

# Ruling Republican Party leads in Armenia parliamentary vote



*Armenia's ruling Republican Party is leading the way in the parliamentary vote after most ballots have been processed.*

*The early results are as follows:*

*Yelc bloc -7.69%*

*Free Democrats -0.90%*

*Armenian Renaissance-3.71%*

*Tsarukyan Alliance – 27.58%*

*Congress-PPA bloc-1,62%*

*Republican Party – 49.06%*

*Communist Party – 0.74%*

*Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanian alliance – 2.08%*

*Armenian Revolutionary Federation – 6.61%*

*According to preliminary results, 1,574,947 citizens or 60.86 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots in the parliamentary elections 2017. The total number of voters was 2,587,706. The voting took place at 2009 polling stations.*

## In This Issue

**Minsk Group Co-Chars: Respect for ceasefire of utmost importance**

p.3

**Armenian-Turkmen economic ties discussed in Ashkhabad**

p.6

**The Embassy of Lebanon hosted one of the most important cultural and diplomatic events**

p.16

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## Serzh Sargsyan: Armenia-EU partnership is a success story

During his working visit to the Republic of Malta, on March 29, President Serzh Sargsyan attended the Congress of the European People's Party held at the "Arena" conference center of the "Inter-continental" hotel in Saint Julian's. The congress was conducted by the President of the European People's Party Joseph Daul. The Head of the European Union Donald Tusk, The Head of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, The Presidents of states and governments representing the parties which are members to European People's Party from the EU member states and Eastern Partners and the Leader of the Nationalist Party of Malta Simon Buzitil participated at the Congress.

During the two-day Congress, the spotlight of all the delegates will be the importance of pan European issues and the agenda, specifically, focuses on the political discussions on the essential topic of "The Future of Europe." They will also turn to the issues of the European neighborhood, the current developments in the sphere of Eastern Partnership and to the current international challenges.

President Serzh Sargsyan made a speech during first plenary session of the congress, in which he touched upon the relations and cooperation between Armenia and the European Union, he stressed the new opportunities and prospects for expanding and deepening bilateral cooperation, and he also touched upon the upcoming parliamentary elections after the constitutional amendments and stressed the importance of the mission and problems of the European big family which is a key milestone in the path of Armenia's democratization.

The President of the Republic of Armenia expressed the hope that the European Union would successfully overcome all the problems faced by this stage and all the challenges, continuing its specific mission of spreading peace, stability and development, which would be beneficial for the people of Europe as well as for its partners.

### Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Congress of the European People's Party

Distinguished Mr. President,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I'd like to thank President Daul of the European People's Party for inviting us to attend this event. Of course, I am also sending all my best wishes to the President Mr. Buzitil at the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm glad to register that from the very beginning this year has been very active for the Armenia-European Union relations. A historical achievement was registered in February: jointly with President Tusk, we had announced the conclusion of negotiations on the new legal document regulating our relations-Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. It will open up a new page in the relations between Armenia and European Union, and consolidate its institutional foundations, establishing new opportunities for the further expansion and deepening of our partnership.

Armenia-European Union partnership is a success story, a model of a successful partnership that resulted on one hand from Armenia's consistent European agenda, and on the other – stemmed



from the tailor-made approaches of the recent years in EU's cooperation with the Eastern Partnership nations. Throughout this process Armenia has vividly demonstrated that it has been possible to make compatible various integration processes while harvesting and sowing everything positive and useful, which unite and does not divide nations.

Dear colleagues,

Just in three days from now on, Armenia will hold parliamentary elections. This is going to be an important stage on the path of democratization of my nation since constitutional reform. Taking into account peculiarities of my country's development we pursue the objective of taking a decisive step towards building a democracy of European model and further strengthening of the democratic institutions. We are committed and spare no effort in order to conduct elections in line with the highest international criteria. All appropriate international structures, such as OSCE/ODIHR, PACE, European Parliament, OSCE and CIS PAs had been invited to Armenia to observe elections.

We are grateful to the European Union and the European People's Party for standing by us throughout these important processes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Few days ago European communities solemnly celebrated the 60-th Anniversary of the Rome Treaty, which established necessary conditions for the current prosperity and sustainable development of European citizens. We, in Armenia closely follow with great interest both those jubilee events and accompanying discussions. The history of the EU is first and foremost one of jointly settling the issues, overcoming disagreements and, last but not least, jointly building the success.

His Holiness Pope Francis had rightly noted on this occasion: "The founding fathers remind us that Europe is not a conglomeration of rules to obey, or a manual of protocols and procedures to follow. It is a way of life, a way of understanding man based on his transcendent and inalienable dignity."

We believe that European Union will also successfully overcome all the issues and challenges it faces at this stage and it will continue with its unique mission of peace, stability and development for the benefit of both people of Europe and Europe's friends.

Thank you.



## Anniversary of 'April violence' should be marked at negotiating table: Richard Hoagland

The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs have one important message as they visit the region.

"We are at the one year anniversary of the violence that occurred in April last years in Nagorno Karabakh. The main message is that this anniversary should be marked at negotiating table, it should not be marked on the battlefield," US Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group told a press conference in Yerevan on March 27.

"It's time to negotiate," he stressed. "The most important is to have political will at the top leadership on both sides to return to negotiations to find a peaceful solution. It's up to the leaders and up to their people to decide on how to live in peace and prosperity in the future. There are plans on the table that could be discussed, and it's time to return to the negotiating table to discuss them," Ambassador Hoagland said.

Responding to accusations that the Minsk Group often fails to issue targeted statements, Richard Hoagland said: "I assure we do know what is going on, but because we are mediators, we have to keep a little degree of distance so that we don't overtly offend one side or the other side. When that happens, the possibility for discussion and mediation gets closed down. We cannot allow those doors to close. We have to keep the doors open. We'll always note when there is an issue that needs to be called attention to, but we have to be a



little careful of what we say in public, even though we know what's really happening behind those closed doors."

Speaking about the perspectives of organizing a high-level meeting, the US Co-Chairs said "we're always working to find the right conditions to bring together the Foreign Ministers or even the Presidents. There is a process going on now. The two Foreign Ministers have been meeting in Moscow separately, and we hope that in the near future the two will be able to meet in Moscow to prepare the ground for the Presidents to meet."

"Our job tight now as Co-Chairs is to talk to all the players," the Ambassador said. He disclosed the plans of the Co-Chairs to visit Nagorno Karabakh to meet authorities in Stepanakert

"We cannot allow violence to be the solution to this long-standing issue. Violence is not an answer. Violence destroys families, violence harms economies, so we have to look for the most positive solution, and our job as

Co-Chairs is to continue to work together to encourage the negotiation process to continue," he said.

"As co-chairs we try to find the most common ground for moving forward. We are facilitators. We ourselves cannot solve the issue. We can help create the conditions so that the leaders involved can make the final decision that will benefit all the people in the region," Richard Hoagland said.

He said that although there is a new administration in Washington, the US policy remains unchanged. "We are fully committed to the Minsk Group, to the co-chairmanship process, to working quietly with all parties to find a solution that leads to peace."

He said there are no strong differences between the three Co-Chairs, and the same goes for the governments of their respective countries. "Even if our governments disagree on certain issues, this is one issue where we really do work together extremely well."

"The negotiation process has slowed down very dramatically, that's why we say it's time for the parties to return to the negating table and think how to move forward. What we want to do is to create the conditions that people feel ready and comfortable to talk again. War is the worst possible solution. What everyone needs is a solution that brings peace and prosperity to all people involved. It's possible to find win-win situations," Richard Hoagland stated.

