

## Nikol Pashinyan4 Donald Tusk meet in Brussel



The European Union welcomes the Armenian government’s ambitious reform agenda and is ready to support it with greater aid, European Council President Donald Tusk said after meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Brussels on March 5.

“I admire your resolve to bring about democratic reforms and economic development which will benefit all Armenians,” Tusk told Pashinyan at a joint news brief-

ing. “The EU will continue to support Armenia’s journey towards becoming a consolidated democracy and creating a better economic future for its citizens.”

“The EU is ready to further support your reform process with enhanced technical and financial assistance,” he said. “We agree with your strong emphasis on the fight against corruption and the rule of law reform.”

Johannes Hahn, the EU commissioner for

European neighborhood and enlargement negotiations, said in Yerevan in late January that the EU will provide Yerevan with additional financial assistance already this year in recognition of democratic change in the country. Hahn singled out the proper conduct of the Armenian parliamentary elections held in December.

Neither Hahn nor Tusk specified in their

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## Armenian PM, European Commissioner for Digital Single Market discuss cooperation in the field of digitization



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan on March 7 received Andrus Ansip, EU Commissioner for Digital Single Market and Vice-President of the European Commission, Noyan Tapan was informed from the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia.

The Premier noted with satisfaction that the activation of top-level EU-Armenia relations over the past few years testifies to the high level of the political dialogue and the cooperation agenda. Nikol Pashinyan assessed as quite effective his March 4-5 visit to Brussels, during which issues of expanding bilateral cooperation were discussed with the heads of EU structures. The Prime Minister said the development

of high and digital technologies is a priority on his government's reform agenda, and the EU is an important partner for Armenia in this area, as evidenced by the fact that this sector is a featured item in the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

With reference to the policy of forming a digital market within the European Union, the EU Commissioner for Digital Single Market pointed out that the EU is ready to deepen partnership with Armenia in information and high technologies, share experiences and achievements. Andrus Ansip specifically presented Estonia's experience in the field of digitalization, noting that the modernization of e-governance and digital management has enabled Estonia to record

significant financial savings and increased management efficiency.

After exchanging ideas on the introduction of e-governance tools, implementation of IT and telecommunication projects, the parties discussed prospects for implementing new joint programs. In this context, they touched upon the digitization of public services and expansion of the range of online services, raising public awareness, developing skills in using digital technologies and promoting cooperation in a number of other areas. An arrangement has been reached to start a series of discussions on a common digital program, which might include the priorities of EU-Armenia cooperation. The Prime Minister instructed Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan and Min-



ister of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies Hakob Arshakyan to keep in touch with the EU partners and work together to develop cooperation in the field of information technology and digitalization.

## Artsakh's involvement in European programs discussed between Ombudsman and EU officials, organizations



From March 6 to March 8, Human Rights Defender of Artsakh Artak Beglaryan in Brussels met with members of the European Parliament, EU officials and non-governmental organizations, discussing issues about raising

Artsakh's involvement in European programs, the Artsakh Ombudsman's Office said in a news release.

During the meetings, A. Beglaryan emphasized that regardless of the political status, Artsakh residents should have the opportunity to participate especially in European programs concerning human rights.

He attached importance to the active involvement of both the European Union and European non-governmental organizations in the promotion of democracy and civil society and the protection of human rights in Artsakh.

The Ombudsman discussed with the repre-

sentatives of some non-governmental organizations the possibilities of further cooperation by getting concrete agreements in that direction.

As a reminder, on March 6, the current and former Human Rights Ombudsmen of Republic of Artsakh Artak Beglaryan and Ruben Melikyan participated in the European Parliament panel discussion on "Armenophobia: historical and present-day resurgence" organized by Armenian European Federation of Justice and Democracy and Tufenkyan Foundation with the support of the member of the European Parliament Elene Theocharous.



## Minsk Group Co-Chairs preparing a meeting between leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan



The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs have been making preparations for a meeting between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the first direct contact between the two leaders conducted under Co-Chair auspices.

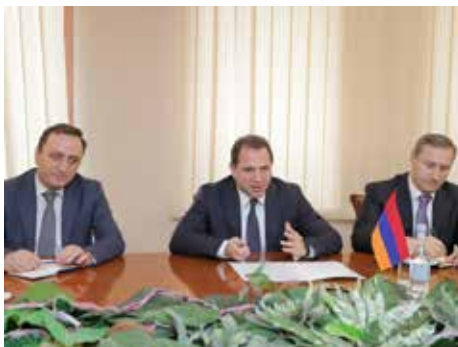
In a statement released on March 9 the Co-Chairs underline the importance of maintaining an environment conducive to productive discussions and continue to assess positively the recent lack of casualties on the front lines. The Co-Chairs also welcome some initial steps being taken in the region to prepare the populations for peace and encourage the sides to intensify such efforts.

At the same time, the Co-Chairs reiterate the critical importance of reducing tensions and minimizing inflammatory rhetoric. In this context, the Co-Chairs urge the sides to refrain from statements and actions suggesting significant changes to the situation on the ground, prejudging the outcome of or setting conditions for future talks, demanding unilateral changes to the format without agreement of the other party, or indicating readiness to renew active hos-

tilities.

With reference to some contradictory recent public statements on the substance of the Minsk Group process, the Co-Chairs reiterate that a fair and lasting settlement must be based on the core principles of the Helsinki Final Act, including in particular the non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples.

"It also should embrace additional elements as proposed by the Presidents of the Co-Chair countries in 2009-2012, including: return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security



and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and in-

ternational security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation," the mediators said.

The Co-Chairs stress their view that these principles and elements must be the foundation of any fair and lasting settlement to the conflict and should be conceived as an integrated whole. Any attempt to put some principles or elements over others would make it impossible to achieve a balanced solution.

