

Nikol Pashinyan appointed Armenia's Prime Minister



President Armen Sarkissian signs a decree appointing Nikol Pashinyan as Prime Minister on Jan. 14

President of the Republic of Armenia Armen Sarkissian signed a decree on appointing Nikol Pashinyan as Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. The President and the Prime Minister of Armenia held a meeting at the Presidential Palace.

President of the Republic of Armenia Ar-

men Sarkissian - Mr. Prime Minister, now I have another opportunity to congratulate you in your capacity of a political party and national movement leader on your victory in the parliamentary elections. Also, I want to congratulate you on the first session of the National Assembly of 7th convocation.

Our parliament has a lot to do: things are very clear at this stage. The parliament should do everything to ensure that the velvet revolution's ideas, hopes and expectations may take effect today, tomorrow and the next day.

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Armenian, Azeri FM's Set for more talks

International mediators are trying to organize another meeting of Armenia's and Azerbaijan's foreign ministers later this month, the Armenian Foreign Ministry said on January 8.

"The [U.S., Russian and French] co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group have proposed a meeting of the foreign ministers in January," the ministry spokeswoman, Anna Naghdalyan, told the Armenpress news agency. "An announcement on the meeting will be made in a coordinated manner."

Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and his Azerbaijani counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov held three face-to-face meetings in the second half of 2018.

According to the co-chairs, at their most recent talks held in Mi-



lan on December 5 Mnatsakanyan and Mammadyarov pledged to "work intensively to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict and to further reduce tensions."

"They agreed to meet again in early 2019 under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs for this purpose and in or-

der to facilitate high-level talks," the mediating troika said in a December 6 statement.

Both ministers described the Milan meeting as "useful." Mammadyarov said that it resulted in a rare "mutual understanding" between the two parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The ministers met in the Italian city the day before Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev spoke to each other at a summit of ex-Soviet states held in Russia.

Pashinyan and Aliyev also had a brief conversation during the previous CIS summit held in Tajikistan in September. There has been a significant decrease in ceasefire violations in the Karabakh conflict zone since then. "The year 2019 will give a new impetus to the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process," Aliyev wrote on his Twitter page on December 14. Pashinyan tweeted two hours later that a Karabakh settlement "remains a top priority" for Armenia.

Armenian Ambassador presents credentials to Polish President

Armenian Ambassador to Poland Samvel Mkrtchyan on January 9 presented his credentials to President Andrzej Duda, the Armenian foreign ministry told Noyan Tapan.

During the meeting the two officials touched upon the centuries-old ties and friendship of the Armenian and Polish peoples, the contribution of the Armenian community to Poland's public and political life.

They both highlighted the need to continue the political dialogue at the highest level by mutual visits.

During the talk the Armenian Ambassador and the Polish President also touched upon the EU's Eastern Partnership format, Poland's leading role on the sidelines of this and the complete implementation of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

Ambassador Mkrtchyan introduced the Polish President on the recent domestic political developments in Armenia, the process of revolutionary reforms and etc.

Within the frames of the ceremony Ambassador Samvel Mkrtchyan laid a wreath at the memorial of Unknown Soldier.



Number of female lawmakers in Armenia's new Parliament increases by 14

The number of female lawmakers will be 32 in the new Parliament of Armenia; their number was 18 in the previous convocation Parliament.

The females will comprise nearly 25% of 132 MPs in the Parliament of 7th convocation.

My Step alliance will have 23 female lawmakers in the Parliament, the Prosperous Armenia party – 5 female MPs and the Bright Armenia party – 4 female MPs.

Snap parliamentary elections were held in Armenia on December 9. Based on the election results, three political forces – My Step alliance, Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia parties have been elected to the Parliament.

My Step alliance will have 88 seats, the Prosperous Armenia party – 26 and the Bright Armenia party – 18 seats in the new Parliament.

The first session will be held on January 14.



Pashinyan defends plans to downsize government

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on January 10 that he will press ahead with a significant reduction of the number of government ministries in Armenia despite strong criticism from affected civil servants and opposition politicians.

A government bill circulated last month calls for abolishing the Ministry of Diaspora and merging four other ministries with different agencies.

In particular, the ministries of agriculture and economic development would be turned into a single ministry, as would be the ministries of education, culture, and sports and youth affairs. 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 total number of ministries would be reduced from 17 to 12. It is not yet clear how many government employees would be laid off as a result.

The bill sparked street protests in December by hundreds of Diaspora and culture ministry employees fearing a loss of their jobs. They denounced it as hasty and ill-thought-out.

Pashinyan countered that the bill is in tune with his repeated pledges to downsize the government made during campaigning for the December 9 parliamentary elections won by his M Step alliance.

“We promised during the election campaign that the composition and structure of the government would be changed and the number of ministries would be cut,” the prime minister told a cabinet meeting in Yerevan. “We must follow that path without any deviation.”

“I want to stress that the aim of this is not to save money, so to speak,” he said. “The aim here is much more important: to enhance the efficiency of the government and its bodies.”

Pashinyan indicated at the same time that he has not made a final



decision on the government's structure and is still open to other proposals. “We will listen to all views regarding all possible configurations and make a maximally balanced decision,” he said.

Some public administration experts question the wisdom of having fewer government ministries. They say that the new “super-ministries” would only slow down the work of the state apparatus.

Pashinyan's intention to close the Ministry of Diaspora has proved particularly controversial.

It is opposed by not only the 90 or so ministry employees but also some prominent members of the worldwide Armenian Diaspora.

Pashinyan insisted that the ministry's closure would not reflect negatively on Armenia's ties with the Diaspora. He pledged to come up with an alternative solution that would actually deepen those ties.