## Minsk Group Co-Chairs: Respect for ceasefire of utmost importance



The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Ambassadors Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, Stephane Visconti of France and Richard Hoagland of the United States of America), together with the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, traveled to Baku (March 11), Yerevan (March 27) and Nagorno-Karabakh (March 28).

The main purpose of the Co-Chairs' visits to the region was to receive the most current detailed political and military information on the Line of Contact and the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, to discuss the implementation of agreements reached at 2016 Summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg and to address the next steps toward a settlement.

The Co-Chairs met with the Presidents and Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia and the de facto authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh. They also visited territories around Nagorno-Karabakh. In their talks, the Co-Chairs reiterated their deep concern over recent incidents along the Line of Contact, calling on the sides to exercise restraint in their rhetoric and in their actions.

The Presidents laid out their positions on the Co-Chairs' proposals to strengthen the ceasefire and to avoid further escalation of hostilities, particularly in light of the Novruz and Easter holidays. They expressed their commitment to continuing the negotiation process toward a political solution.

In their talks, the Co-Chairs stressed the essential importance of continued support for Ambassador Kasprzyk's mission and its expansion. The Co-Chairs also emphasized their conviction that respect for the ceasefire is of the utmost importance for building an atmosphere of trust to enable further negotiations.

The Co-Chairs will soon travel to Vienna to brief the members of the Minsk Group.

## IOM notes “overall lack of public confidence and trust in the elections



Election observers representing various pan-European organizations cited vote buying, intimidation of voters and other irregularities in their preliminary assessment of Armenia's parliamentary elections presented on April 3.

“Despite welcomed reforms of the legal framework and the introduction of new technologies to reduce the incidents of electoral irregularities, the elections were tainted by credible information about vote-buying, and pressure on civil servants and employees of private companies,” they said in a joint report. “This contributed to an overall lack of public confidence and trust in the elections.”

The nearly 300 observers mostly deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe monitored voting and ballot counting in polling stations across Armenia on Sunday. They also included representatives of the European Parliament and the parliamentary assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

“It is a pity that despite all of the legal and organizational changes these elections did not remove long-standing doubts about the reliability and integrity of electoral processes in the country,” Liliane Maury Pasquier of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) told a joint news conference with other heads of the monitoring mission.

“Regrettably, the process was undermined by credible, recurring information of vote buying, intimidation of voters notably civil servants in schools and hospitals and employees of private companies as well as abuse of administrative positions,” agreed Heidi Hautala, who led the observers from the European Parliament.

The mission chiefs declined to say whether they think the irregularities were serious enough to affect the official vote results that gave a landslide victory to the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). “The election is not just what's happening in polling stations on Election Day,” said Ignacio Sanchez Amor, the mission coordinator representing the OSCE.

Vote buying by the HHK is a key source of complaints voiced by Armenian opposition parties and local election observers. They claim that it was instrumental in the HHK's victory.

Vote bribes are also a major highlight of the preliminary conclusions of the European monitors. “Widespread allegations of vote-buying to vote for certain parties were reported throughout the country and the OSCE/ODIHR [election observation mission] received many credible reports directly from the public,” reads their report. It says even some Armenian government officials acknowledged that “vote-buying had become an entrenched part of political culture” in the country.

The mission was careful, however, not to name any Armenian party engaged in bribing or intimidating voters. It said only that these illegal practices, also reported by the Armenian opposition, media and observers, called into question Armenians' “ability to cast their votes free of fear of retribution.”

The report assesses negatively the voting process in 12 per cent of polling stations visited by the European observers due to problems such as overcrowding and violation of the secrecy of the ballot. “In addition, large groups of people were present in the immediate vicinity of polling stations in 30 per cent of cases, with tension seen in 6 per cent of observations and intimidation of voters in 4.5 per cent of observations,” it says.

The report also offers a negative assessment of 20 of 118 vote counts attended by the observers mainly because of “undue interference in the process” by unnamed party proxies. Also,

it says, election officials in over a dozen polling stations “did not determine the validity of ballots in a consistent and reasonable manner.”

On the positive side, the reports notes, among other things, that “fundamental freedoms” were generally respected during the election campaign and that Armenian state television provided “equitable coverage” of their pre-election activities.

The OSCE-led mission did not report significant instances of multiple voting, one of the most serious forms of fraud that marred previous elections. The Armenian authorities enacted last fall a set of opposition-backed legal amendments designed to preclude this illegal practice. This led to the introduction of electronic voter authentication devices in all polling stations across the



country.

The authorities also installed web cameras to broadcast online voting and ballot counting in the vast majority of those stations. The European Union allocated earlier this year over \$7 million for the purchase of the equipment.

“The use of new voting technologies cannot alone restore confidence in elections ... just the same as better legislation is only effective if applied in good faith,” Pasquier, the top PACE monitor, stressed at the news conference.

A deputy chairman of the ruling HHK, Armen Ashotyan, insisted late on Sunday that the elections were free and fair and marked a “leap forward” in Armenia's democratization. The European observer report clearly does not back that claim.



## Artsakh can never be part of Azerbaijan under any status: MFA



The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a statement on the anniversary of the Azeri aggression against Artsakh:

It has been a year since Azerbaijan's April aggression against Artsakh.

During four days of April 2016 Azerbaijan conducted the same type of aggressive actions and barbarism against population of Artsakh, that it had carried out for about four years in the beginning of 1990s, when it had tried to deprive the people of Nagorno-Karabakh from their right to live in their homeland and to exercise their right to self-determination.

We pay tribute to the memory of all heroes who fell repelling the attack of Azerbaijan against Artsakh and who gave their lives to prevent mass atrocities against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

While the international community was condemning the gross violations of International Humanitarian Law by the Azerbaijani

armed forces, Baku was praising the acts of barbarism and their perpetrators.

Azerbaijan's adventurism severely damaged the peace process.

On May 16 in Vienna, upon the initiative of the US Secretary of State, and on June 20 in St. Petersburg, at the invitation of the President of Russia, the meetings of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan took place aimed at stabilising the situation, preventing new escalation and creation of conditions conducive to the advancement of the negotiation process. As an outcome of those meetings it was emphasised that it is necessary to settle the conflict exclusively through peaceful means, to strictly adhere to the 1994-1995 trilateral ceasefire agreements, which have no time limitations. It was agreed to establish in the shortest possible time an investigation mechanism for ceasefire violations and to expand the capacities of the team of Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

However, Azerbaijan refused to implement the reached agreements and found itself in an isolation by opposing to the international community.

The highest leadership of Azerbaijan openly lies when it claims that the Co-Chair coun-

tries allegedly recognise Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. It pretends as if it does not understand what the Co-Chair countries are referring to when they say that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh should implement its right to self-determination through the legally-binding free expression of will. Armenia shares the same approach: indeed, the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be determined by the people of Artsakh. That forgery of Baku exposes the failure of the policy of Azerbaijan. After failing in the negotiation process Baku resorted to the military solution but failed again.

The April war once again vividly proved that Artsakh can never be part of Azerbaijan under any status, and that the implementation of the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination is irreversible.

In response to Azerbaijan's continuous threats to use force, the international community clearly warns that it will not be tolerated.

As a guarantor of Artsakh's security, Armenia will ensure the safety of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Together with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries we will continue the efforts aimed at exclusively peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

## Joint statement on parliamentary elections in Armenia



The European Union, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom have issued a statement on the upcoming parliamentary elections in Armenia:

Over the past year, the European Union, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom have offered significant financial and technical support to Armenia's voting process, including providing equipment to facilitate a free and fair parliamentary election on April 2. We are pleased with the latest tests of the voter authentication equipment developed for Sunday's election. We commend the Gov-

ernment of Armenia for its commitment to this project to support Armenia's election process and the United Nations Development Program for its effective implementation of the project within a severely constrained timeline.

