

Armenia launches Free Economic Zone on Iran border



Armenia - Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan speaks to journalists at the official opening of a free economic zone near Meghri, 15Dec2017.

The Armenian government inaugurated on December 15 a free economic zone on Armenia's border with Iran, saying that it will attract more foreign investment in the domestic economy and expand commercial ties with the Islamic Republic.

Businesses operating in the zone close to the southeastern Armenian town of Meghri will be exempt from virtually all types of taxes. They will be allowed to engage in not only manufacturing but also trade, cargo transport and even tourism.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Prime

Minister Karen Karapetyan indicated that his government expects the tax haven to attract Iranian companies seeking to capitalize on Armenia's tariff-access to Russia's market and privileged trade regime with the European Union. It will also allow other foreign investors to do business with Iran, he said.

"I am sure that the free economic zone has very good prospects," Karapetyan told reporters. "But this is just the beginning. We must now work hard every day," he added.

Minister for Economic Development Suren Karayan, who also attended the ceremony,

said the government anticipates that between 50 and 70 firms will set up shop in the tax haven in the coming years. He said their combined output should increase Armenia's exports by around \$250 million annually.

Vahe Hakobyan, the governor of the Syunik province encompassing the border area, estimated that this should translate into 2,000 new jobs. "That will definitely be an addition boost for the socioeconomic development of our region," he said.

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Meeting of Edward Nalbandian with the President of Greece

On December 13, Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian, who is in Athens on an official visit, met with the President of Greece Prokopis Pavlopoulos.

Welcoming the Foreign Minister, Prokopis Pavlopoulos noted that he is glad to receive the Foreign Minister of friendly Armenia and expressed hope that this visit will contribute to further strengthening of ties between Armenia and Greece.

Expressing gratitude for the reception, Edward Nalbandian noted that it is symbolic to be in Greece on an official visit in a jubilee year of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations and conveyed the greetings and the best wishes of the President of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the invitation to visit Yerevan.

President of Greece and the Foreign Minister of Armenia expressed satisfaction with the multidimensional cooperation between the two countries, underlining that the two brotherly nations are connected to each other with centuries-old friendship and mutual sympathy.

During the meeting the sides exchanged views on the deepening of the Armenian-Greek political dialogue and intensification of economic ties.

In the context of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU, the Armenian Foreign Minister presented the enhancing Armenia-European Union relations.

Edward Nalbandian presented to Prokopis Pavlopoulos the agenda and main topics of the Summit of La Francophonie to be held next year in Yerevan. President of Greece highlighted the importance of holding the Summit of La Francophonie in Yerevan and wished suc-



cess in organizing this representative event.

Foreign Minister of Armenia presented to the President of Greece the joint efforts of Armenia and the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries aimed at peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Foreign Minister of Armenia Edward Nalbandian met with representatives of Armenian community organizations of Greece

On December 12, Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian, who is paying an official visit to Athens, met with around forty representatives of Armenian organizations of Greece.

At the meeting, Edward Nalbandian pre-

sented the goals and agenda of his visit to Athens, the steps that are being taken for a further strengthening and development of the Armenian-Greek relations.

Minister touched upon the efforts of Armenia and the OSCE Minsk Group

Co-Chair countries aimed at the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the recent developments in the settlement process.

Edward Nalbandian informed the representatives of the Armenian community of Greece about the prospects of cooperation between Armenia and the European Union in the framework of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, introduced the approaches of Armenia on urgent international and regional issues, priorities of the foreign policy of Armenia.

Minister Nalbandian touched upon the results of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vienna, Armenia's upcoming Chairmanship in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, and the Summit of the International Organization of La Francophonie to be held next year in Yerevan.

Foreign Minister of Armenia answered the numerous questions of the attendees.



U.S. Envoy sees continued NATO assistance to Armenia



The United States and other NATO member states stand ready to continue their assistance to an Armenian army unit contributing troops to the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo, U.S. Ambassador Richard Mills said on September 14.

Mills said NATO's Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller will make this clear when she arrives in Yerevan on Monday for talks with President Serzh Sargsyan and other Armenian leaders. Gottemoeller will reaffirm the U.S.-led alliance's readiness to provide Armenian peacekeepers with more

"support, assistance and training they need to carry out their work," he told reporters.