“We are going to discuss that model with our Diaspora compatriots as well,” he said. “I hope that we will reach agreement and consensus on this issue.”

New Armenian Parliament meets, elects speaker

Ararat Mirzoyan was elected Speaker of Parliament.

The new speaker, Ararat Mirzoyan, is a 39-year-old former scholar who became the country's first deputy prime minister following last spring's mass protests that brought Pashinyan to power. He is a founding senior member of Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, the dominant force in the My Step alliance that swept to a landslide victory in the December 9 parliamentary elections.

Mirzoyan was backed by 131 of the 132 members of the National Election in secret ballot. He was nominated for the top parliamentary post by My Step and endorsed by the two other parties represented in the legislature: Prosperous Armenia (BHK) and Bright Armenia.

“We are electing you as National Assembly speaker but we don't know what kind of a speaker you will be,” Bright Armenia leader Edmon Marukyan told Mirzoyan before the vote. Marukyan expressed hope that he will act like an “impartial arbiter” in his new capacity.



Speaking during a parliament debate on his candidacy, Mirzoyan pledged to strive for a stronger “parliamentary oversight” of the government and said he will be “open to dialogue” with the opposition minority. At the same time he urged the BHK and Bright Armenia to “work together” with the government instead of “confronting” it on every issue.

Based on the results, Alen Simonyan and Lena Nazaryan from the ruling My Step faction have been elected Vice Speakers of

Parliament.

124 MPs voted in favor of Lena Nazaryan's candidacy, while three voted against.

109 MPs voted in favor of Alen Simonyan's candidacy, with 20 against.

130 out of 132 MPs participated in the voting.

Vahe Enfiadjyan from the opposition Prosperous Armenia party has been elected the 3rd Vice Speaker of Parliament.

The first session of the Parliament of 7th convocation began on January 14.

Three political forces – My Step alliance, Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia parties, are represented in the Parliament.

My Step faction has nominated MPs Alen Simonyan's and Lena Nazaryan's candidacies for Vice Speaker of Parliament. The third Vice Speaker must be a representative from one of the opposition factions. Prosperous Armenia opposition party nominated Vahe Enfiadjyan's candidacy for Vice Speaker, whereas the Bright Armenia nominated Mane Tandilyan's candidacy for the position.

Moscow slams Baku's denial of entry to Russian citizens of Armenian descent



Russia again demanded on January 11 that Azerbaijan stop barring Russian citizens of Armenian descent from visiting the South Caucasus country, saying that the practice is “incompatible with friendly relations between the two countries.”

“We have repeatedly raised this issue with the Azerbaijani side and said that such instances are becoming a tradition, a bad and wrong tradition,” said Maria Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman.

“In our view, such facts constitute a blatant violation of the rights of Russian citizens,” Zakharova told a news briefing in Moscow.

“The Russian Foreign Ministry has repeat-

edly brought the Azerbaijani side's attention to the unacceptability of the existing situation. We have demanded an end to detentions and expulsions. The practice is incompatible with friendly ties between the two countries.”

The Azerbaijani government has long maintained a travel ban for not only Armenia's citizens but also ethnic Armenians from other countries because of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It considers any Armenian presence on Azerbaijani soil a security risk and an affront to the country's honor and territorial integrity.

According to Zakharova, in 2018 there were at least 16 cases of Russian nation-

als denied entry to Azerbaijan “on ethnic grounds.”

The most recent of them was reported late last month. Kristina Gevorgyan, an ethnic Armenian holder of a Russian passport, said that she was held in detention at Baku's Heydar Aliyev international airport for 13 hours before being deported to Russia.

Moscow already publicly denounced the practice in July 2017. Reacting to that criticism, an Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman cited continuing “Armenian occupation” of Azerbaijani territory.

“Unfortunately, some ethnic Armenian individuals display ethnically motivated hostility, and that is why we take certain measures,” he said at the time.

Incidentally, Russia's longtime Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was born to an ethnic Armenian father. Lavrov visits Baku on a regular basis.

The Azerbaijani ban also applies to presumed or actual ethnic Armenians from Turkey, Azerbaijan's closest ally. In 2014, a Turkish arm-wrestler called Zafer Noyan was reportedly barred from entering Azerbaijan and participating in a major competition there because of his last name which officials at the Baku airport felt is Armenian. Noyan was forced to flow back to Istanbul despite his assurances that he is not of Armenian origin.

Court adjourns hearing on ex-top official Armen Gevorgyan's measure of restraint

The Court of Appeals in Yerevan has adjourned the hearing over the prosecution's complaint seeking the arrest of former Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgyan. Gevorgyan is also a former Secretary of the Security Council.

Gevorgyan's attorney Erik Alexanyan told reporters the hearing was delayed because they haven't received the copy of the prosecution's complaint.

“We didn't receive the copy and didn't have the chance to prepare written objections. That's why we requested the court to delay the hearing, to provide the copy in or-



der for the defense to get familiarized with it,” he said. The hearing

will resume January 17th.

Gevorgyan once again reiterated

that he denies any wrongdoing and doesn't accept the charges.

Earlier a court of first instance denied the Special Investigation Service's request to arrest Gevorgyan pending trial and the prosecution appealed the decision to a higher court. Gevorgyan filed a complaint requesting the court to uphold the lower court's ruling and consider the absence of reasonable suspicion as confirmed.

Gevorgyan is charged with complicity to overthrow constitutional order, bribery and money laundering, as well as obstruction of justice.

Western survey notes democratic change in Armenia



The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a London-based think-tank, has acknowledged “substantial improvements” in Armenia in an annual report on the state of democracy around the world.