We firmly believe that this effort will diminish the likelihood of voter fraud on Election Day and will limit tampering with the electoral process inside polling stations. We state firmly that the voting process remains anonymous and that the voter authentication devices and cameras installed in polling stations are not designed to track votes. We laud and support the strong effort by credible local and international electoral observers to cover virtually the entirety of Armenia's 2009 polling stations, with the aim of providing balanced, objective analysis of the conduct of the election.

We note that our ultimate assessment of the conduct of the April 2 election will not be limited to observing electoral procedures on Election Day, itself. We are aware of and concerned by allegations of voter intimidation, attempts to buy votes, and the systemic use of administrative resources to aid certain competing parties. We continue to urge all parties engaged in the election to abide by the letter and spirit of Armenia's electoral law, and call upon relevant law enforcement authorities and electoral institutions to implement existing laws in an unbiased and credible manner.

We hope the ultimate result of the election will pave the way to a future of prosperity, peace, and progress. The Armenian people deserve as much.

## Armenian-Turkmen economic ties discussed in Ashkhabad



Armenian-Turkmen relations have been progressing over the past few years, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said at a meeting with visiting Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan.

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stressed that Turkmenistan is interested in and attaches great importance to the implementation of mutually beneficial projects and programs in various fields aimed at furthering and strengthening of cooperation with Armenia.

"Our peoples enjoy historically warm relations and ties. I am confident that your official visit can best contribute to the further development of our fraternal relations in various spheres of economy – energy, transport, agriculture, engineering, and industry. We have great potential for cooperation and stand ready to discuss your proposals and ideas," the President of Turkmenistan said.

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov asked to convey warm greetings to President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan. Karen Karapetyan thanked the President of Turkmenistan for the warm welcome and, in turn, conveyed President Sargsyan's greetings to Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

Hailing the current level of Armenian-Turkmen relations, the head of the Armenian government noted that the economic cooperation does not correspond to this level.

"The purpose of my visit is to discuss in detail various issues and projects of economic cooperation that will make it possible to intensify economic interaction, increase trade turnover using the existing great potential," the Prime Minister of Armenia said, expressing confidence that the two peoples' friendship might provide a good basis for further development of exchanges between Armenia and Turkmenistan.

The Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Turkmenistan discussed various issues of the economic sphere. Karen Karapetyan and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov expressed conviction that economic cooperation could stimulate the growth of bilateral trade turnover.

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov expressed support for the implementation of mutually beneficial programs discussed between the two countries. The parties agreed to continue the discussions in April in Yerevan at the level of the working groups.



## Armenian Highway Upgrades "Mismanaged"

Transport Minister Vahan Martirosyan acknowledged on March 29 that an ambitious project to upgrade Armenia's main highways stretching more than 550 kilometers to Georgia and Iran has fallen behind schedule due to poor management.

The North-South transport project worth an estimated \$1.5 billion is aimed at facilitating the landlocked country's access to the Georgian and Iranian ports. It is also designed to enable Iran to use Armenian and Georgian territory for large-scale freight shipments to and from Europe.

In 2009, the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) lent the Armenian government \$500 million for the planned road up-



grades. Only two highways connecting Yerevan to the towns of Ararat and Ashtarak have been expanded and repaved to date, costing \$70 million. Their total length of is about 50 kilometers.

Work on about 120 kilometers of other roads running further south-east and northwest of the Armenian capital is due to be finished in 2018.

In 2015, the government also borrowed \$150 million from the Kazakhstan-based Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) to rebuild a 20-kilometer road currently running through Armenia's highest mountain pass close to the Iranian border. Most of that money is to be spent on the construction of a 4-kilometer tunnel.

Martirosyan could not say when the entire project initiated by President Serzh Sargsyan could be completed. "I can't speak right now of any time frames as to when it will be complete," he told reporters.

He admitted that some of the planned roadworks "have slightly fallen behind schedule." "We are working with concrete contractors in connection with that," he said.

Martirosyan, who was appointed as minister in October, insisted that the expensive project has not been a failure. "It's just that it probably was not or is not correctly managed," he said. "We certainly have some work to do there."



## Ameriabank unveils Drops app for automated payments

Ameriabank on March 28 launched a new payment tool called Drops, enabling customers to make automated payments through plastic cards on a daily basis.

Founder of Drops Vahagn Tsaturyan explained that large annual payments are often a heavy burden for the family budget, especially wintertime utility payments and tuition fees in general. Speaking to reporters, he said the new application allows customers to use their payment cards to pay the debts in small amounts throughout the year, thus avoiding one-time large payments and not having to visit a bank or another financial institution, ARKA says.

According to him, the application can be used to pay utility bills, tuition fees, communication and travel costs, make insurance and loan payments, set to soon be applicable for property taxes, fines for violation of traffic rules, etc..

As he noted, by registering with the system, users can choose the necessary service, specify the amount of payment and the payment timeframe; the app will independently schedule the payments -



daily, weekly, monthly, as specified by the user, and will automatically write off the necessary amounts from their card accounts.

Ameriabank's Retail Operations Director Arman Barseghyan noted that the system allows customers to manage their personal financial flows. It also reduces the financial burden and helps avoid attracting additional loans to pay for certain expenses.

"Taking a loan is an additional burden, while in this case the client simply pays for the intermediary service in the amount

of zero to 1.9%, which is significantly lower than other attracted resources," Barseghyan said.

Ameriabank Technologies and Operations Director Burastan Movsisyan explained that the new app is available to all ArCa, Visa and MasterCard holders.

"The application provides for remote management of one's financial flows with a high level of security," Movsisyan said, stressing that the system has three-level protection backed by VbV (Verified by Visa) and Secure Code technologies.

Drops commercial director Ashot Mesropyan said, in turn, that the number of organizations represented in the app will grow.

"A number of Armenian higher education institutions, kindergartens, schools, insurance companies, tour agencies have already joined us. We are now negotiating to attract more organizations," Mesropyan said.

Ameriabank serves as the payment and settlement partner of the project. The application is available on AppStore and GooglePlay.

## Armenia to supply organic food to luxury hotels in six Arab countries

Four Memorandums of Understanding were signed within the framework of the Armenia-UAE Investment Forum held in Abu Dhabi last week, the Development Foundation of Armenia reports.

The "Hydro Corporation" Group of Companies and Estekshaf Investment Company signed a MoU on investments in the field of renewable energy, which envisages implementation of large-scale and long-term programs. The programs aim to upgrade the small HPPs.

"Tamara Fruit" CJSC and Natural Organic Healthy Food Company signed an agreement, under which the Armenian company will supply organic food to luxury hotels in six Arab countries. The first delivery is expected in the first decade of April.

The Armenian-Emirati Business Union and the Natural Organic Healthy Food signed a Memorandum on opening of or-

ganic food processing center in Armenia.

Under a MoU signed with the Armenian Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources, the Ocean Holding

intends to invest 100 million USD in solar photovoltaic power plants in Armenia and operate them using the best technology available to the sector.



## U.S. Ambassador meets with women from Armenia's IT industry

Increased female employment offers great potential to Armenia's economy. Currently, women constitute 67 percent of Armenia's economically non-active population and their unemployment rate is almost double that of male unemployment (51.5 percent female vs. 21.8 percent male).

According to World Bank estimates, Armenia loses as much as 14 percent of its potential GDP due to unequal opportunities for women to participate in employment and entrepreneurship. To highlight the importance of women's leadership and economic empowerment in Armenia, on March 29 the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard M. Mills, Jr. met with a group of female representatives from Armenia's IT industry who have benefited from USAID assistance.