The Co-Chairs are prepared to meet with the leaders and foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan at any time, and call on the leaders to resume negotiations in good faith at the earliest opportunity. Continuous and direct dialogue between Baku and Yerevan conducted under the auspices of the Co-Chairs remains an essential element in building confidence and advancing the peace process.

The Co-Chairs will also continue to discuss, as appropriate, relevant issues with the interested parties directly affected by the conflict, recognizing that their views and concerns must be taken into account for any negotiated solution to succeed.

The Co-Chairs stress that they remain fully committed, in accordance with their mandate, to helping the sides find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The Co-Chairs also express their full support for the impartial and critical monitoring work undertaken by the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and his team.

## Armenia, NATO discuss cooperation



Armenian Defense Minister David Tonoyan received on March 11 James Appathurai, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, who has arrived in Armenia for the NATO week events to be held from March 11 to 15.

The parties touched upon a wide range of issues of Armenia-NATO cooperation, namely the Individual Partnership Ac-

tion Plan (IPAP), the process of implementation of measures under the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process, their assessment, as well as planning for the future.

Armenia's participation in NATO-led missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan was hailed as an important contribution.

James Appathurai expressed gratitude for hosting the NATO Week events.

Issues of regional security were also discussed.

## New Armenian Government Structure Approved

The Armenian government on March 7 made the final decision to reduce the number of its ministries from 17 to 12 and lay off some of their employees.

A government bill setting a new structure of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's cabinet was sent to the parliament for approval. Its passage by the National Assembly controlled by Pashinyan's My Step alliance is widely seen as a forgone conclusion.

As expected, the bill would abolish the post of first deputy prime minister, meaning that Pashinyan will have only two deputies. More importantly, it would dissolve the Armenian ministries of agriculture, energy, culture, Diaspora, and sports and youth affairs.

In particular, the ministries of education, culture, and sports and youth affairs would be turned into a single agency. A similar merger of the ministries of energy and local government would lead to the creation of a new Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures. The Diaspora Ministry is due to be scrapped altogether.

The government announced plans for such a restructuring in December, sparking street protests by hundreds of Diaspora and culture ministry employees fearing a loss of their jobs. Pashinyan countered that the planned change is in tune with his repeated pledges to downsize the government made during campaigning for the December 9 parliamentary elections won by his bloc.

Pashinyan insisted on Thursday that the government will operate more efficiently as a result of the changes. He also confirmed that



at least some employees of the affected ministries will be laid off but did not give any numbers.

"Yes, there will be staff cuts but those staffs will follow an evolutionary pattern," he said at a cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

A leaked government document publicized this week by a senior member of the former ruling Republican Party (HHK) suggested that as many as 10,000 civil servants will be laid off in the coming weeks or months. Finance Minister Atom Janjughazian effectively denied that when he spoke to RFE/RL's Armenian on Tuesday.

Some public administration experts have questioned the wisdom of having fewer government ministries. They say that the new "super ministries" would only slow down the work of the state bureaucracy.

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public statements the likely amount of the extra EU aid promised by them.

Visiting Brussels in July, Pashinyan criticized the EU for not boosting its assistance to Armenia following the "velvet revolution" that brought him to power. A senior EU diplomat dismissed the criticism at the time.

Pashinyan again called for greater EU support for his govern-

ment's stated reform effort at the start of his latest trip to Brussels on Monday. "It is obvious that an enhanced assistance of the European Union will help us move forward in a more resolute and decisive way," he told members of the European Parliament. "The wider the scope of the assistance, the faster and smoother the pace of our reforms will be."

Speaking after his talks with Tusk, the Armenian leader said: "I highly appreciate the European Union's technical and financial support to our government's reform agenda." He stressed the importance of new EU "initiatives aimed at supporting our efforts to develop institutions and reinforcing our democratic achievements."

"I am glad that our European friends and partners have a similar approach and vision on our bilateral agenda," he added.

Pashinyan also urged an "early ratification" by all EU member states of the EU's Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia signed in 2017.

And he again expressed hope that the 28-nation bloc will lift "in the near future" its visa requirements for Armenian travelling to Europe. "We do hope that the political decision on this matter will be taken shortly," he said.



## U.S. reiterates strong support to Armenia's democratic institutions



Lynne Tracy, the US Ambassador to Armenia, met on March 7 with Armenia's Parliament Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan

Mirzoyan congratulated the new American ambassador on assuming office and wished productive work for the welfare and prosperity of both countries.

Emphasizing that the US is one of Armenia's important partners, Mirzoyan said that Armenia attaches great importance to further deepening and development of bilateral relations.

In the context of developing bilateral intergovernmental relations, Mirzoyan stressed the role of inter-parliamentary partnership, expressing conviction that the soon-to-be formed Armenia-US friendship group and the US Congressional Armenian Caucus are important circles for developing ties between the legislative bodies.

In the context of deepening political dialogue with the US, the Speaker of Parliament attached importance to the role of existing mechanisms – the USATF and TIFA.

Mirzoyan also highly appreciated the US assistance over more than 25 years for the strengthening of democracy, economic development and various reforms.

"Democracy, human rights and freedoms, the combat against corruption, transparency and accountability aren't simply words for us, these are fundamental values, and Armenia will steadily head on this path. I call on our international partners, also the United States, to stand on our side and support the strengthening of democracy in our country," Mirzoyan said when speaking about the continuous process of ongoing reforms in Armenia.

The US ambassador touched upon the directions of bilateral cooperation, future programs and actions. She too attached importance to the role of parliamentary diplomacy for strengthening bilateral ties.

"It is an honor to meet you Speaker of National Assembly and to reiterate the firm support of the United States to the democratic institutions of Armenia," Tracy said.

The sides also discussed the development of the Armenian-American commercial relations, as well as boosting partnership in the IT sector.

## NK conflict is a matter of physical existence of people living in that territory – Italian MP's remarks on Sumgait massacres



Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy, responsible for the Armenian-Italian inter-parliamentary relations, representative of the ruling Lega party, Giulio Centemero, has delivered remarks on the 1988 Armenian massacres in Sumgait.