The EIU rated 167 countries and territories on five indicators, including civil liberties and electoral process and pluralism. The resulting Democracy Index again divided them into four categories: “full” and “flawed” democracies, “hybrid regimes” and “authoritarian regimes.”

“Armenia saw the most improvement among all ‘hybrid regime’ countries in eastern Europe

in 2018, raising its score to 4.79, from 4.11 in 2017,” said the EIU. “This led to a jump in its ranking from 111 to 103.”

According to the survey, the democratic change resulted from last spring’s “velvet revolution” that toppled Armenia’s longtime leader, Serzh Sarkisian, and brought protest leader Nikol Pashinyan to power.

“Mr. Pashinyan’s opposition coalition subsequently swept the Yerevan municipal election and won a staggering 70 percent of the vote in a parliamentary election in December 2018,” said the EIU. “These developments, and Mr.

Pashinyan’s subsequent anti-corruption campaign, improved the country’s scores for government accountability and transparency.”

“They also resulted in a vast improvement in citizens’ perception of corruption and confidence in the government and political parties,” it said.

Armenia’s Democracy Index score had barely changed in the previous years.

The South Caucasus state will have to score more than 6 in order to be classified by the EIU as a “flawed democracy” alongside the United States, France and 53 other nations. The EIU’s latest list of 20 “full democracies” is topped by Norway, Iceland and Sweden.

Georgia and Turkey are 89th and 110th respectively in the EIU rankings, having been both again rated as “hybrid regimes.” Armenia’s two other neighbors, Azerbaijan and Iran, are far lower in the rankings and remain “authoritarian.”

In an explanatory note, the EIU said that “hybrid regimes” often have “serious weaknesses” in their political culture, functioning of government and political participation. “Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak,” it added. “Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.”

OIF Secretary General announces readiness to closely cooperate with Armenia

Armenia’s representative to the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), Ambassador Christian Ter-Stepanyan and the General Secretary of the organization Louise Mushikiwabo met at the OIF Office.

Christian Ter-Stepanyan congratulated Louise Mushikiwabo on the occasion of assuming the post of the Secretary General of the organization.

Press service of MFA Armenia informed, that Louise Mushikiwabo expressed satisfaction for the meeting, noting that it’s her 1st official meeting, which is also symbolic.

The OIF Secretary General expressed her admiration with



Armenia and the Armenian people, noting that thank to the exclusive contribution of the Armenian authorities and the Armenian people and the per-

sonal devotion of the representative of Armenia the Yerevan summit of the OIF was a great success. Louise Mushikiwabo asked Ter-Stepanyan to convey

her congratulations over the success to the Armenian Foreign Minister and the leadership of the country.

The representative of Armenia to the OIF spoke about the cooperation between Armenia and the organization, particularly, about the decisions made during the summit and the implementation of the initiatives assumes by Armenia as the chairing country of the summit. Louise Mushikiwabo announced about her decision to closely cooperate with Armenia aimed at the implementation of the mentioned decisions, as well as jointly organizing the events dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the OIF.

Armenian gas operator vague on new prices

Armenia's national gas distribution network declined to clarify on January 10 whether it is ready not to raise its domestic tariffs following a 10 percent increase in the price of Russian natural gas purchased by it from its parent company, Gazprom.

Gazprom announced on New Year's Eve that it has raised its wholesale gas price for Armenia from \$150 to \$165 per thousand cubic meters. The announcement followed fresh talks held by the Gazprom chairman, Alexei Miller, and Armenia's Deputy Prime Minister Grigoryan as well as phone conversations between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Pashinyan assured Armenians



that they will not pay more for gas despite the price hike.

For his part, Grigoryan said on January 7 that the government and the Gazprom Armenia network will start discussions on the issue later this week. Gazprom Armenia will not ask Armenian utility regulators to allow it to

raise the tariffs until those talks are over, he said.

In written comments to RFE/RL's Armenian service, Gazprom Armenia said the talks will focus on the size of its profit margins that have to be approved by Armenian regulators.

"Gazprom Armenia expects

that those negotiations will result in solutions that will ensure the normal functioning of the company and reliable and safe gas supplies to consumers," it added without elaborating.

Gazprom Armenia's chief executive, Hrant Tadevosyan, said in November that his company is operating at a loss for a second consecutive year. He attributed the losses to its decision in late 2016 to cut the gas prices for households and corporate consumers.

Grigoryan suggested on Monday that Gazprom-Armenia's losses can be cut or even nullified because of a significant difference between the costs of gas purchased from Gazprom and sold to Armenian consumers.

World Bank forecasts 4.3% GDP growth in Armenia in 2019

Economic growth in Armenia eased to an estimated 5.3 percent in 2018 and will slow down further this year before accelerating in 2020 and 2021, the World Bank said late on January 10.

In its latest Global Economic Prospects report, the bank also forecast weaker growth in many other countries in Europe and Central Asia. "Growth in the eastern part of the region is also anticipated to slow as large economies including Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine decelerate," it said.

The report cites "downside risks" to this outlook. "Increases in policy uncertainty could undermine confidence in the region and impact growth," it says. "A slowdown or reversal of ongoing structural reforms remains a risk in many countries in the region, especially in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine, and Turkey."

The report further warns of possible spillover effects of Turkey's current financial troubles. "While direct linkages between Turkey and the rest of the region are small, an intensification of financial turbulence there could lead investors to reevaluate their exposure to the region, likely leading to capital outflows, currency depreciations and rising borrowing costs," it explains.

The World Bank projected lower growth rates for Armenia in its previous global report



released this summer. It said that the Armenian economy will expand by 4 percent in 2018 and 2019. The bank's latest report estimates the country's 2018 growth at 5.3 percent. According to its projections, growth will slow to 4.3 percent in 2019 but stand at 4.6 percent in the following years.