During the meeting, held at the USAID-supported Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center, Ambassador Mills discussed with the participants their career challenges and successes, and inquired about their ongoing projects.



"Too often, I'm afraid, the stereotype of a successful IT professional is still of a man. But in reality, women play an increasingly important role in coding, product development, web design, and all aspects of IT work. That is especially true in Armenia, as demonstrated by the wealth of talent and expertise gathered today in this room. You are a group of IT professionals, all women, who are working to boost Armenia's economy through your creativity, problem solving, and technical knowhow. I'm proud that the United States, largely through USAID, has been able to support you and help you fulfill your potential and your aspirations," said Ambassador Mills.

USAID has supported female Armenian IT entrepreneurs through multiple activities, including the establishment of three innovative



technology centers. Working in partnership with the Armenian government, universities, and the private sector – including Microsoft, National Instruments, and IBM – USAID has established the Microsoft Innovation Center Armenia ([www.micarmenia.am](http://www.micarmenia.am)), the Armenian National Engineering Laboratories ([anel.am](http://anel.am)), and the Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center ([istc.am](http://istc.am)).

As one of the fastest growing sectors in the Armenian economy, IT presents a real opportunity for women to become leaders in innovation and to make major contributions to the country's overall economic advancement.

Recognizing the need for gender equality and the vital role women play as drivers of economic growth, USAID has been promoting Armenian women's participation in the economy for over two decades, helping them unleash their potential in areas that span from agribusiness and hospitality to textiles and IT.



## Poland's President marks 650 years of Armenian community in the country

Poland's President Andrzej Duda praised the contribution of Armenians to Polish society and culture during a meeting on Wednesday marking 650 years since an Armenian community arrived in this country, Radio Poland reports.

Duda noted that Armenians began arriving after special privileges were granted by Polish king Casimir the Great in 1367, establishing the first Armenian diocese in Poland.

During a meeting with the Armenian community at the presidential palace in Warsaw, a parchment from that year was displayed. The document testifies to privileges accorded by the Polish king to Armenian Bishop Gregory.

Duda said the contribution made by Armenians to Poland "is invaluable and penetrates practically all of social life, because they were both excellent farmers and created [sections] of the Polish intelligentsia, they were wonderful craftsmen, merchants."





## Belarus unwilling to quarrel with Azerbaijan or Armenia: Lukashenko



Belarus and Armenia are close peoples, and will remain so, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko said as he met with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Armenia, Armenia's permanent representative at the CIS Armen Khachatryan on the occasion of the completion of his diplomatic mission in Belarus.

The President emphasized that Belarus and Armenia have absolutely identical positions on all issues on international agenda. "We understand the policy that is pursued by the current leadership of Armenia and was pursued by the previous leadership," the head of state continued.

The President also remarked: "There are issues of concern for Armenians and Belarusians. For example, Nagorno-Karabakh. I will openly say that it is not our issue, not my issue. We have nothing to do there. There are conflicting parties that must handle the issue. We have a univocal position: Armenia and Azerbaijan should sit at the negotiating table and solve this problem without any strong or weak mediators. If they want to use someone as a guarantor, they must make this decision together. It is the right time to solve this issue today."

The President also spoke about the extradition of blogger Alexander Lap-

shin. "Does Armenia have anything to do with it? Armenia has never told me anything about Lapshin. Only one country, Azerbaijan, put him on the wanted list. When he was apprehended here I thought why it happened right here. He could have gone anywhere else. Belarus would not have been involved in it. But he was. Interpol caught knew about it. We had to report and we did it as law-abiding people."

What did we have to do with him? We had to extradite him to the country which had put him on the wanted list. Moreover, I will say it in public for the first time: no one wanted to take him back. They started to play this card later. He is the citizen of three countries, and neither of them needed him. They just wanted to get rid of this problem. Therefore, there are always subtexts in all issues which will be always used to someone's advantage."

The head of state continued: "You should know the main thing: we have been close people and will remain so. Armenia may have a different attitude to Azerbaijan, but Azerbaijan is also a close state and close people for us. We lived in one country some time ago. Why should we quarrel with Azerbaijan or Armenia? Perhaps, we will be useful for Azerbaijan and Armenia someday. Not as mediators. Therefore, I do not want to interfere. This position derives from the wisdom of the Belarusian and Armenians peoples."

## France ready to host meeting between Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan



France is ready to host a meeting between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan if they reach an agreement, French Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Stéphane Visconti said after talks with Artsakh President Bako Sahakyan in Stepanakert, Artsakhpress reports.

On his first visit to Nagorno Karabakh, Mr. Visconti said he's delighted with the beauty of Stepanakert. "It was a pleasant surprise to me," he said.

Speaking about negotiations, the Co-Chair said "the process continues and there is a rich dialogue between the parties."

"It's not visible to everyone. We cannot disclose details, as the negotiations are confidential. It does not mean, however, that nothing is being done. To continue the talks, it's first necessary to exclude ceasefire violations at the line of contact. The parties have to make concessions to move forward," Stéphane Visconti told reporters.



**City Spa**, one of the founders of Aesthetic medicine in Armenia, that was established 14 years ago, is still following the main principles that were implemented since the launch: to use only clinically and scientifically approved, highly effective and safe with FDA approval products and equipments imported mainly from UK and Europe.

**Depilation:** Last year City Spa launched a very safe, painless and fast acting new machine for permanent hair removal. It is the “Primelase” produced by Cocoon Medical. The machine has an innovative



international leading brands such as ZO Skin health (Beverly Hills US), GLO therapeutics (ColoradoUS). Skin Ceuticals (US) etc.

**And that's not the all: pedicure, manicure and massage will make your day.**

You are welcome to City Spa. The aesthetic doctor's consultations and skin diagnostics with Skin Scanner is fee. The atmosphere in City spa is full of love and peace. The pricing strategy is very flexible and discounts for good long term clients are available during whole year as well as different Gift Cards.

method (dynamic mode) which allows to treat very large areas of the body within few minutes.

**Localized fat removal:** In Armenia the first cryolipolysis method was implemented by City Spa in 2016. Cooltech is an innovative machine that acts as a none surgical liposuction, with a new method of cryolipolysis for permanent localized fat removal and body reconturing. It is safe, painless and very effective. City Spa is equipped also with the Wellashape machine for anti-cellulite treatment.



**Anti aging Facial treatments and Care:** City Spa offers the latest scientifically approved anti aging treatments and products for care. The doctors are regularly improving their qualifications in London and Paris, bringing the new inventions to Armenia. The products used in City Spa are only



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## Diaspora celebrities urge high voter turnout in Armenia



Rock musician Serj Tankian and other prominent Diaspora Armenian artists on Friday urged voters in Armenia to turn out in large numbers for Sunday's parliamentary elections which they will monitor along with local observers.

Tankian, Canadian-Armenian actress Arsinee Khanjian, her husband and filmmaker Atom Egoyan and his Armenian-American colleague Eric Nazarian arrived in the country as part of their "Justice within Armenia" campaign.

The campaign was launched in September with a joint online petition signed by them and more than two dozen other well-known individuals, virtually all of them ethnic Armenians living in Europe and North America. They called on Armenia's government to end widespread corruption, respect laws and hold democratic elections.

The four celebrities will be among about 300 Diaspora Armenians that will monitor the elections. They will be part of a much larger observer mission launched by a coalition of Armenian civil society groups. Tankian said he and his colleagues want to "help create justice within Armenia." "We are not professional monitors," he told a joint news conference in Yerevan. "We are artists. Our job is to inspire you to turn out and vote."