"I would like to deliver speech at this hall and remember perhaps one of the most tragic, but less known pages of the modern history – the Armenian massacres in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait which have taken place 31 years ago. In February 1988, in response to the peaceful demonstrations

of the people of Nagorno Karabakh aimed at exercising their right to self-determination, the Azerbaijani authorities organized violent pressures against the Armenian population of the Azerbaijani cities of Baku, Sumgait and Kirovabad.

Everything began from Sumgait where as a result of the obvious support and permission of the Azerbaijani authorities, numerous Armenians have been killed for one reason – their ethnic affiliation. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were forced to leave their homes and towns. During those days, one of the fundamental human rights – the right to life, has been violated", the Italian MP said.

He stated that following the Sumgait massacre the European Parliament adopted a resolution which characterized what has happened as a murder of people as such. The lawmaker emphasized that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is not a territorial

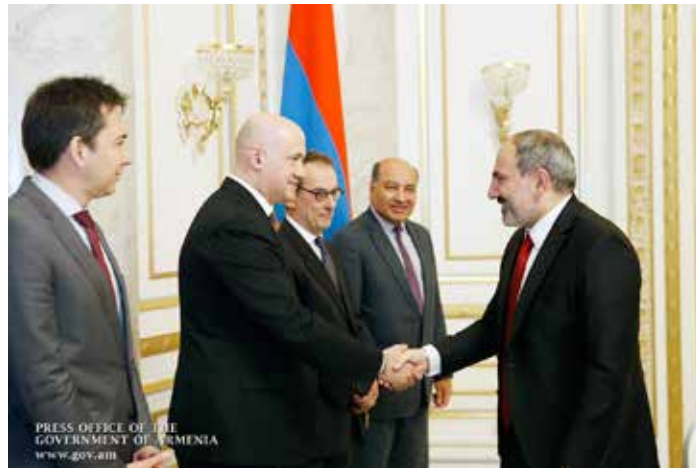
demand, but a matter of physical existence of the people living in that territory.

"Unfortunately, even 31 years later, we still are witnessing a real propaganda of a continuous anti-Armenian rhetoric and hatred. This was also demonstrated during the 2016 April four-day war by the use of artillery against the innocent people and brutal killings of elderly people in Nagorno Karabakh. Therefore, it is necessary to end the hatred rhetoric and educate the peoples to peace, respect to the person and freedom of religion. And therefore, it's very important for our country, which chaired the OSCE in 2018, and also as an OSCE Minsk Group member state, to continue supporting the works of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, as the only format having a full international mandate to deal with the settlement of the NK conflict", Giulio Centemero said.

## Armenian PM, EBRD President discuss ways for expanding cooperation

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received the delegation led by President of EBRD Suma Chakrabarti.

As Noyan Tapan was informed from the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan highly assessed the cooperation between Armenia and the EBRD and highlighted its future expansion. Nikol Pashinyan noted that the projects of the EBRD are of great importance for the implementation of the reform initiated by the Government and for the economic revolution agenda in the directions of improvement of business environment, fostering the competitiveness in private sector and so on. The Head of the



Executive hoped that the amount of EBRD investments will rise in the future and will cover other spheres of the economy. Nikol Pashinyan highlighted the implementation of projects for SMEs in Armenia

by the Bank, adding that the goal of the Government is fostering the development of business.

Suma Chakrabarti noted that the EBRD, taking into account the positive developments in

Armenia, is ready to continue its assistance to the Armenian Government for the implementation of projects in various spheres. The EBRD President noted that in its new strategy of cooperation with Armenia projects for SMEs will have a major place. Suma Chakrabarti expressed his personal and EBRD's assistance to the Government of Armenia in the reform implementation process. He noted that the assistance will be in the form of both financial and consultative.

During the meeting the sides exchanged views on various issues referring to the future partnership, spoke about the works of the annual conference of the EBRD to take place in May.

## EU ready to assist Armenia's reforms and development: Pashinyan discussed several megaprojects in Brussels



The European Union is fully ready to support Armenia in its reforms agenda and implementation of development programs in general, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan said at the beginning of the Cabinet meeting, introducing the results of his Brussels trip.

"As you know, our delegation has just returned from the talks held with the EU leaders. We can record that we are entering a new state for the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU. In this regard, it was noted that the EU is fully ready to assist our reforms agenda and the implementation of development programs in Armenia in general", Pashinyan said.

The PM stated that there is no geopolitical agenda in these relations both by Armenia and the EU which is very important in this

sense.

"There is a nuance here that we should make important decisions in the future. Yesterday, I touched this topic in the Parliament, the issue is the following: we have discussed several megaprojects with the EU the first group of which concerns road and transportation infrastructures. Our goal is to make the roads of Armenia in accordance with the European standards. We also must make a decision on the North-South transportation project", the PM said.

He added that the next one relates to the water reservoir construction plan and the introduction of new water management system.

"The next issue concerns building schools, especially in terms of seismic resistance, which we carry out. But we need to seriously expand this project, first of all to make these schools in accordance with the seismic, educational, content and latest demands from both building and property terms.

We also need to carry out serious programs in the justice sector. Speaking with the EU partners I have stated that the prison conditions of today cannot be considered comfortable with the standards of new Armenia. We have court hearings that are

being held in corridor conditions and thus undermine the content of justice.

For the implementation of all these programs we have received the EU's readiness to assist, but there is one problem here that the EU is not ready to implement these programs by 100% and expects that Armenia will have a serious participation in this. Our task is to increase the state revenues via administration. In this context importance is also attached to the attraction of foreign funds, and we view the infrastructures as their main target", the Prime Minister said, adding that a political decision must be made here on how the executive reacts this issue. "Because we also have certain legislative restrictions on the GDP-state debt ratio. Frankly speaking, I personally, when I was an MP, have voted against all loan programs, and it had a very concrete political explanation: I have stated that if I consider the government as corrupt, I cannot trust any fund to that government, especially a loan, and unfortunately, our observations during this period explain the justification of this political decision with a number of major programs".