By comparison, the Armenian government forecast a 4.9 percent growth rate in its 2019 state budget approved by the parliament in November.

Armenian growth accelerated to 7.5 percent in 2017, according to official statistics. It hit 9.7 percent in the first quarter of 2018, just before the start of weeks of mass protests that led to the resignation of the country's longtime leader, Serzh Sarkisian.

Political opponents of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the protest leader who came to power in May, have seized upon those figures to criticize his economic record. They claim that his government's policies are scaring away investors.

Pashinyan and his associates dismiss the criticism. They say that the new government has already succeeded in practically eradicating corruption and breaking up economic monopolies that have long hampered Armenia's development.

Economy Minister Tigran Khachatryan insisted in November that the "velvet revolution" will benefit the domestic economy in the longer term.

"The revolution has led to a greater degree of economic freedom, easier access to the markets and more equal competition," Khachatryan told. "These are factors that could and should create a more favorable environment for investment-related decisions. But they can't produce results at once."

In his first New Year's Eve address to the nation, Pashinyan reaffirmed his pledges to carry out an "economic revolution" that would significantly improve the lives of ordinary Armenians.

World food prices stable in December: UN FAO

The FAO Food Price Index (FFPI) averaged 161.7 points in December 2018, nearly unchanged from its November value as lower dairy and sugar quotations were largely offset by firmer cereal prices and somewhat higher prices of meat and oils, Noyan Tapan was informed from the official website of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN.

For the whole of 2018, the FFPI averaged 168.4 points, down 3.5 percent from 2017 and almost 27 percent below the highest level of 230 points reached in 2011. Sugar values dropped the most in 2018, with also vegetable oil, meat and dairy prices registering year-on-year decreases. However, international prices of all major cereals rose in 2018.

The FAO Cereal Price Index averaged 167.1 points in December, 3.0 points (1.8 percent) higher than in November and 9.6 percent above December 2017. Wheat prices were up slightly in December, mostly supported by harvesting concerns in Argentina due to untimely rains and tightening export supplies in the Russian Federation.

However, strong competition for exports limited the rise in prices. International maize prices also rose in December, amid firm global demand coupled with weather concerns in the southern hemisphere. By contrast, international rice prices subsided for the sixth successive month, pressured further by a quiet pace of trade.

Over the whole of 2018, the FAO Cereal Price Index averaged just over 165 points, some 9.0 percent higher than in 2017 but still 31 percent below its peak reached in 2011. Falling world output of wheat and maize contributed to the increase in prices during 2018, although overall global supplies of all the major cereals remained more than sufficient, leaving inventories still at high levels.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index averaged 125.8 points in December, posting a marginal increase of 0.5 points (0.4 percent) from the previous month and marking the first rebound after ten consecutive falls. The slight recovery was driven by higher palm oil prices, which reflect both rising domestic demand in major produc-



ing countries and firmer global import demand. By contrast, international soy and rapeseed oil prices continued to drift downward on account, respectively, of ample supplies in the US and weak demand in the EU. Falling mineral oil prices also weighed on vegetable oil values. For the year as a whole, the FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index averaged 144 points, down 15 percent from 2017 and reaching the lowest level since 2007, with palm oil prices registering the largest decline amid weak global demand accompanied by an accumulation of stocks in major producing countries.

The FAO Meat Price Index* averaged 163.6 points in December, 1.3 points (0.8 percent) higher than its slightly revised value for November. While poultry and bovine meat prices changed only little in December, international price quotations for ovine meat fell slightly, mostly as a result of increased export supplies from Oceania. By contrast, pigmeat prices partially recovered, supported by strong global import demand, especially from Brazil. In 2018, the Index averaged 166.4 points, down 2.2 percent from 2017. The year-on-year decline reflected drops in the prices of pig and poultry meats, which more than offset higher ovine meat quotations. In bovine meat markets, prices remained close to their 2017 levels.

The FAO Dairy Price Index aver-

aged 170 points in December, down 5.9 points (3.3 percent) from November, marking the seventh successive month of decrease. In December, international price quotations for butter, cheese and Whole Milk Powder (WMP) declined, underpinned by increased availability of export supplies, especially from New Zealand. However, Skim Milk Powder (SMP) prices increased marginally on stronger world import demand. For the whole of 2018, the Index averaged 192.9 points, down 4.6 percent from 2017, as a result of declines in price quotations for all dairy products included in the Index during the second half of the year.

The FAO Sugar Price Index averaged 179.6 points in December, down 3.6 points (1.9 percent) from November. International sugar prices fell under renewed downward pressure, in part because of reportedly faster growth in sugar production in India in recent months. Falling international prices of crude oil also contributed to the slide in sugar quotations, as lower energy prices tend to reduce the use of sugarcane to produce ethanol, resulting in more supplies for the production of sugar, notably in Brazil, the world's largest sugar producer. Overall for 2018, the Index fell by almost 22 percent year-on-year, underpinned by ample world production and accumulating inventories.

Consultation on the silk road (OBOR) remembering the old thinking of the new

A consultation on “Religions in OBOR,” entitled “The Silk Road (OBOR): Remembering the Old and Thinking of the New,” was held at the Armenian Church, Catholicosate of Cilicia on Monday, January 7th, 2019. His Holiness Aram I presided over the consultation, which was initiated by Minzu University of the China University of Minorities and the Geneva Agape Foundation (GAF).