"The bones of this ancient proud nation are deep and powerful, but the muscles on these bones need to be exercised, and democracy is a muscle" Egoyan said, for his part. "Without a democratic process we fall into tyranny."

"We can assume that this election will be tampered," he claimed. "We have already seen proof of vote rigging and electoral corruption"

The famous artists insisted that they are not supporting any of the Armenian election contenders. "We don't have a dog in this fight," said Tankian. "We are non-partisan ... Whoever you vote for we will support."

The lead singer of the American rock band System Of A Down at the same time criticized "one-party" rule in Armenia. "I don't like any government that has one political party running the game, whether it's the U.S. with the Republicans or here with the Republicans or anywhere with one-party system," he said. "I think there should be a variety of voices."

"So if you don't know who to vote for, vote for a party that you think has the right ideas and intentions, even if you think they are not going to make the 5 or 7 percent [vote threshold for winning parliament seats,]" added Tankian.

Khanjian also stressed the need for "change" in Armenia. "If we are to bring about change in Armenia without violence ... then your vote must be a vote for change," she said.

In a November 2016 speech, President Serzh Sargsyan pledged to strengthen Armenia's ties with its worldwide Diaspora and "seek more input from "our compatriots who have achieved global success." He praised traditional Diaspora organizations that have rarely criticized Armenian governments' records on democracy and human rights. But in what may have been a reference to "Justice Within Armenia," Sargsyan blasted other Diaspora Armenians who "do not understand our reality ... but have assumed the role of judges and are slamming and reproving us at every corner."

## Artsakh Ombudsman discusses war crimes at Johns Hopkins University

Artsakh Human Rights Ombudsman Ruben Melikyan outlined the work of his office and presented the findings of its latest report on Azerbaijani war crimes and atrocities committed during the four-day April 2016 war to public policy leaders at a forum sponsored by the Center for Transatlantic Relations (CTR) at the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), reported the Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC).

CTR's Benedikt Harzl, an Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Fellow in Central European Studies at Johns Hopkins University SAIS and assistant professor of international law at the University of Graz, hosted the March 15th discussion. In his introductory remarks, Prof. Harzl noted the lack of a harmonized and unified approach to conflict resolution involving de facto states as one of the reasons these situations continue to fester and the importance of hearing the voices

from these entities.

Prof. Harzl explained that a crucial question revolves around "what role should be afforded de facto states in the course of conflict resolution" and believed "international law is indeed in a position to provide accommodation with de facto states."

Mr. Melikyan offered an overview of the responsibilities of the Human Rights Ombudsman, an independent position established in 2008, to address the human rights concerns of the citizens of Artsakh, including social, political, education, and religious rights. The Ombudsman has the right to investigate human rights complaints, can demand information from state and local government officials, and has unrestricted access to prisons. Mr. Melikyan, who was elected to a six year term by the Artsakh Parliament in May 2016, reported that he handles about 130 complaints a year. He is not an "Armenian rights defender," but a "human rights defender," stressed Mr.

Melikyan, who recounted his visit to an Azerbaijani soldier currently in custody in Artsakh during which he shared a copy of the European Convention on Human Rights and emphasized his right to an attorney of his choice.

The number one human rights concern in Artsakh was the right to security and life, explained Mr. Melikyan, citing Azerbaijan's constant threats of war and repeated attacks. His investigation into the four-day April 2016 War found widespread and systematic war crimes abuses by Azerbaijani soldiers, including three cases of beheadings. The report, which has been published on the Ombudsman's website, found that of the 28 combatants and 3 civilians, who fell under the control of Azerbaijan, 90% of them were either tortured, executed, or mutilated.

Mr. Melikyan decried the lack of widespread condemnation of these atrocities, warning that "impunity encourages new atrocities."

## Russian FM denies rumors on 'Lavrov Plan' on Karabakh settlement

No 'Lavrov Plan' on settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has ever been compiled, Russia's top diplomat said in an interview with Azeri-Press Agency.

The collective proposals of the OSCE Minsk Group are the only option currently on table, Sergey Lavrov said.

"I have publicly stated on many occasions that there is no Lavrov Plan," he said. "The ideas that are now up for discussion are based on the proposals worked out collectively by the three states co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group."

"To be more precise, those are the provisions of joint statements on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement by the presidents of Russia, the United States and France. They are well-known," he added.

According to the Russian minister, the sides generally stick to these agreements, but have different approaches to the sequence of measures that have to be implemented to achieve the target.

"Any changes or new plans that change the system developed by the co-chairs are ruled out," he said. "Above all, we need to help the sides find a balanced political solution that would allow drafting legally binding documents."

Moscow, Washington and Paris speak with one voice on the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, he went on.

According to Lavrov, co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group actively engage in discussions on the issue. "During their regular visits to the region, they, as a rule, speak with one voice at talks with the leadership of Armenia and Azerbaijan," he said. "I believe that a team approach of this kind is an example of how (sides) should cooperate in settling international conflicts."

"I expect our close cooperation on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement to continue with both Washington and Paris," Lavrov added.

"The Nagorno-Karabakh settlement issue is a very delicate subject, so details of talks are confidential," he said. "At the same time I can say that many aspects have already been agreed upon. A few questions remain. But they are most difficult."

"No consensus has been reached so far," the minister added. "But nevertheless the work continues."

"We are concerned about what is going on in a nearby region," Russia's top diplomat continued.



"That's why we are interested in restoring peace and stability in the region, in opening borders, in bringing back refugees, in resuming trade and economic ties. This is why the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains among the absolute priorities of our foreign policies."

Lavrov denied allegations that no practical steps toward reconciliation have been made so far.

"The Karabakh issue is constantly in the spotlight of attention of international mediators, who take collective and individual efforts intended to solve this problem," the minister said.

"As far as Russia is concerned – a three-party summit on the issue was held last year at the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin," he said. "At all times, the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement issue holds a prominent place during Vladimir Putin's meetings with the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia."

According to Russia's top diplomat, the issue was discussed in detail during Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan's March 15 visit to Moscow.

"Naturally, top diplomats don't stand aside. A detailed discussion on the matter with Armenian Foreign Minister Edvard Nalbandyan took place in February, and with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mamedyarov in early March," Lavrov added.

## Armenia hails Russia's efforts in Karabakh settlement process

Armenia and Russia have never been on the opposite sides of the barricades, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said in an article published in Russian Nezavisimaya Gazeta on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"Establishment of diplomatic relations opened a new page in the modern history of centuries-old relations between the brotherly peoples that have passed the test of time," Minister Nalbandian said.

According to Armenia's top diplomat, the two nations are tied by a number of

deep threads, which form the ground, on which the relations between Armenia and Russia are being built.

"Today the Armenian-Russian allied strategic partnership is seen as an exemplary model of cooperation, one of the most successful and effective ones on post-Soviet space," he said.

Minister Nalbandian said "Armenia appreciates Russia's mediating efforts, including in its capacity as Minsk Group Co-Chair, in the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict."

"It was thanks to Russia's efforts that the agreement on ceasefire was signed

between Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia on May 12, 1994. This enabled us to step into the political phase of conflict resolution. Despite Azerbaijan's continuous efforts to wreck the implementation of the agreement, including the large-scale military actions unleashed last year, Armenia works in cooperation with Russia, the co-chairing countries continues to take efforts towards stabilization of the situation, creation of conditions for furthering the negotiation process with a view of solving the conflict exceptionally in a peaceful way," Minister Nalbandian said.



## News from the Youth Orchestra

The State Youth Orchestra of Armenia will have a concert in Armenia ahead of the concerts within the Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival in Poland dedicated to the Maternity and Beauty Day of Armenia celebrated on 7 April.