Over 120 Armenian soldiers are deployed in Afghanistan and 35 others in Kosovo at present, highlighting Armenia's increase cooperation with NATO.

"We greatly appreciate Armenia's participation in international peacekeeping operations and NATO-led and other multinational exercises," U.S. President Donald Trump said in a September letter to his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan.

Mills likewise said that Armenians

should be "very proud" of their soldiers serving in Afghanistan. He said they are helping NATO forces boost peace and security in the war-torn country and prevent it from becoming a "safe haven for terrorists."

The soldiers serving there are part of the Armenian army's peacekeeping brigade that has received considerable assistance from the U.S. and other NATO militaries. As recently as on October 31, senior Armenian and U.S. military officials inaugurated the brigade's newly renovated training center near Yerevan.

Armenia has pledged to join more multinational peacekeeping missions abroad with specialized medical and demining units in the near future. They will undergo U.S. training before such deployment.

In October 2016, Mills and Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan inaugurated a new paramedic school of the Armenian armed forces. U.S. military instructors trained the first group of Armenian teaching personnel for the school in August 2015.

Mills said in July this year that Armenia's military and political alliance with Russia does not prevent it from forging closer security ties with the U.S.

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Hakobyan also told journalists that businesspeople from Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus have already expressed readiness to invest in the Meghri zone. And a large delegation of Iranian government officials and entrepreneurs will arrive in the provincial capital Kapan on Wednesday, he added.

A separate statement released by Karapetyan's press office said that the business zone will be expanded by 70 hectares in the next few years.

The Armenian premier discussed the upcoming launch of the zone with Iranian officials during an official visit to Tehran in October. He called on Iranian firms to set up branches there.

Economic issues were also high on the agenda of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's November 28 trip to Yerevan. Zarif arrived with a large group of Iranian businessmen who held a one-day conference with fellow entrepreneurs from



Armenia.

"There are quite good opportunities for expanding economic relations between the two countries," Zarif said after talks with his Armenian counterpart Edward Nalbandian.

According to official Armenian statistics, Armenian-Iranian trade stood at a relatively modest \$211 million in the first ten months of this year. Iran accounted for less than 5 percent of Armenia's overall foreign trade.

Serzh Sargsyan still vague on political future



President Serzh Sargsyan has again declined to clarify what he is planning to do after serving out his second and final term in April.

In an interview with the Armenia TV channel aired late on Thursday, Sargsyan also praised Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan and said the latter's desire to retain his post next year is "very good" and "healthy."

Sargsyan said that "the time has not yet come" for him to announce whether he will become prime minister or take up another state post after his decade-long presidency. "When it comes I will declare," he went on. "There are different factors [at play,] ranging personal to oth-

er factors. I think that at the end of the day we, the Republican Party (HHK), have a right to decide, together with our coalition partner, who can do a better job where."

Asked whether he will stay in politics in any case, the president replied: "We'll see, we'll see."

Immediately after the end of his second term, Armenia will switch to a parliamentary system of government, meaning that most of the sweeping powers currently enjoyed by the head of state will be given to the prime minister. Karapetyan has repeatedly indicated his desire to stay on as prime minister come April.

"As for Karen Karapetyan's desire, it's a very good, healthy, logical desire," Sargsyan said in this regard. "And generally speaking, I believe that Karen Karapetyan, is very acceptable and useful to us as a prime minister and as a person. I mean to me personally and to the party."

Sargsyan noted that Karapetyan's cabinet has pledged to ensure that the Armenian economy grows by roughly 5 percent annually in the coming years. "That is not a bad indicator," he said, adding that the results of such growth would be "visible and tangible."

Karapetyan vowed to improve the socioeconomic situation in the country through major reforms and a fight against corruption when Sargsyan named him prime minister in September 2016. The ruling HHK's governing board headed by the Armenia president gave a largely positive assessment of his track record a year later.

Deal with EU to strengthen Armenia, says French Envoy

Armenia's policy of seeking a "privileged" relationship with the European Union while remaining part of a Russian-led bloc will strengthen its positions in the region and make it more attractive to investors, France's ambassador in Yerevan said on December 12.

Jonathan Lacote referred to the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Armenia that was signed in Brussels on November 24.

"The key thing about this agreement is that while being a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) Armenia can also have privileged relations with the EU," he told a news conference.