The consultation is the first in a series of meetings planned to take place over the next five years. The five-year international research program was launched on May 31st 2018 by the Academy of Religions, Minzu University of China, with the participation of Chinese and international scholars. The first consultation focused on the role of the Armenian Church along the Silk Road. Experts from China, Switzerland, France, and Lebanon presented papers

on the theme.

At the opening session, His Holiness Aram I welcomed the guests and thanked them for choosing the Armenian Church, Catholicosate of Cilicia to launch the research project. Aram I gave a detailed account on the role of the Armenian Church historically and in the present and spoke of its people-centered self-understanding as Church. He stated that the openness of the Armenian Church rendered it not only a leader, but also a servant of its people. Finally, His Holiness spoke of how the Armenian Church, Holy See of Cilicia has historically acted as a bridge between different peoples and cultures and between the East and the West, always without compromising its identity. “Because of this role as bridge builder and its rich spiritual heritage,” he said, “the Holy See of Cilicia has consistently provided ethical values

and promoted a culture of dialogue.”

The welcoming remarks were delivered by Teny Pirri-Simonian, President of the ARMENOFAS Foundation. The first session included presentations by Prof. You Bin, Chairperson of the Academy of Religions, Director of the Institute of Comparative Scripture and Interreligious Dialogue, and Vice-Chairperson of the China Association of Religious Studies, and Dr. h.c. Christoph Stückelberger, President and Founder of Globethics.net and Executive Director of the Geneva Agape Foundation. History Professors Claude Mutafian and Raymond Kevorkian also presented papers.

The consultation concluded its sessions on Wednesday, January 9th, 2019.

The report of the consultation will be published in the forthcoming months in Chinese and English.

Nikol Pashinyan appointed Armenia's Prime Minister

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I have received the National Assembly's recommendation, based on which I am pleased to sign a decree to appoint you Prime Minister. Mr. Prime Minister, please accept my congratulations. I wish you every success for the sake of our Homeland and the Armenian nation.

Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan - Dear Mr. President, I am grateful to you. You have clearly formulated the framework in which we should proceed and act. I want to underline that the anticipated key political change has already taken place in the Republic of Armenia: our people has full control of the government and the political power, and democracy is established in Armenia.

Another problem is that democracy should be strengthened through institutional guarantees, which means that democracy, the rule of law and universal access to economic activity need to be guaranteed by democratic, state and political institutions rather than by political circumstances or personal considerations.

Significant changes have taken place in the economic life. In fact, there are no longer monopolies in the economy at the level of political will and reality, but we also need institutional guarantees. And I consider it very important to note that the changes we anticipate cannot take place without the citizens' active participation, which was behind the recent political changes. Just as the political, non-violent revolution took place in Armenia with the participation of millions of our citizens and compatriots from the Diaspora, I imagine the economic revolution with the same formula, provided that the government should comply with all of its commitments as-

sumed before the people. In this respect, I attach great importance to the cooperation of our state institutions. In fact, we deal with a new situation, and I attach great importance to the cooperation between the President, the Prime Minister, the Government and the National Assembly.

It should be noted that we gained some experience over the past eight months, but we are dealing with quite a new situation; there is a new institutional relationship, and we should be able to create such traditions that will ensure clear separation of power, democracy, the rule of law and, of course, an adequate system of checks and balances. I want to say that we all, myself, our political power are devoted to that vision and to that idea. Democracy, the rule of law and transparency are not slogans for us, but a system of values by which we are guided.

All this should be done in a way that would ensure that the level of state governance is not lowered on the one hand, while management efficiency, accountability and transparency would not suffer, on the other hand. And, of course, the citizens of the Republic of Armenia should be confident that no one will ever take away their right to form a government, and will not even try to do so, even if such an attempt is made, will definitely fail.

Thank you for your good wishes. Also, I want to thank the majority of the National Assembly for nominating me as Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. I am convinced that we all are dedicated to building a free and happy future for our country and people.

Thank you.

President of the Republic of Armenia Armen Sarkissian - Thank you, Mr. Prime Minis-

ter. I want to reiterate that first of all I am glad to hear your remarks. I am convinced that they are not mere words: words which you believe and are dedicated to. That is to say, in a sense, this is your mission.

These words make me happy because, after all, we are here to make this country one of the best countries in the world that our citizens should be truly proud of. Not only should they be proud on a sentimental note, but actually they should be proud because they are going to live in a country where the rule of law prevails, where the country is governed by laws and by the Constitution, not by someone's whims; a country, where their rights are both respected and protected.

All our citizens have the right to live in a prosperous country where every one of them will be confident of the future of their children and grandchildren.

I wish you good luck, every success - to the Government and the National Assembly because they have a lot to do.

When we talked about the fourth republic, it seemed a symbolic word game. But in essence, it is meaningful in a sense that not only do we have a new political situation, but also a new structure of state governance. And as you mentioned, the responsibilities of different authorities and their rights should be re-formulated.

It is crucial for all branches of power - Presidency, Government, National Assembly, and why not, the fourth power - to cooperate for a single purpose, for our country.

Therefore, I congratulate you once again and wish you every success. Your success is the success of our country, our people, and my own success.

Bizarre Turkish News: For the Amusement of Readers During the Holiday Season



By
*Harut
Sassounian*

Throughout this past year, I have collected several examples of eccentric reports or rules imposed on Turkish society. Naturally, millions of liberal and civilized Turks are unhappy with these behind the times regulations, but as long as President Erdogan is in power, such draconian measures will continue to be imposed on all Turkish citizens! Here are some examples:

— Pinar Tremblay of Al-Monitor reported that Turkey's Diyanet, the Religious Affairs Directorate's website, announced on February 3, 2018 that "based on the well-known words of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims are advised to eat and drink with the right hand and to teach their children to do the same because the 'devil eats with the left hand.'" How about those who are left-handed or don't have a right arm, wondered many members of the Turkish public?