It will take place on April 6 at 19:00, at Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall. The program includes Symphonic Images by Ghazaros Sarian, "Scheherazade" symphony suite by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Concerto-Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra by Aram Khachaturian (soloist - **Bartosz Koziak** (cello, Poland).

orchestra as soloists.

On April 12 the orchestra will perform at Centrum Spotkania Kultur in Lublin. During this concert Bartosz Koziak (cello) and Jarosław Nadrzycki (violin) will perform with the orchestra.

The orchestra will be headed by Sergey Smbatyan.

According to an info from the Embassy of Poland in Yerevan, the concert of the SYOA in Warsaw is devoted to the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Poland and the 650th anniversary of Ar-

menian community in Poland.

The Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival dates back to 1997. It is Poland's largest festival of classical music which hosts renowned soloists, conductors and orchestras from all over the world. The organizer of the festival is Ludwig van Beethoven Association. This year the project will be held from April 2 to April 14, in Warsaw. The best orchestras from Europe and other regions will perform during this huge event. 15 symphony and 2 chamber concerts – this is the agenda of the 2017 Easter Festival!



SYOA/Lusi Sargsyan



SYOA/Lusi Sargsyan

Conductor: the Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the SYOA Sergey Smbatyan.

The same program will be presented during the two concerts, which the orchestra will have in Poland. On April 11 the orchestra will perform at Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall within the framework of the Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival. **Narek Hakhnazaryan** (cello) and **Jarosław Nadrzycki** (violin) will perform with the



To remind, at the Tsitsernak Awarding on 25 March the Independence Generation PanArmenian Orchestra and Choir Project authored by Sergey Smbatyan received Special Prize, and the Youth Orchestra ensemble – Alexander Haroutyunyan Windwood Quartet has received Prize as the Best Ensemble.

*Acknowledgement:  
Marianna Galstyan and  
Roza Grigoryan of the SYOA*



## Second Annual Armenian Genealogy Conference held in Detroit



*Asbarez* – The second annual Armenian Genealogy Conference took place at the University of Michigan-Dearborn on March 18, while several related events were held in the Detroit area throughout the weekend. The conference was sponsored by the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and co-sponsored by the Cultural Society of Armenians from Istanbul, the Nor Keghi Association, and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR). Over 250 people from 18 states attended the conference.

The conference kicked off on the evening of March 17 with an opening reception, where over 150 people of Armenian ancestry gathered at St. Sarkis Lillian Arakelian Fellowship Hall to connect with each other and to enjoy a traditional Armenian buffet, in which each item was identified by its historic origins. Der Hrant Kevorkian, pastor of St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church, extended a warm welcome to the guests who were seated at tables that mapped the geography of Historic Armenia with each table being designated a particular province. This gave conference attendees the opportunity to connect with others whose ancestors hailed from the same regions of Historic Armenia. Whether Keghitsis, Everegtsis, Adanatsis or Kharpertsis, compatriots made their way for group pictures taken according to regional roots.

On March 18, the conference opened with introductory remarks and a welcome by George Aghjayan and Ani Boghikian Kasparian of the organizing committee as well as by Dr. Ara Sanjian, the director of the University of Michigan-Dearborn Armenian Research Center. The morning sessions touched on genealogy 101 (Tracy Keeney), the hidden Armenians of Turkey (George Aghjayan) and the history of the Palu region (Vahe Tachjian).

In the afternoon, participants went into four consecutive break-out sessions on various themes, including the Armenian Immigration Project (Mark Arslan), genealogy and social media (Tracy Keeney), DNA testing (Janet Achoukian Andreopoulos), Armenian/Ottoman records (George Aghjayan), success stories (Jen Langley), and sources in Armenian research centers (Ani Boghikian Kasparian). Speakers shared “success stories” of genealogical discovery and encouraged those in attendance to start putting together the puzzle pieces of their own family history.

In her presentation, Tracy Keeney, creator of the Armenian Genealogy Facebook page, encouraged conference attendees to become more involved in tracing their family lines, whether it is through genealogy websites, newspapers and national archives, or Google, stating “You never know what you’re going to find and where you’re going to find it.” Keeney also emphasized the importance of connecting with living relatives. “You’re not going to find this all on ancestry.com,” she said. “There’s so much more to genealogy than names and dates.”

Meline Lachinian, who has been interested in Armenian genealogy for twenty years, described the conference as “a labor of love.” She explained that as a result of a meeting with the director of the Houshamadyan Project Vahe Tachjian at last year’s genealogy conference, he published an article about her family narratives and photos.

Saturday evening, the banquet participants enjoyed the culturally rich program with traditional songs and dances of historic Armenia. Harry Kezelian III, accompanied by Dickran Callan, sang songs from various regions, explaining the occasion of when they used to be sung, while playing the oud. The Hamazkayin Arax Dance group of Detroit, led by Nayiri Karapetian, performed dances from Vasbouragan, Shirak, Kessab, and Sepastia. They invited the guests to join them in an effort to reintroduce some of the original steps.

Conference attendees on Sunday morning had an opportunity to attend mass at the local Armenian churches. In the afternoon, everyone was shuttled to St. John’s Armenian Apostolic church for a tour of the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum. As everyone was gathered in the art gallery, Lucy Ardash, the director of the museum, highlighted some of the special artifacts from the collection. With docents in each of the six galleries of the museum, the guests went through at their own pace, identifying with artifacts from their ancestral towns and villages.

The tour was followed by the farewell reception with a warm welcome by Hayr Aren Jebejian, pastor of St. John’s Armenian Apostolic Church. Guests enjoyed more Armenian pastries and more time with newly discovered family and friends. Participants thanked the organizers, George Aghjayan, Janet Achoukian Andreopoulos, Mark Arslan, Luc Baronian, Ani Boghikian Kasparian, Tracy Keeney, Jen Langley, Marc Mamiogonian, and Shoghig Shahinian for a worthwhile conference and left with great anticipation for its next installment.





## Recent News from Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator

### A street lighting system has been installed Horbategh community

Horbategh community of Vayots Dzor region is one of the settlements where attacks of the wild animals such as bears and wolves are very often. The village has 262 inhabitants. Their main sources of income are cattle-breeding, bee-keeping, and agriculture. Because of the dark streets in the evenings, the wild animals enter the village, damage the backyard gardens, fields and beehives, get into barns and harm sheep, rams and steers.

Outdoor lighting infrastructure was destroyed in Horbategh after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The small budget of the village was never enough to solve the problem.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) and VivaCell-MTS have summed up the results of yet another joint program implemented within the framework of The Alternative Energy Project. An outdoor lighting system, consisting of 65 LED lamps, has been installed in Horbategh community of Vayots Dzor region. As a result of the implemented project, the whole territory of the community has been provided with a street lighting system along 2.300 m area.

The environmentally friendly and energy-efficient systems are used for the first time. The Founder of FPWC Ruben Khachatryan, VivaCell-MTS General Manager Ralph Yirikian, head of Horbategh community Gagik Sandrosyan, and community residents attended the launch of the system.

*"The thing we try to do with this program is crucially important. This is a challenge and if we overcome it the result will be more than just providing lighting. Civilized and farseeing world strives to downgrade consumerist approach. This, basically, is the shortest and most efficient way of reducing poverty and improving people's lives. Launching environmentally friendly energy saving system and its long term results are beneficial for everyone,"* said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**.

The use of latest technologies in environmental protection initiatives promotes nature conservation, energy efficiency and community development.