## World Bank prepares document defining cooperation priorities for next four years with Armenia



President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian on March 6 hosted the World Bank Country Manager for Armenia Sylvie Bossoutrot, the Presidential Office told Noyan Tapan.

During the meeting a number of issues on

the Armenia-World Bank cooperation agenda were discussed.

Highlighting the productive cooperation with the World Bank, the Armenian President said the work with international finan-

cial structures, the World Bank, is very important for Armenia. According to the President, the economic growth, stable and rapid development are the main tools to overcome poverty in the country. The ongoing joint programs with the World Bank should be directed for solving the existing issues through these tools.

In her turn Sylvie Bossoutrot said the Country's Partnership Framework strategic document which defines the cooperation priorities for the next four years with Armenia is being prepared. It will be based on three pillars – boosting export and competitiveness, developing the human capital and environment and resource management.

President Sarkissian highlighted the development of high technologies, education and science for the country's future and stated that his efforts in this context are directed for the promotion of high technologies and innovations, adding that there is a great potential for productive cooperation here.

## Armenian organic tea already sold in Germany



The Armenian organic "Mountain tea" is already sold on TeeGschwendner's online store and its shop network. This became

possible thanks to the joint project "Development of organic agriculture" between ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK and The Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V. (NABU).

As ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK informs, in the sidelines of BioFach international exhibition of organic products a new agreement has been reached to continue the exports and increase the volumes.

"Organic agriculture development" project in Armenia has been implemented in Ar-

menia since 2015 in collaboration between ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK and NABU.

The winning organizations, farmers and agronomists are given an opportunity to receive an organic food producer's certificate with the joint financial support of the bank and NABU and considerably increase the added value of the products and enable the further prospects of exporting their products.

The project will continue in 2019 as well.

## Armenia to participate in Viva Technology 2019 in Paris

Armenia will participate in the upcoming Viva Technology 2019 in Paris, one of the largest technological events of Europe. The event will take place May 16-18 and Armenia will have an individual pavilion at the expo, Minister of Transportation, Communication and Information Technologies Hakob Arshakyan said on Facebook.



He said Armenia's participation at the event "as a new Silicon Valley of the region" has been initiated by the AGBU France and G2iA.

The ministry also called on interested Armenian companies and startups to be involved.

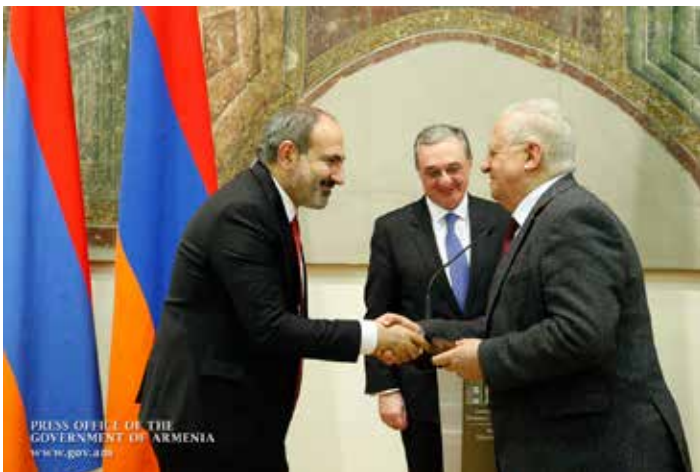
## All diplomats have the opportunity to participate in economic revolution – Pashinyan attends reception on Day of Diplomat



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan attended the reception dedicated to the Day of Diplomat at the National Gallery of Armenia.

Congratulating the diplomats on their holiday, Nikol Pashinyan said,

“Honorable Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Dear Government Members,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs,  
Dear diplomats,  
State officials,  
Dear representatives of diplomatic corps accredited in Armenia,  
I congratulate you on the Day of Diplomat. This is a really im-



portant day for our country. Let me record that our diplomatic system meets this day in totally different conditions and situation. Fortunately, today our diplomats throughout the world do not need to spend long days and time to give explanations in different countries about to what extent the elections were falsified, and to what extent the elections will not be falsified during the next elections, or how many steps these elections were a progress and how many steps they were a reverse, or who, whom and where shot dead and for what. I think this is an important change that reflects the nature of the non-violent, velvet and people's revolution. And I hope that this change will not be taken as a reason for working less, but vice the versa, it will be an inspiration for working more, more encour-

aged, with greater enthusiasm, because today the Republic of Armenia has something to present to the world and today different parts of the world have a greater willingness to listen to the Republic of Armenia”.

Pashinyan emphasized that the most important change that has occurred in Armenia and in all the government bodies, including among the diplomats, is that the entire Government, including the diplomats, do not serve the needs of a single person or even a government, but the people.

“All the diplomats who missed the chance to participate in the political revolution in Armenia, today have a good opportunity to participate in the economic revolution, becoming the activists of the economic revolution, Pashinyan said, adding that the diplomats



should present throughout the world the changes taking place in Armenia.

PM Pashinyan also highlighted the activities of the diplomats in terms of Nagorno Karabakh. “I told you during our previous meeting that unfortunately during my international meetings in this period I came to the conclusion that the perceptions and understanding of the nature of Nagorno Karabakh issue has in many cases been distorted in the international arena”, the PM said, emphasizing the necessity of presenting the real image and nature of the conflict on international arenas.

“We have to also continue our policy aimed at the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. We clearly record that the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide is a key contribution to the global security and prevention of genocides and we view this issue from this perspective”, Pashinyan said.

PM Pashinyan thanked all the diplomats for their service, particularly those working in unstable regions with security risks. “Particularly, our Consulate General in Aleppo deserves our deepest respect for its the uninterrupted work, despite the fact that the building was bombed. The same can be said about our Embassy in Baghdad”, PM Pashinyan said.