— Ihsan Senocak, a well-known Islamic Imam, resigned from the Diyanet in February after his controversial announcement that women who wear pants are sinners destined for hell! Senocak had also announced that a man should not kiss the hand of his young mother-in-law because it could lead to temptation!

— Mahmut Acar, a local resident of nearby Incirlik Air Base in Turkey told Sputnik News that US soldiers stationed there are buying Turkish children and then taking them to the United States to convert them to Christianity.

— Yavuz Ornek, a Turkish lecturer at Istanbul University, stated on Turkish television on January 6 that Noah communicated with his son via a cell phone before the flood. Ornek also claimed that Noah built his ark with steel plates and it ran on nuclear energy! "I am a scientist, I speak for science," the ignorant Ornek insisted.

— The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs announced that girls as young as nine years old and boys at the age of 12 can get married!

— The Diyanet also issued several fatwas (religious edicts) announcing that "Bitcoins are inappropriate at this time." A second one stated that dyeing men's hair black is inappropriate according to Islam. A third one forbade the purchase of lottery tickets or working at a place where alcohol is sold. A fourth one banned listening to "immoral music." But the most controversial fatwa was the one announcing that a man can divorce his wife via a telephone call, email, text message or letter. Such means of declaring divorce is supposed to be as good as saying it to the spouse's face. The only thing the wife has to make sure is that the text message or email is from her husband!

— Newsweek quoted a Turkish Islamic preacher announcing on the religious television station Fatih Medreseleri that men without beards "cannot be distinguished from women" and can provoke "indecent thoughts" by other men. "Men should grow beards. [Beards are] one of the two body parts that separate men from women," Murat Bayaral stated. "If you see a man with long hair from afar, you may think he is a woman if he does not have a beard, because nowadays, women and men dress similarly. God forbid! You could be possessed by

indecent thoughts," he explained, expressing the fear that men might look at members of the same sex with sexual interest.

— As I reported in an earlier article, former Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc had announced that "women should not laugh out loud in public!"

According to Newsweek, the foregoing reports indicate that Erdogan is trying to take Turkey "down an increasingly religious path with a new version of Islamic nationalism. Since the founding of modern Turkey in 1923, the word 'secularism' was enshrined in Turkey's constitution. But Erdogan has increasingly recommended that religion become a part of public life. Over the past year, classes on evolution have been removed from public school curricula, and the government permitted girls to wear headscarves in school, something that was prohibited in the past."

Newsweek's reporter Cristina Maza concluded: "Today, Turkey's leadership faces the daunting task of determining how to govern the more religious and the secular aspects of its society simultaneously. 'The religious in the Muslim world have reasserted themselves in a number of divergent streams. This has inevitably energized the Muslim masses in Turkey,' geopolitical forecaster George Friedman wrote in an April op-ed for Real Clear World. 'The secular, European culture that had dominated the country is confronting the increasingly powerful claims of the religious. The fundamental political and social question is how to create a single polity built around two divergent cultures.'"

We hope President Erdogan and his old-fashioned Imams issue more bizarre edicts in 2019 returning Turkey to the Stone Age!

Yerevan Home Care is the first and the only one company launched in 2011 in Yerevan. The company is providing a 24/7 qualified care service to older adults, disabled people, people suffering from chronic diseases or those who need postoperative care, as well as to people with dementia.

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care aides, home care aides, and home health aides. Home health aides might also provide limited assistance with things such as taking blood pressure or offering medication reminders.

Nursing care is more related for patients after surgery, traumas, different chronic diseases

Rehabilitation service is for people who need professional rehabilitation in their recovery periods after some types of diseases and surgery. Dementia / Alzheimer /special care is for people with dementia in all stages when you worried about their safety or a health problem.

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GenEd to create California State curriculum on Armenian Genocide



Asbarez - The Genocide Education Project has begun a two-year project to provide the California Department of Education curriculum on the Armenian Genocide aligned with the new state History-Social Science educational framework.

Led by the Sacramento County Office of Education, the Content, Literacy, and Citizenship (CLIC) project has created History-Social Science Statewide and Regional Communities of Practice which will implement the “inquiry-based” curriculum throughout the state.

GenEd is collaborating with these Communities of Practice with two teacher-training workshops scheduled for June, 2019, and more to come across California.

The Genocide Education Project has embarked on a new partnership with the USC Shoah Foundation. The organizations had their first planning meeting in December, discussing ideas for various collaborative projects, combining GenEd’s Armenian Genocide curriculum with Armenian Genocide survivor videos (originally filmed by J Michael Hagopian) that USC Shoah

foundation has made available online for use by teachers and students.

The Texas State Board of Education has updated its education standards to include the Armenian Genocide (p. 80) as an example of genocide students must be able to identify. GenEd successfully advocated for the change and collaborated with the Austin, Dallas, and Houston Armenian-American communities to send public comments to the board.

Board member Patricia Hardy introduced the amendment, referring to the 2017 Texas House of Representatives recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the numerous public comments received.

Beth Hudson, curriculum director for the Austin Independent School District and participant of several GenEd teacher workshops said, “I am delighted and gratified that my home state took the necessary steps to appropriately include the Armenian Genocide in our educational standards, supporting our efforts to truthfully and effectively teach this part of history.”

GenEd attended more educational conferences and hosted more professional training workshops than ever, introducing a wider spectrum of teachers to the value of teaching about the Armenian Genocide and the pattern of genocides that followed.

Exhibit booths and workshop sessions were provided at social studies conferences and full-day teacher-trainings were carried out in California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, Texas, and Chicago, where GenEd interacted with hundreds of high school history teachers.