"I think that thanks to this agreement Armenia can become a very important actor in the region," said Lacote. "This is what I realized especially after meeting with French businesspeople in Armenia. Things will get easier for them because Armenia will move closer to European norms with [CEPA-related] reforms initiated by it."

French companies doing business in Armenia, the diplomat went on, are first and foremost interested in tariff-free access to markets in Russia and other ex-Soviet states making up the EEU. "And if Armenia can offer a secure business environment it will



certainly take on the role of a bridge," he said. "In our view, membership in the two systems strengthens Armenia."

The French investors include the liquor giant Pernod Ricard, which bought Armenia's largest brandy company about two decades ago. More than 80 percent of its Armenian subsidiary's output is exported to Russia.

The CEPA does not provide for a free-trade regime between the EU and Armenia in view of the latter's membership in the Russian-led trade bloc. Instead, it says, the two sides will seek to ease non-tariff barriers to mutual commerce such as technical regulations and licensing and labelling requirements.

Citing "common values" shared by the two sides, the 350-page accord commits the Armenian government to implementing political reforms and "approximating" national economic laws and regulations to those of the EU. Yerevan will regularly report to Brussels on "the progress made with regard to approximation" specified by several annexes to the agreement. This "regulatory harmonization" will cover business regulation, agriculture, transport, environment, consumer protection and even energy.

Lacote stressed the significance of Yerevan's reform commitments undertaken as part of the CEPA.

Turkey says committed to Armenia protocols, links ratification to Karabakh settlement

Turkey has said it is still committed to the protocols signed with Armenia in 2009, which have not yet been ratified by either side, “despite Yerevan’s negative stance” in proceeding with the normalization of bilateral ties and the establishment of diplomatic relations.

“Despite Armenia’s negative stance on the Protocols, Turkey is committed to the primary clauses of the Protocols. These Protocols are still on the agenda of the Turkish Grand National Assembly’s Foreign Affairs Commission. For their ratification it is essential that a favorable political atmosphere and peace in the South Caucasus is secured,” read a written statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Dec. 14.

The statement came after Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said Turkey is responsible for the delay in the ratification of the protocols signed between Turkey and Armenia on Oct. 10, 2009, vowing that the Armenian government would annul the said protocols.

“These claims do not reflect the truth and aim to mislead world public opinion,” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in response, suggesting that Ankara



had made efforts to normalize relations with Armenia “on several levels” after Armenia proclaimed its independence in 1991.

“Turkey’s primary target pertaining to the Protocols process is to realize the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia so comprehensive peace and stability in the South Caucasus is provided,” read the statement.

“In this vein, it is necessary that progress is achieved in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, based on

Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and in light of the relevant resolutions of the U.N. Security Council,” it added.

The Foreign Ministry statement also responded to Nalbandian’s remarks on the Armenian Genocide.

“Mr. Nalbandian’s claims on genocide in his speech do not reflect the truth either. As ascertained by the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, the 1915 events are a matter of legitimate debate within the framework of freedom of expression,” it said.

Israeli Party to submit bill recognizing the Armenian Genocide

Leader of the Israeli Yesh Atid party calls for recognition of Armenian genocide, The Times of Israel reports.

Lapid said his party would lodge a bill

in the Knesset recognizing the Armenian genocide — a step Israel has traditionally refrained from taking over fears of angering Turkey, with which Israel re-established ties

in 2016.

The Yesh Atid leader also called for “burying the bad idea” to build a gas pipeline to Turkey and for Israel to “upgrade its support for the creation of an independent Kurdish state” and to “assist the Kurds together with the United States and with countries in the region.”

His comments came after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday called Israel a “terrorist state” that “kills children.”

“Erdogan crossed the line,” said Lapid.”

“Someone who denies the murder of hundreds of thousands of children in the Armenian genocide won’t lecture us. Someone who cooperated with Iran and Hezbollah in Syria, in a war which has left half a million dead, won’t lecture us,” added Lapid.



UN projects 5.8 percent GDP growth in Armenia in 2017



The UN projects a 5.8 percent GDP growth in Armenia in 2017. In its World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report the UN predicts 3.8 and 3.6 percent growth in Armenia in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

According to the report, Armenia has reported vibrant economic activity indicators. The UN says “recovery of remittances from the Russian Federation is contributing to the

acceleration of economic activity in Central Asia and the Caucasus.”