Addressing to FM Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Nikol Pashinyan said, “Mr. Mnatsakanyan, I wish you success, as it is usually said, in leading this difficult and complex staff. I also want to say words of appreciation to all the foreign minister of the 3rd Republic of Armenia for their efforts to accomplish the diplomatic system of Armenia”, Nikol Pashinyan concluded.



## Azerbaijan Enlists Infamous Congressman Hastings in its Anti-Armenian Propaganda

*By Harut Sassounian*

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (Democrat of Florida) is the latest transmitter of Azerbaijani propaganda. He issued a statement on February 25, 2019, which he entered in the Congressional Record, accusing Armenians of killing 613 Azeri men, women, and children on Feb. 26, 1992, in the Khojaly village of Azerbaijan during the height of the Artsakh (Karabakh) war. Human Rights Watch placed the number of Azeri dead at 161. Nevertheless, even the single loss of life is regrettable be it Azeri or Armenian. Hastings, a member of Azerbaijan Congressional Caucus, called the alleged killings “the Khojaly Massacre.”

These killings are controversial with Armenians and Azeris blaming each other for the deaths. In recent years, the government of Azerbaijan has made these killings a cause celebre, organizing observances in various countries and accusing Armenians not only of committing a massacre, but a genocide! These propaganda observances are funded by what is known as “caviar diplomacy,” meaning that Azerbaijan bribes government officials around the world to block decisions critical of Azerbaijan or adopt resolutions in its favor.

It is ironic that while Azerbaijan describes the alleged killing of 613 Azeris a genocide, it shamelessly denies the actual genocide of 1.5 million Armenians from 1915 to 1923.

On March 3, 1997, the Armenian Foreign Ministry circulated a statement to members of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, rejecting the statement issued by Azerbaijan on February 22, 1997 on “the Khojaly event.” Armenia quoted the words of the then President of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutalibov who had stated that the Azerbaijani National Front “actively obstructed and actually prevented the exodus of the local [Azeri] population through the mountain passages specifically left open by Karabakh Armenians to facilitate the flight of the civilian population.” Mutalibov had made that statement in the days following “the Khojaly event” in an interview with Czech journalist Dana Mazalova published in the April 2, 1992 issue of the Russian newspaper Nizavisimaya Gazeta.

By organizing such propaganda observances, Azerbaijan’s officials have found a convenient way of countering the mass murder of Armenians in the Azeri towns

of Sumgait (Feb. 28, 1988), Gyanja (November 1988), and Baku (January 1990) as well as the Armenian genocide by Ottoman Turkey.

Azerbaijan could not have found a more infamous member of U.S. Congress to carry out its propaganda war against Armenia. Prior to becoming a member of Congress, Hastings served as a United States District or Federal Judge from 1979 to 1989, at which time he was impeached and removed from office!

According to Wikipedia, “In 1981, [Judge] Hastings was charged with accepting a \$150,000 bribe in exchange for a lenient sentence and a return of seized assets for 21 counts of racketeering by Frank and Thomas Romano, and of perjury in his testimony about the case. In 1983, he was acquitted by a jury after his alleged co-conspirator, William Borders, refused to testify in court, resulting in a jail sentence for Borders.”

“In 1988, the Democratic-controlled United States House of Representatives took up the case, and Hastings was impeached for bribery and perjury by a vote of 413–3. He was then convicted on October 20, 1989, by the United States Senate, becoming the sixth federal judge in the history of the United States to be removed from office by the Senate. The Senate, in two hours of roll calls, voted on 11 of the 17 articles of impeachment. It convicted Hastings of eight of the 11 articles. The vote on the first article was 69 for and 26 opposed....”

Hastings was disgraced for the second time when a staff member of the Helsinki Commission for which he was the Chairman, accused him of inappropriate sexual behavior! The Roll Call newspaper reported on December 8, 2017 that the U.S. Treasury Department secretly paid the staffer \$220,000 to settle an alleged sexual harassment case against Hastings.

Winsome Packer, the staff member of the congressional commission, stated in a written document that Hastings touched her, made unwanted sexual advances, and threatened her job. In her lawsuit, Packer stated “that Hastings repeatedly asked to stay at her apartment or to visit her hotel room. Packer also said he frequently hugged her, and once asked her what kind of underwear she was wearing,” according to Roll Call. Hastings denied the accusation.

Finally, it appears that Hastings has maintained extensive contacts with the BGR Group, a major U.S. firm that is paid \$50,000 a month to lobby for Azerbaijan in Washington.

Under the federal FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act) laws, every lobbying firm has to register with the U.S. Justice Department, disclosing the contract signed with the foreign entity. More importantly, the lobbying firm’s employees are required to report to the Justice Department every contact they make with outsiders on behalf of their clients, whether by email, phone call, or personal meeting.

For example, during the six-month period of December 1, 2017 to May 30, 2018, BGR reported contacting congressional offices hundreds of times. Each time the subject matter was listed as “U.S.-Azerbaijan Relations.” Cleverly, BGR had hidden the name of the Congressman or Senator, mentioning only his or her staff member’s name.

Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) conducted a lengthy investigation to identify the names of the Congress members for whom these staff members worked. The ANCA investigation disclosed that on Nov. 17, 2017, Feb. 27, March 5, March 12, April 30, May 22, May 23, and May 30, 2018 BGR lobbyists emailed Tom Carnes, a staff member of Hastings. BGR also had a meeting with Tom Carnes on May 30, 2018. In addition, on May 22, 2018, lobbyists from BGR e-mailed Susannah Jackson of Hastings office. In addition, on Nov. 2, 2017, Rob Mangas, Tim Hutchinson, K. Laurie McKay, Killoran Long, and Albert Wynn on behalf of a lobbying firm for Turkey, Greenberg Traurig, had discussions with Lale Morrison from the office of Hastings regarding U.S.-Turkish relations. Finally, on Oct. 27, 2017, Lydia Borland on behalf of another lobbying firm for Turkey, LB International Solutions, LLC, met with Lale Morrison from the office of Hastings regarding U.S.-Turkey relations.