Ruben Safrastyan considers important Assad's statement to restore Armenian Church in Deir ez- Zor

It's still too early to talk about the end of war in Syria, Ruben Safrastyan – Director of the Oriental Institute, told a press conference in Armenpress, stating that the Turkish armed forces are waiting for an order at the border to once again enter into Syria.

“Everything started when the United States announced withdrawing its troops from Syria. This led to new developments, in the center of which Turkey appeared. The latter urged the US either to eliminate or transform to the Turkish side the 22 military bases deployed in Syria's north.

But the US opposes this demand, meanwhile Turkey supposes that these military bases will be left for Kurds. Here we see that there is a problem between the US and Turkey”, Ruben Safrastyan said.

The next problem between the two countries is that Turkey calls the armed organizations

consisting of Kurds as terrorist organizations, but the US considers such characterization unacceptable because some of these groups were fighting together with the Americans. Erdogan clearly stated that they will fight against terrorists up to the end, meaning the Kurdish squads.

“Currently the Turkish army stands on the border, is ready for getting an order, and the Turkish authorities announce that that order will sooner or later be given”, he said.

Safrastyan said in such circumstances Kurds started self-defense. They were seriously concerned that Turks would enter into Syria. They have applied to the Syrian government for assistance. Safrastyan noted that Kurds tried to counteract the Turkish operations. Ruben Safrastyan said currently US-Turkey trade deal is underway which can lead to decline of Turkey's role



in Syria.

At the same time there are talks on Syria's restoration. “Quite positive developments are expected in terms of providing financial aid to Syria. The statement, according to which Saudi Arabia is ready to provide assistance to Syria's restoration works, was interesting. If this happens, a serious process will launch”, he added.

Talking about the Syrian-Ar-

menian community, Ruben Safrastyan said Armenians gradually return. He highlighted the fact that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad announced that he will restore the Armenian church in Deir ez-Zor with his own resources.

“This is a symbolic step, the Syrian leadership shows that they are interested in the return of Armenians, this is a green light for return”, he stated.

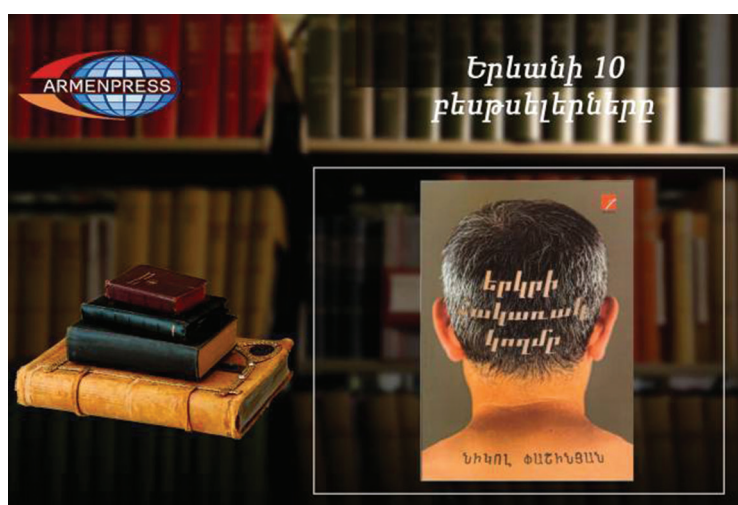
PM Nikol Pashinyan's novel is Yerevan's December bestseller

Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's *The Opposite Side of the World* (also known as *The Other Side of the Earth*), a novel he wrote during 2008-2009, has topped the ARMENPRESS Yerevan Bestseller list of Armenian authors according to sales data from bookstores of December 2018.

The novel was been the top-selling book in Yerevan in earlier ratings also.

The Other Side of the World was published in 2018.

The novel was created from a series of articles by Pashinyan that were published on Haykakan Zhamanak (Arme-



nian Times) newspaper during May-December of 2008.

Speaking about the book, Pashinyan has said that he was

approached in January 2018 by an amateur publisher who suggested to publish the novel. “I was skeptical about his skillful-

ness in organizing this work,” Pashinyan said. “Nevertheless, I asked for some time to read and edit the novel. Reading the novel 10 years later simply turned me upside down. A massive storm began inside of me, a massive revolution. I realized that the time of the people's victory has come...”

The other bestselling books of Armenian authors of December are : Balzac, *A Dog's Tale* by Levon Nes (Hovhannisyan), *Dilemma* by Anahit Khazakhetsyan, *Takard (Trap)* by Ashot Aghababyan, *Goodbye* by Ani Karapetyan, *Paruyr Sevak's Selected Collection* etc.

Healthcare minister makes unannounced visits to Yerevan school, kindergarten and clinic



Acting healthcare minister Arsen Torosyan has made unannounced visits to a public school, a kindergarten and a polyclinic on January 10 in Yerevan.

At the Leo Tolstoy School, the minister toured the facility with the principal and talked with the children. He also

checked the temperature in the classrooms.

The principal said that children who have flu-like symptoms are being sent back home. "The nurse checks the children one by one in the morning," Principal Anahit Uzunyan said, adding that the classes resume normally.

At the #30 kindergarten, Principal Anna Sisoyan told the minister that parents don't bring sick children to the care centers. "From 106 children, today 63 attended," she said. "20 of them are sick, the others are afraid to bring their children," she said, adding that they check the children for fever in the mornings.

Director of the Karlen Yesayan Polyclinic told Torosyan that few people sought treatment during the holidays.

Torosyan inquired about the flu immunization situation, and medical personnel said that people mainly get vaccinated during this season. "Both healthy people and at-risk individuals get vaccinated against the influenza. However, pregnant women are horrified from being vaccinated," an expert told the minister.