“Improved terms of trade, a more supportive external environment and less volatile macroeconomic conditions, including tapering inflation and stabilized exchange rates, have created a more favourable environment for the region’s economies,” the report reads.

According to the UN, “In Armenia, the economy has bounced back strongly, amid

rapid industrial growth and higher copper prices.”

According to the report, 2017 global economic growth had reached three per cent – its highest since 2011 – as crisis-related fragilities and the adverse effects of other recent shocks have subsided.

The improvement is widespread. Roughly two-thirds of the world’s countries have experienced stronger growth in 2017 than in the previous year, and movement is expected to remain steady at three per cent in 2018 and 2019.

Despite the improved short-term outlook, the global economy continues to face longer-term challenges, including trade policy changes and rising geopolitical tensions.

The report highlighted that the improved macroeconomic situation has opened a door for reorienting policies, including to increase economic diversification; reduce inequality; support long-term investment; and tackle institutional deficiencies. It noted that addressing these challenges can generate stronger investment and productivity, higher job creation and more sustainable medium-term economic growth.

New solar plant launched in Armenia’s Armavir

Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan attended the opening of Green Energy 1 MW solar power plant (SPP) in Shenik community in Armenia’s Armavir province, Government’s Press Service informs.

The station has been completely built by local organizations, such as Baghramyan-shin, ACBA Leasing, and Stigen. The construction was carried out during 3.5 months this year to a total cost of USD750-800 thousand.

Seventy jobs were provided during the construction, staff was hired from neighboring communities and villages. The station consists of 3124 polycrystalline solar panels and 37 solar inverters available from the world’s leading specialized companies. The SPP is expected to supply 1600 MW/h of electricity per year. Welcoming the project, the Head of Government said solar energy has great potential for development in Armenia, and the increased number of solar power plants testifies to serious progress in the field.

The Premier next went to see the intensive orchard established by Spayka



in Shenik community of Armavir Marz. Karen Karapetyan got acquainted with the Company’s ongoing investment program and development prospects. The Prime Minister was told that a drip irrigation system is used on about 30 hectares of cherry plantations and 22 hectares of apricot orchards. The system is quite efficient and will reduce the cost of irrigation by about 8-10 times.

Intensive technology was said to provide

more opportunities for the use of farm machinery, which in turn reduces the amount manual work. The orchard will be fully covered by hail-proof nets.

As the Prime Minister noted, the establishment of intensive orchards is an important vector of modernization and development of agriculture in Armenia, and the Government is consistent in promoting this process through targeted State support programs.

Armenia placed 75th in Good Country Index



Armenia is ranked 75th among 163 countries in the Good Country Index,

which ranks countries across 35 indicators grouped under seven main headings,

including science and technology, planet and climate, and prosperity and equality.

The results are then divided by gross domestic product to create a more level playing field.

Data comes from international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Health Organization.

Armenia's neighbor Georgia is placed 57th, Turkey and Azerbaijan are ranked 38th and 89th respectively. Iran is placed 131st.

Armenia's partners in the Eurasian Economic Union are ranked as follows: Russia – 65th, Belarus – 78th, Kazakhstan – 108th and Kyrgyzstan – 90th.

The index is the work of Simon Anholt, a policy adviser who has worked with governments across the world for the last 25 years.

Armenia says Ankara not ready to normalize relations with Yerevan

The December 14th comments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey regarding the Armenian-Turkish relations is yet another flagrant example of distortion of the letter and spirit of the Zürich Protocols of 2009, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

“Our position on President Sargsyan’s initiative to normalize relations with Turkey was expressed in the well-known approach to normalize relations without preconditions. Based on this common understanding with the Turkish side we launched the negotiation process and reached agreements,”

The comments come after the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement, stating its commitment to the Armenian-Turkish protocols, but went on to cite prerequisites for their ratification.

“It is well known that right after the signing of the Protocols Ankara backtracked from the agreements. Turkey not only has rejected to ratify those Protocols, but has returned to the same language of preconditions that it had used before the launch of the process. The last statement of the Turkish MFA goes in the same direction,” the Armenian Foreign Ministry said.

“Ankara doesn’t shy away to voice once again its preconditions, linking the Armenian-Turkish relations to the the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement in favor of Azerbaijan, at the same time making redundant reference to the UN Security

Council resolutions, which have nothing to do with the negotiation process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. It is well known, that there is no single word on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or any precondition in the Protocols. By returning once again to the language of preconditions following the signing of Protocols, Turkey has opposed to the international community, which has always supported the normalization of the Armenian Turkish relations without preconditions and continues to do so now,” it added.