No wonder that Hastings was given the low grade of D and D plus in recent years by the ANCA for not supporting various Armenian issues in Congress.

Azerbaijan has tried to cover up its crimes against Armenians and human rights violations of its deprived citizens by bribing foreign officials around the world and blaming others for its own wrongdoing!

## OSCE/ODIHR: 2018 parliamentary elections in Armenia enjoyed broad public trust



While noting that Armenia's 9 December 2018 early parliamentary elections enjoyed broad public trust and were held with respect for fundamental freedoms, the final report issued by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) recommends that the authorities, political parties, the media and civil society continue their efforts to preserve the integrity of the electoral process.

The report acknowledges that the legal framework for elections is comprehen-

sively regulated and recommends addressing remaining legal gaps and ambiguities in a timely and inclusive manner.

It also recommends the provision of enhanced training to members of polling station commissions on counting votes and documenting the voting results. The report also recommends that the authorities take a more proactive role in ensuring an accessible environment for the electoral participation of persons with disabilities and addressing overcrowding at polling stations.

The media generally ensured balanced and informative coverage of the campaign, the report says. It recommends that authorities further support the editorial independence of public media and foster citizens' access to impartial, critical and analytical political information.

The report reiterates ODIHR's previous

recommendation to introduce a legal obligation for electoral contestants to account for and report on all campaign-related expenditures and contributions. It further recommends conducting meaningful oversight of campaign finance by relevant authorities.

The report also recommends a legal review of measures to guarantee the protection of voters' private data during the publication of voters' lists, and further enhancing special measures to promote women candidates, so as to strengthen the participation of women in public and political life.

For election day observation, ODIHR was joined by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.

## Armenian doctors provide surgical and therapeutic assistance to patients during humanitarian mission in Syria



The Caucasus Wildlife Refuge (CWR) hThe group consisting of humanitarian deminers, doctors and Armenian specialists, while in Syria on a humanitarian mission, launched the demining works on February 19, the Humanitarian Demining and Expert

Center SNCO told Armenpress.

As of today, the Armenian specialists have demined over 10510 square meters of land. "Hundreds of anti-tank and other types of mines have been eliminated. The doctors involved in the humanitarian mission carry

out activities in the military hospital of Aleppo and university clinics. From February 18 to today, the Armenian doctors, jointly with their Syrian colleagues, have provided 50 surgical and nearly 100 therapeutic assistance to the patients", the Center said, adding that one doctor each day is involved in the demining group. "The humanitarian aid to the Syrian people continues", the Center said in the statement.

A group consisting of humanitarian deminers, doctors and Armenian specialists ensuring their safety, a total of 83 people, arrived in Syria's Aleppo on February 8 aimed at providing professional humanitarian support to the Syrian people.

The deployment, status, functions and security issues of the Armenian specialists in Syria will be settled in accordance with the Armenian legislation. The transportation and provision issues of the Armenian specialists are being carried out by the assistance of the Russian side.



## Troika did everything legally and transparently, Ruben Vardanyan reiterates



Russian Armenian businessman and philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan has issued an address to express gratitude to everyone who believes in him, his team and in what they do.

The statement comes in the wake of a publication accusing the Russian Troika Dialog bank he headed between 2006 and 2012 of being involved in money laundering.

Vardanyan says a huge number of partners and colleagues, friends and associates and even people he hasn't met personally, reached out to him and his offices in Russia and Armenia from all over the world to express their support and gratitude for the projects and initiatives his family, colleagues and his team are implementing.

"I am deeply grateful to everyone who believes in me, in our team and in what we do. Trust is the most valuable asset, and your unconditional support in the current situation serves as testament to this conviction," Ruben Vardanyan aid.

"Although, it is stated in most publications that there are no accusations against me, I have been targeted as the supposed mastermind for transactions of independent clients of one of Troika's operating divisions that have subsequently been brought under suspicion. I was the senior partner of Troika Dialog and therefore feel morally responsible to defend our collective reputation," he said.

He reminded that Troika was founded in the early 1990s, when the investment bank-

ing industry did not exist in Russia, and the whole country was in a position similar to that of a startup. Therefore, he added, it is neither correct nor impartial to assess Troika's activities outside of the historical, economic and business context, and measure them against contemporary standards. I

Vardanyan reiterated that "throughout all of its history, Troika did everything in full compliance with the principles of legality and transparency, in line with international standards, and sometimes even set its bar higher than market level."

Referring to the fact that his Armenian origin is being frequently emphasized in many publications, the businessman said: "I am Russian with Armenian roots, which I am very proud of. As a representative of a people who have played the role of a bridge between civilizations for many centuries, I have always strived for dialogue and understanding in all my projects."

"With its multinational and multicultural environment, Troika served as a bridge between Russia and the world, brought foreign investors into the country and gave Russian companies the opportunity to enter the global financial markets. Today we continue to implement commercial, social entrepreneurship and charitable projects, guided by the same goal and conviction. The Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO in Russia, the UWC Dilijan College in Armenia, and especially the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative – all of them serve to unite people in a world where, regrettably, many still live in a "friend or foe" mindset," Vardanyan stated.

## Business Armenia representatives secure \$14 million in investments



Thirty-five foreign representatives of Business Armenia in 24 countries have done an effective work, ensuring investment memoranda of \$14 million. The data

was summed up on the one-year activity of the foundation's foreign representative's network.

Investments of the US and Canadian representatives will be sent to Armenia's real estate and hotel business sectors. For now, business plans are being developed.

By the efforts of the representatives of Finland, Poland, France, USA and Lebanon, several Armenian companies have signed export or outsourcing contracts.

Outbound business missions were organized with the assistance of representatives from Lebanon, US, Canada, Switzerland, UAE, Portugal, France, Egypt, Lithuania,

China during which conferences and B2B meetings with Armenian and foreign companies were held, and business arrangements were reached.