Earlier the healthcare ministry said that the H1N1 virus is circulating in Armenia in the usual seasonal pattern and there is no alarming situation.

Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act signed into law

President Donald Trump signed the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, a ground-breaking genocide prevention law, overwhelmingly adopted by the Senate and House, which codifies earlier measures, including those implemented by the Obama Administration, and puts in place a set of clear policies and processes to prevent new atrocities.

"The ANCA welcomes the President's signature on the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, and thanks all the legislators who spearheaded and supported this landmark bipartisan genocide prevention measure," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "As Armenian Americans – descendants of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide – we are particularly gratified to see a measure signed into law that speaks to transitional justice, criminal accountability, and the moral imperative to apply the lessons of past genocides in seeking to prevent new atrocities."

The genocide prevention measure was spearheaded by Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD), Todd Young (R-IN), and Thom Tillis (R-NC) in the Senate and by Representa-



tives Ann Wagner (R-MO) and Joe Crowley (D-NY) in the House during the previous Congress and received broad bipartisan support. It enjoyed broad-based support from genocide and atrocities prevention organizations with the Friends Committee on National Legislation at the forefront along with over 70 grassroots groups, including the ANCA and In Defense of Christians.

The law states that U.S. must regard the prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes as a core national security interest and moral responsibility. To that end,

it calls for the creation of a task force to strengthen State Department efforts and assist other agency efforts at atrocity prevention and response. The law also calls for the training of Foreign Service Officers "on recognizing patterns of escalation and early warning signs of potential atrocities, and methods of preventing and responding to atrocities, including conflict assessment methods, peacebuilding, mediation for prevention, early action and response, and appropriate transitional justice measures to address atrocities."

As part of the new provision, the President is required to transmit a report to Senate and House Committees on Foreign Affairs and Appropriations, offering a review of countries and regions at risk of atrocity crimes, the most likely pathways to violence, specific risk factors, potential perpetrators, and at-risk target groups.

The law also calls on the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to support programs and activities to prevent or respond to emerging or unforeseen foreign challenges and complex crises overseas, including potential atrocity crimes.

Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

Chiron will soon enter your sign. This points rather directly to your physical and emotional well-being. If anything is outside of normal, it will begin to nag at you. Don't ignore symptoms because they won't just go away. Make a plan to see your doctor soon for physical problems.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

Changes may be occurring in your primary relationship. One or the other of you is probably trying to hang onto what is familiar. Changes and growth must be allowed to happen or the relationship will become stale. Let things flow naturally. Don't jump to conclusions or make problems bigger than they are.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

This is a good time to communicate with your partner. It is very important that you set the Critic aside and engage in a conversation about feelings, even if you think it is about things. For example, if this person did not do something that was expected, avoid the blame game. Ask what was happening on the interior that kept him/her from completing the plan.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

The eclipse energy of this month continues its background effect on everyone, but most especially on Moon Children. Tune out if this energy is too much for you. Indeed, whether global or personal, anything built on sand rather than solid ground, is showing cracks and signs of impending change.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

Your work or daily routine takes on a quality of intensity this week. Family and home matters may play a part in the situation. Concentrate on breathing deeply and moving with deliberation. It is possible that you are more intensely emotional than the situation deserves. Take a step back and look at it from a larger perspective. This is likely to be something that affects you, but is not about you.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Details may nag your mind and your time like pecking ducks. You and significant others are not having the best of communications right now. You may be in the mood to nit-pick yourself or others. Probably you will feel generally better if you work alone. Put the Critic in the closet.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

There is a potential for becoming caught in ego games with a loved one. Any of the "games" will do, but this week's aspect is particularly fond of playing "How much do you love me? Prove your feelings." You could be asking the question or the Other might be asking you. Try to stay with communications that are more authentic.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Please note the opening paragraph about Pluto because it is one of your ruling planets. Concentrate on serving up the truth as you know it with tact and diplomacy. The Scorpion sometimes delivers their thoughts about others with a force that can be hurtful, even though you perceive it as being for their own good.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

If you have been channeling your energy into a project that has positive value for many you may be receiving recognition and applause now. If, instead, you are working on something that is purely to make your ego shinier, you will find others are fighting you every step of the way. Think about your motives.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

You may need to concentrate to avoid critics, whether they be internal or external. Instead of accepting blame or guilt, use the energy to make improvements wherever they are needed. Avoid contracts and business negotiations for a week or so because misunderstandings may develop.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

The more you attempt to hurry, the more rocks in your path. You might just as well take your time and allow things to develop as they will. Rushing along will not get you there any faster. If a traffic jam gets in your way, try to take it in stride. These things happen with regularity. The cosmos is not pointing at you.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

This is a fine time to enjoy books and/or TV, meditate and journal. Give yourself time for self-exploration and even just "diddling around" and relaxing. Your dreams are meaningful and your intuition strong. Beware of any offer that looks "too good to be true". Yes, it is. Don't bite, lest you lose.

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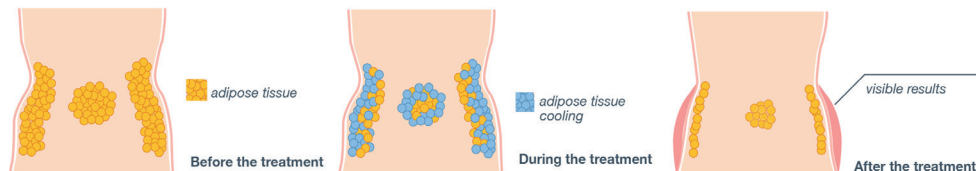
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