“The Turkish side refused to ratify the Protocols and intentionally moved the whole process to the stalemate. This was the very reason that compelled Armenia to suspend the ratification procedure, while staying in the normalization process, and this was duly acknowledged and welcomed by the leaders of different countries. It is obvious that even today, years after signing of the Protocols, Ankara is not ready yet to normalize the Armenian-Turkish relations,” the statement reads. “It does not come as a surprise that the Turkish authorities stick to stereotyped approaches and are trying to voice fabricated allegations. For more than a century the leadership of that country denies the Armenian Genocide. Is it easier to take the sin for the century-old great crime committed in the Ottoman Empire by continuously denying it, instead of recognizing it and thus rendering an important service to its own people, to the future of the region and to the prevention of

future genocides?” the Ministry noted.

“Ankara goes the opposite direction. The statement of the MFA of Turkey claims that allegedly the efforts to recognize the Armenian Genocide are morally and legally incorrect and ill-intentioned. It turns out that Turkey preaches morality to France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Uruguay, Belgium, Greece, Cyprus and to dozens of other countries, which have recognized the Armenian Genocide,” it added.

The MFA said that “it is ironic that Turkey, one of the most notorious countries of the world in restricting freedom of expression, tries to justify the genocide denialism on the grounds of freedom of expression.”

“It has always been clear for different world capitals both after the signing of the Protocols and today that the ball is on the Turkish court, that Armenia has done everything possible for the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations. Ankara’s inability to accept this and other realities consolidates the sense throughout the world that Turkey and the international community speak in different languages,” the Ministry said.

“We would like to reiterate that this is the very reason why the President of Armenia declared at the UN General Assembly that since the Protocols continuously lack any positive progress towards their implementation, in the spring of 2018 Armenia will declare them null and void,” the statement concludes.

Cyprus President hosts event dedicated to Armenian community

President Nicos Anastasiades has expressed the state's pride for the contribution of the Armenian community in the political, social, and economic life of the island, Cyprus Mail reported.

Anastasiades, who was addressing an event in honour of the Armenians of Cyprus, recalled that both peoples have fallen victim historically to the same aggressor, noting that they did not give up but fought and are continuing to fight for the great principle of justice in order to prevail on the international scene.

"This is why Cyprus was one of the first European countries to recognise the Armenian genocide and we have jointly condemned the perpetrators of this crime," he said.

Referring to the Armenian community in Cyprus, he said that "as a state, we will always show off proudly the fact that your small community manages with its vigour to be present in all aspects of our country's life – political, social and economic."

Anastasiades also spoke of his vision for a free and reunified Cyprus, which will be inhabited in peace and prosperity by all Cypriot citizens: Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Armenians, Maronites and Latins.

"We aim to put an end to the occupation and we insist on working towards a just, viable and functional solution, which will not allow for a dependence on any third country," he stressed.

To that extent, he referred to the efforts over the summer in the Swiss resort of Crans-Montana to reach a solution to the Cyprus problem.

"It is true that the outcome disappointed us but there was no other alternative," he pointed out.

According to Anastasiades, Turkey's persistence in retaining anachronistic treaty of guarantee, intervention rights and a presence of Turkish troops did not allow for anything other than a rejection of these positions.

He said that he has conveyed a message to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres that he is ready to return to the negotiating table on the internal aspects of the problem.

On the international aspect, he said he has "made it clear to the UN SG, our European partners and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council that a new conference on Cyprus should be well prepared so that it does not lead to disappointment.

"What we seek is mutual respect and political will from both our Turkish Cypriot compatriots and Ankara, because human rights and security are not negotiable," he stressed.

The Armenian Representative Mr. Mahdessian, on behalf of the Armenian Community of Cyprus, expressed words of gratitude to the government of Cyprus, for catering for



all the needs of the community, thus strengthening and safeguarding the preservation of the rich Armenian culture, language and religious identity.

His Holiness Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia also addressed the event and decorated the President of the Re-

public of Cyprus with the "Prince of Cilicia" medal.

Afterwards a cultural programme took place, with the participation of both Sourp Asdvadzadzin Cathedral choirs, as well as the Hamazkayin "Sipan" and the "Nanor" dance groups, followed by a reception.