The environmentally friendly and energy-efficient LED lights will reduce outdoor lighting costs up to 80%. Outdoor lighting will be provided from 21:00 to 00:00 in summer, and from 18:00 to 23:00 in winter. On holidays, street lighting will be provided all night long. LED bulbs are efficient and durable, and last much longer than the regular ones.

### Tree planting aimed to preserve the ecosystem of Armenia

The Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) and VivaCell-MTS have initiated a tree-planting in Urtsadzor on the International Day of Forests. Within the frames of the event partner organizations' employees helped to plant several hundred apricot and plum trees in the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge (CWR).

The nursery in the CWR was established by the FPWC in cooperation with USDA Forest Service International Programs for reforestation purposes. Besides, as a result of extensive wild seed gathering works, a seed bank was created in the CWR, as an important genetic resource for biodiversity conservation.



Within the framework of the program it is planned to test the innovative technologies for the seedlings' production. Over 5000 almond, apple, cherry, plum, pear and wayfaring (*Viburnum*) trees have already been planted by this technology in the CWR. These trees are indispensable food source for some animals.

In collaboration with VivaCell-MTS the FPWC is planning to replenish regular tree planting activities using modern and innovative technologies in order to preserve the ecosystem of Armenia and to contribute to community development.

FPWC Founder Ruben Khachatryan, VivaCell-MTS General Manager Ralph Yirikian, community head Rafik Andreasyan and members of the SunChild eco-clubs were among participants of the action.

*"We have to live in harmony with the nature. If we neglect the problems today we will make our children suffer their consequences tomorrow. What we do is important in terms of preserving the ecosystem. Our partner*

*and we strive to be guided by responsible attitudes for years. It is based on the following logic: the healthy environment and the quality of tomorrow's life are in our hands,"* said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph Yirikian.

*"The planting of 5,000 trees per year is only the beginning of a project that is aimed to preserve the biodiversity. We hope that soon we will be able to increase the number of trees. The continuous initiatives implemented in CWR are based on international experience and innovations. We have successfully examined and already use hydrogel, a water storage polymeric material, drip irrigation and deep root irrigation system. These new and modern systems guarantee a positive result, plus they contribute to the sustainable use of natural resources,"* said FPWC founder Ruben Khachatryan.

In 2016 a small scale food forest was set up using permaculture and agroforestry techniques for the first time in Armenia. The trees planted there are typical for the area and adapted to local conditions. Along with the tree planting the soil was improved using manure as fertilizer to keep plants healthy and green.

Because of the scarcity of water resources in the area water-absorbing polymer material called hydrogel is applied. This innovative technology implies a unique combination of over 20 hydroabsorbants and nutritive components enhancing and significantly improving soil quality characteristics and water retention functions, crucial for plant growth in drought conditions.

Forest gardens mimic the structure and functions of natural eco-systems that allow creating a close-to-natural environment with controllable production.



## The Embassy of Lebanon hosted one of the most important cultural and diplomatic events

An interesting meeting with H.E Mr. Tigran Mukuchyan, Chairman of the Central Election Commission with Ambassadors, Chargés d'affaires and diplomats.

Mr. Mukuchyan gave a briefing about the upcoming parliamentary elections and explained the election preparations, the process of the electoral operations and the electoral modalities that serve to meet the international standards and to guarantee free and fair elections.

This event held at the invitation of the Ambassador of Lebanon Dr. Jean Makaron represented indeed a great opportunity to exchange with the audience constructive thoughts about the elections. This cultural activity was attended by the Ambassadors, Chargés d'affaires and diplomats of the following embassies and diplomatic organizations: Russia, Lithuania, Swiss Confederation, Italy, Czech, Poland, USA, Argentine, Japan, Egypt, India, Greece, Bulgaria, Syria, Sweden, Iraq, OSCE, IMF, UNIDO, IBRC council, pastor Levon Bardakjian.

It should be noted that Dr. Niery Grace Bardakjian has volunteered to take charge of the interpretation, many thanks to her generous contribution.

The Lebanese Ambassador said in his introduction the following. "I truly appreciate the notable role of Mr. Tigran Mukuchyan, I commend him for his professionalism and for



assuming this big responsibility. We all know that the election is a decisive event and we look forward to watch the process of this election hoping it will give a beautiful image of democracy in Armenia." And he quoted John Maxwell when he said: "A leader is a missionary and being missionary is to say goodbye to your own comfort to make life better for others." And he quoted as well Churchill who told us: "The function of parliament is not only to pass good laws but to stop bad laws."

## Armenian Assembly urges investigation into Turkey's attempts to compromise U.S. Democratic Institutions

On March 31, Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian sent a letter to the Senate Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr (R-NC), Vice Chairman Mark Warner (D-VA), House Intelligence Chairman David Nunes (R-CA), and Ranking Member Adam Schiff (D-CA) highlighting Turkey's activities attempting to compromise America's democratic institutions.

"Given recent reports about Turkey's attempts to gain surreptitious influence over U.S. officials and media to the detriment of U.S. national security, and as a follow-up to our March 13th letter regarding Azerbaijan and its influence buying in the United States, we are writing to urge your thorough investigation of President Erdogan's Turkey in an expanded review of foreign governments and their activities that compromise America's democratic institutions to allow massive human rights violations and work against the United States in ways that are totally out of legal or diplomatic bounds," Assembly Co-



Chairs Barsamian and Krikorian stated.

The Assembly's letter comes against the backdrop of revelations of former national security advisor Michael Flynn. "This week, even more developments related to this case were exposed. This abundant public record alone represents a disturbing pattern that compromises both our nation's security and constitutional government," they added.

Next week, an upcoming hearing in the House Foreign Affairs Committee entitled "Turkey's Democracy Under Challenge," promises to reveal further President Erdogan's disregard for U.S. democratic values and human rights as Turkey nears a constitutional referendum that will vastly expand the powers of the president.

Earlier this month, the Assembly also ex-

pressed its concerns with Azerbaijan's potential violations of Iran sanctions based on similar reports. The Assembly Co-Chairs sent a letter to the Senate and House Select Committees on Intelligence noting Azerbaijan's human rights abuses and tactics to influence America's democracy and governance process through its corrupt caviar diplomacy.

Assembly Co-Chairs Barsamian and Krikorian said: "We are writing to express our concern regarding the undue influence of yet another foreign government on America's democratic institutions, namely Azerbaijan. We are deeply troubled by recent reports about Azerbaijan's ties to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its nexus to both the Mammadov family and the highest levels of the Azeri government. We therefore respectfully request that the congressional investigations of Russian influence be expanded to include Azerbaijan's influence peddling and any materials it may have potentially compromising U.S. officials."



## Diligence: Charles Aznavour's 'most Armenian' feature



Charles Aznavour says diligence is his 'most Armenia' feature. "I don't believe in inspiration, I believe in sweat," the legendary French-Armenian singer said in an interview with Russian Chastny Korrespondent ahead of his visit to Moscow.

"I forge every word and hone every phrase. If I need days, weeks or months to find the necessary phrase, I stubbornly seek it out," Aznavour said.

Aznavour is known for his charity, particular his support to Armenia after the devastating earthquake in Spitak.

"This is how my sister Aida and I have been brought up. The fate of our parents, who fled the Armenian genocide, and their behavior, served a role model to us. They often recalled the courage and kindness of an Italian captain, who saved them from death, when they were fleeing Constantinople. They were already on the ship, when one of the Turkish soldiers heard Armenian speech and ran after them. The captain, however, rushed to protect my parents. I believe they managed to escape due to support and kindness of many people, that's why they tried to help everyone throughout their lives," the singer said.

"We lived very modestly, but our doors were always open. My parents were sharing everything they had. During the Second World War they hosted Jews and opponents of the regime," he added.