"Foreign Representatives of Business Armenia also make a great job in a daily routine by introducing our investment climate to business circles, making Armenian products recognizable. They are free-funded, non-budgeted and dedicated to our country whose work is indefatigable and deserves recognition," noted Alina Yeghiazaryan, Institutional Cooperation Manager at Business Armenia.

## Armenia to kick off francophone days on March 12



The French Embassy in Armenia will hold the francophone events from March 12 to April 12 this year.

“We want this one month to become a holiday for lovers of French language,” noted the French Ambassador.

During that period, francophone culture will be represented in Armenia through cinematography, music, theater, and various contests.

The program will open with the 2nd Francophone Film Festival on March 12 at Moscow Cinema, held in cooperation with the embassies of Switzerland and Canada.

On March 19-22, Armenian-French chef, Bocuse Magazin Editor-in-Chief Sonia Ezgulian and illustrator, designer Guillaume Long will make their first visit to Armenia.

Another event of the program, “Et en plus je parle français...en Arménie!” (“I also

speak French...in Armenia!”) is a video and oral speech contest, which will kick off on March 20 on the new cultural website of the French Embassy, [www.culturefrance.am](http://www.culturefrance.am). The winner will be given the opportunity to travel to France.

On March 24, the Armenian Alliance Française will hold a written French contest



for young people aged 13-25.

On March 30 and 31, the town of Gyumri will host the 2nd National Junior Francophone Theater Festival, “10 out of 10”.

The francophone days will close with Jules Massenet’s opera “Manon”, the French version of which will be performed at the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre of Armenia on April 11 and 12.

## Ryanair ‘planning’ flights to Armenia

Ryanair is planning to become the world’s first budget airline to launch regular flights between Europe and Armenia, the head of the Armenian government’s civil aviation department said on Friday.

The official, Tatevik Revazyan, told RFE/RL’s Armenian service that she has held talks with senior executives of the Irish carrier in Dublin for that purpose.

“We received a proposal and are now negotiating over that proposal,” she said. “They made clear that they want to enter the [Armenian aviation] market in 2020.”

“They said that the average price of their tickets is 40 euros (\$45). Obviously, they won’t be able to fly to Armenia at that price, but it definitely won’t be 350, 400 or 500 euros,” added Revazyan. She did not



give other details of the planned flights.

“Ryanair can really revolutionize, completely transform our aviation market,” argued the 31-year-old official. “If Ryanair does enter the Armenian market, I’m sure that air ticket prices will fall and passenger traffic from Europe to Armenia and also from Armenia to Europe will increase as a result.”

Armenia’s international air traffic has

already grown rapidly since the liberalization of its civil aviation sector in 2013. The former Armenian government decided to switch to the so-called “open skies” policy following the bankruptcy of the Armavia national airline. Armavia had enjoyed exclusive rights to fly to Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East for almost ten years.

The liberalization, strongly backed by Western donors, allowed local and foreign carriers meeting safety standards to carry out flights without any restrictions. This has led to lower ticket prices, giving a strong boost to the country’s burgeoning tourism industry. The number of foreign tourists visiting Armenia reached a new record high in 2018, according to official statistics.

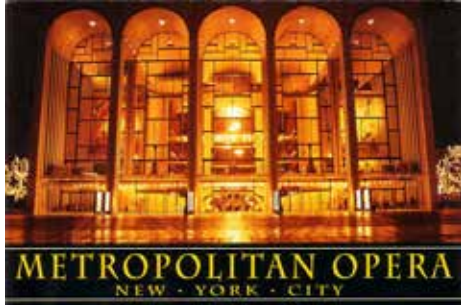


## Armenian Opera Recent News...

*This time The Highlights decided to present our regular "Opera News" with two publications, slightly edited...*

### Maestro Orbelian is Again Invited, This Time to Metropolitan

By Samvel Danielyan,  
journalist



The Metropolitan Opera House is one of the most famous opera houses in the world. It opened in 1883, with Gounod's opera "Faust", and is the only permanent opera house in the United States to date. It is noteworthy that the performances here are a daily event. The chorus, the orchestra and the supporting staff are full time employees. International soloists and conductors are invited to perform in different productions and performances, and operas are sung in the original language. This practice was adopted in the early 1900's. The repertoire is mainly classical, such as Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, Wagner, Gounod, Bizet, Mozart, Strauss and other great operas. Armenian opera singers such as *Lili Chugaszyan, Lusin Amara, Susan Simo-*

*nian, Shake Vardenisyan, Ara Berberyan, Garpis Boyajyan* and others performed at Metropolitan Theater for many years.

...Recently, after a 100-year break, the composition of a female composer was staged in the Metropolitan. This Award was awarded to Finnish *Kaya Sariaho*. (By the way, no Armenian woman composer has ever won such an honor during the history of our theater). In the 1980s, *Hasmik Papyan, Gegham Grigoryan, Barsegh Tumanyan, Vazgen Ghazaryan and Yeghishe Manucharyan* were the main Armenian singers performing at the MET.

According to an "Aravot" info, which confirmed that Maestro *Constantine Orbelian* will be hosted at the Theater between March 8-18 by the invitation of *Anna Ziff*, Chairman of the Board of the Metropolitan Opera, - to be an Associate Member of the Board, to get acquainted with further Theater programs. At the same time, Orbelian is the only Armenian who deserves such an honor. They will discuss issues related to the collaboration of the Lindemann Young Artists Development Program at the METropolitan and the possibility of the auditions of our Armenian Soloists of the Yerevan Opera at the Metropolitan will be discussed. It is definitely an event and occasion for representatives of the Armenian

vocal school, which has long been known in the world, to appear in this famous theater. Maestro Orbelian is also in discussions with the Metropolitan Opera to bring the life Simulcast performances which the MET does around the world to Armenia for the first time. This is a great first step in acquainting the Armenian audiences with the greatest singers in the world who grace the stage of the MET. Two of those singers had performed in Yerevan - the great *Renee Fleming* on the 7th of October 2017 and of course, *Dmitri Hvorostovsky* of the blessed memory in 2015.

Hopefully, this new initiative will forge a great bridge with Master classes with the famous *John Fisher*, and *Howard Watkins* who have already been in Armenia and have worked with our singers.

*Diane Zola* who is now Assistant Artistic Director of the MET was brought to Yerevan by Maestro Orbelian to be a special guest at the Khachaturian Vocal Competition and was also listening to our singers and giving master classes.

Hopefully these initiatives will bring much success to our wonderful Armenian singers.

"Aravot" newspaper, 06.03.2019

### "...Every Time I Came Out of the Opera Hall with Indescribable Pride, Delight..."

By Lilit Galstyan,  
Fmr MP, public-cultural activist



Over the last few months, in Al. Spendiaryan National Opera and Ballet Academic Theater, I was present at the three premieres, "Manon" by Massenet, Mozart's "Magical Flute" and Bizet's "Carmen".

And every time I came out of the Hall with indescribable pride, delight inspired by

the vitally important charges you get meeting the timeless culture, with respect and admiration for our (the Armenian) talented KIND. Yesterday, we had a next chance to meet with the high culture at the National Opera: one of the most famous works of the world opera, "Carmen" by Bizet was presented, - with staging conductor *Christopher Ocasek* (USA), Director *Naire Stepanyan*, Staging Artist *Avetis Barseghyan*, Dress Artist *Christine Avetisyan*.

The opera having three acts the audience enjoyed in almost one breath...

Beautiful, tall, bright vocal, - *Greta Bagiyan, Hovannes Ayvazyan, Davit Babayants, Hayk Tigranyan, Mary Movsisyan, Artsvik Demurchyan* became complete and multi-layered with the Choir. Stage designs and costumes were equally elegant, modern, dynamic, full in their minimalism and harmonious at the same time.

Certainly, with no hesitation I have to announce openly and publicly that our National Opera sets an international opera benchmark.

And this is achieved thanks to the talent of our artists, musicians, and indeed dedication and efforts of the Artistic Director and General Manager of the National Opera Theater, Maestro *Constantine Orbelian*.

Facebook, 8 March

## Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

Income fluctuates wildly with Uranus in Taurus or it begins to come from more than one source. Those with this position are more willing to take financial risks in order to gain increased rewards--and sometimes it works! You may be working more than one job. It is not uncommon for this position to bring windfalls, but don't count on it.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

Uranus' tour of Taurus symbolizes important changes and probable expansion of your career arena. Your boredom with old routines drives you to explore the untried. You have a need to rebel, which may cause difficulty with authority figures. Avant-garde electronics become a focal point. You'll be very attracted to the unusual in occupation--the more eccentric, the better.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

You will probably enter a long period of changes related to employment. A new situation might present you with a job that brings something new and different every day. Another arena of new interest is likely to develop in the area of personal health. You may be attracted to alternative healing methods. Don't hesitate to try



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

The planet Uranus enters your sign now and will be there for a seven year stint. Are you restless? Wishing for a break from the routine of your life? You may or may not recognize it, but Uranus will help you break free of fears that have chained you to the old grind. Taurus is the least likely to initiate change, preferring the known devil to the unknown potential. Your self-image, along with your hair color and style of dress will alter as well.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

While Uranus moves through Taurus, you will be experiencing a rapidly expanding world view. This may come about through travel, higher education or attraction to people who hail from an altogether different environment. You may feel the need to explore alternative religions and/or philosophies.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

A new person or an option is present in your career or work in the world. The "new" one offers positive ideas, encouragement, and a fresh means of expanding your territory. You may be mixing business and pleasure in a pleasant combination. Business takes on a more collegial quality.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Disclosure of old family secrets that alter your perception of self may occur during the next 7.5 years. You develop much greater awareness of the unconscious and your interest in alternate forms of healing intensifies. Episodes of intuition or psychic awareness are likely to increase. Be aware of your tendency to sabotage yourself with needless eccentric behavior.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

During the next 7 years of Uranus in Taurus you'll be introduced to a much greater perspective on the world of finance. You are also likely to grow through exposure to those who can teach you more deeply about yourself, psychologically, sexually and spiritually. Issues around birth, death, and transformation play an important role.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

Your probability of making one or more moves of home and hearth is strong while Uranus is in Taurus. It might be easier to put your belongings in storage than to try to drag them around with you. Property may begin to feel like tons of baggage. Your perspective on your personal definition of "security" will change over the next 7.5 years.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

During Uranus' transit of Taurus (7 years) you are likely to be exposed to a new social life and broaden your sense of community and friendship. It is possible you will withdraw from associations or groups that have been with you a long time. You will attract unusual people into your life that will serve to expand your sense of humanitarianism. Your overall goals and life choices will be shifting



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

New and unique experiences will likely be brought to you through changes in situation made by your partner (business and/or personal). Those with clientele will see major shifts in whom they attract. Scorpio tends to resist change, but this is a message to relax and follow the new currents.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Uranus in Taurus will free you to explore new and untried territory through travel or via high tech gadgetry. Your habitual attitudes and your normal patterns of communication may alter considerably over the next 7-8 yrs. Unusual situations develop involving your neighborhood, siblings, and roommates. A new sports car sounds appealing.



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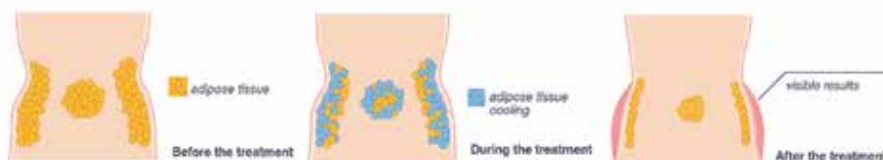
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