Charles Aznavour describes his life as 'self-conquest.' "I started from the scratch. I had to learn everything myself. One had to pay for education then, while our family's means were scarce, that's why I had to leave school early. From that moment on I have had to achieve everything on my own.

Charles Aznavour will perform in the Kremlin Palace on April 5.

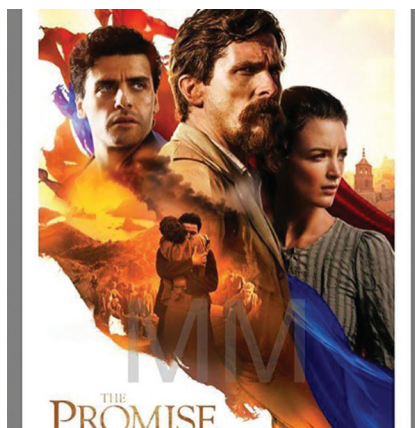
## Sylvester Stallone promotes Armenian Genocide film "The Promise"

Hollywood star Sylvester Stallone has praised the Armenian genocide-themed film "The Promise."

"This extraordinary film is opening April 21... It is a subject that I have been fascinated with for decades and it has taken many years for it to finally have the guts to make it and finally bring it to the screen all to see," Sylvester Stallone said in a Facebook post.

"It is true and incredibly important historical drama that has all the extraordinary ingredients that can make a movie Oscar quality. Its amazing lead actors Christian Bale and Oscar Isaac play their parts to perfection! And a special shout out to it's a legendary producer, Mike Medavoy, who finally brought this epic story to the screen. Also, I owe Mike Medavoy A great deal because he's the one who gave Rocky the greenlight, and that's why am here today. This film has it all...!!! I'm jealous," the actor said.

Set during the last days of the Ottoman Empire, "The Promise" is an epic human drama about a love triangle between Michael Boghosian, a brilliant medical student played by Golden Globe winning actor Os-



car Isaac, the beautiful and sophisticated Armenian artist Ana played by Charlotte le Bon, and Chris Myers, a renowned American photo-journalist covering the war played by Oscar-winning actor Christian Bale.

The film is also supported by an impressive cast of international actors. Their relationships unfold amidst the start of the Armenian Genocide, causing major upheaval of their lives and a struggle just to survive.

The Promise hits theaters April 21.

## IDeA Foundation continues to assist Syrian Armenians

Initiatives for the Development of Armenia Foundation (IDeA Foundation) continues providing support to Syrian Armenians. With the support of the Foundation, the Aleppo Compatriotic Charitable Organization's (ACCO) Save A Life programme has led to 64 people being resettled from Syria to Armenia up to now. An additional 30 Syrian Armenians have expressed the desire to relocate to Armenia in the next three months.

In October 2016, the IDeA Foundation announced the allocation of \$250,000 to support Syrian Armenians. This financial aid package is distributed among the four partner organizations, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Mission Armenia, ACCO and Repat Armenia – to develop and implement programmes for Syrian Armenians.

Since January 2017, with the funds provided by IDeA Foundation, Mission Armenia has covered the cost of rental accommodation for 40 Syrian Armenians who resettled in Armenia. Thanks to the efforts of the partner organizations, a number of meetings and events have been held in Armenia aimed at helping the integration process of Syrian Armenians.

## Zodiac Weekly Forecast



### Aries (March 20–April 19)

The love goddess, Venus, is in your sign and retrograding out of it on April 2. You may experience a relationship event that feels like the finale, the “last straw”. Whoops!

Time to back away and review what you really need here. If you have made a recent purchase, it may suddenly look not so desirable. I hope you have the receipt.



### Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

You may have been dallying with a person from the past and discover on April 1 that this is not going to “work”. A quick getaway is called for, but avoid hurting feelings if you can. It’s never a good idea to burn bridges behind you.



### Gemini (May 20–June 20)

There is a shift of your attention to matters of your personal history that may go back quite a long time. You will be looking inside yourself for meditative peace, answers to serious questions, and encouragement from

your source. Journaling, hypnosis, meditation or counseling are favored activities now.



### Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Your mind and heart are clearly in sync this week. You are likely at peace with yourself. There is a solid and practical solution at hand and you do not have to quarrel with yourself over it. Activities involving your

children and/or other creative products of your being are favored.



### Leo (July 22–August 21)

This is a time in which your exuberance and enthusiasm may carry you farther than you really intended to go. You will certainly have more energy to do whatever you choose, but take care that you don’t promise way more than you can deliver.

Your warm and generous heart could get you in trouble.



### Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Mercury, your avatar planet, is crossing into your solar ninth house. Your attention will be shifting to mental and philosophical expansion. You may be researching a new interest, gazing over travel brochures for

your next adventure, or pursuing an interest in philosophy or religion. You are experiencing a stronger sense of who you are and who you want to be.



### Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

Your open-hearted generosity may lead you to bite off more than you can chew this week. There may be more people at the table than you have plates to serve. Do not worry

about what people will think. They are aware you’ve almost exceeded your limit of tasks to handle. It will all work out.



### Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

You may very well be involved in an ambitious project. You must take care with those who could be thought of as ‘authorities’. If you press as hard as you want to, you

likely will encounter resistance from these folks. If your plan is good for many of people, and not at the expense of others, you could make a coup.



### Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

You probably have a big idea that has caught your enthusiastic attention. Be aware that you will be prone to pour too much money or

other resources into it. Evaluate carefully. Avoid using your credit cards to finance it. Don’t let others seduce you into spending what you do not have.



### Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

You may feel compelled to raise your flag and promote your plans now. Do some self-searching ahead of time to find your own motive. If it is for the good of all, you will gain

support from others. However, if you are really after a prize that will simply allow you to preen, let go of it. Your product or idea is not yet ready for exposure.



### Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

This is an excellent time to pursue any activity that requires your mental concentration. The Waterbearers are not always able to sit still enough

to learn theoretical information, but right now there is a window open for it. Contracts and written communications, along with short distance travel, have go signals.



### Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Venus returns to your sign but it is retrograde right now. You are subject to fall in love with someone or something that is better left untouched. Someone from your past may be returning to check-in. Smile

and wave, but do not invest yourself in this relationship again. Stay awake. Avoid repeating previous relationship patterns.



# ARMENIA

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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.

Creating the company we concenter to support many families that live abroad and have their elderly family members staying in Armenia. We succeed in supporting these families to have not only a solution of the raised problem but to have a deep feeling of satisfaction that their relatives are in good hands.

The organization's greatest wealth is educated, professional, skilled, experienced staff and people with high values and psychological knowledge.

We treat each patient with a strong sense of responsibility and show an individual approach to the families, at the same time maintaining the accepted norms and using contemporary approaches.

Taking your relative's care on our shoulders, we bring harmony between the different generations.

Apart from the professional knowledge the company pays a great attention to the humanitarian qualities of the serving staff, to their kindness, patience, attention and cour-



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.

Yerevan Home Care provides all type of medical equipment that will increase the quality of life of your loved ones. (rent of the equipment is acceptable)

Transportation is a key issue for older adults and for people with temporary or permanent disabilities especially in Armenia where the streets and buildings are not adjusted for disabled people. Yerevan Home Care is providing a transportation service for people that are in wheelchairs.

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yerevanhomecare.am 010 546 546

teous manner.

We assure that we will be your irreplaceable assistant in helping and surrounding your relative with care and support.

We provide service to all type of patients who needs care assistance.

Personal care is for elderly people who are alone and need support in daily living, such as dressing, bathing, feeding, or meal preparation. This type of care includes personal care aides, home care aides, and



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