Australian Greens recognize the Republic of Artsakh



Cross-bench political power, The Australian Greens have added the recognition of the right to self-determination of the Armenians of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) to their party policy platform, following meetings between their candidate in the upcoming Bennelong by-election, Justin Alick and representatives of the Armenian National Committee of Australia (ANC-AU).

The Australian Greens, who also reiterated their party's recognition of the Armenian Genocide, have become one of the first non-Armenian political parties in the world to adopt what ANC-AU called a "principled position" on the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

The Australian Greens' party position also includes a call "on the Commonwealth Government to officially recognize the independence of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh [Artsakh] and strengthen Australia's relationship with Nagorno-Karabakh and its citizens."

ANC-AU Managing Director, Vache Kahramanian said: "We sincerely thank the The Australian Greens hierarchy

and their Bennelong by-election candidate Justin Alick for proving their belief in the principles of self-determination by formally recognizing the Republic of Artsakh."

"Nagorno Karabakh has been part of the greater Armenian motherland for millennia, and the continued threat of the war-mongering, corrupt dictatorship governing Azerbaijan means the world must take notice and speak out for the human right to self-determination of the Armenian citizens of the region, who have voted overwhelmingly in a referendum declaring independence."

Kahramanian added: "The Australian Greens have taken notice and they have spoken out, and for this, we are grateful."

The Republic of Artsakh's Permanent Representative in Australia, Kaylar Michaelian added praise on behalf of the government he represents.

"This is a truly historic recognition," said Michaelian. "The people of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) have lived under constant security threat for 26 years, however their resilience during that time has allowed them to build a democratic nation, which only waits for the world to recognize it and its citizens in order to thrive."

"On behalf of the government of the Republic of Artsakh and the people of Artsakh, I thank The Australian Greens for their commitment to human rights," Michaelian added.

In the current Federal Parliament, The Australian Greens are represented by nine Senators in the Upper House and one Member of Parliament in the House of Representatives.

TV Bridge with Armenian peacekeepers in Afghanistan



On December 14, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia hosted the traditional TV Bridge for the Armenian peacekeepers participating in the peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan and their families, which was organized within the framework of the 11th "NATO Week" in Armenia launched on December 13.

In his welcoming speech, Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Ashot Hovakimyan highlighted the importance of participation and contribution of the Armenian peacekeepers in the establishment of international peace and security, and thanked the Armenian peacekeepers and their families for their dedication.

Deputy Minister Hovakimyan noted that the participation of Armenian peacekeepers in these missions contributes to the improvement of Armenia's international standing, as well as to the strengthening of Armenia's security.

Colonel Vaghinak Sargsyan, Commander of the peacekeeping brigade of the Armed Forces of Armenia, welcomed and thanked the Armenian peacekeepers participating in operations for the establishment of peace in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of their role in ensuring international peace and security. Ambassadors of Germany, United States and United Kingdom in Armenia sent their greetings and best wishes.

Armenian peacekeepers in Afghanistan also sent their greetings and words of gratitude. During the TV Bridge, the families of the peacekeepers were provided with the opportunity to communicate in a relaxed atmosphere with their relatives in service.

Armenian Bar Association's Judges' Night Draws Encore Ovation



Judge Huey Cotton (third from left) and Judge Holly Fujie (fourth from right) flanked by Armenian Bar Board Members.

On November 16, 2017, members and friends of the Armenian Bar Association gathered at the landmark Glen Arden Club in Glendale, California to celebrate and honor the best of California's judiciary during the Annual Judges' Night Dinner. Nearly 50 judges of the state and federal court systems turned out to rejoice as three prominent jurists of the Los Angeles Superior Court were honored—Judges Victor Chavez, Holly Fujie and Huey Cotton.

Board Member Armen K. Hovannisian distilled the essence of the evening. "The Annual Judges' Night has fast become the Association's signature celebration, drawing hundreds of attendees from all walks of the legal profession in the most convivial and interactive of atmospheres. The Association honors those jurists who have distinguished themselves beyond the laudable lines of high intellect, efficiency and consistency. The Armenian Bar singles out for distinction those who have opened broadly the public's access to justice, advanced the precepts of the rule of law, incorporated compassion into the fabric of their characters, and guided others in profession and in life."

"We are fortunate to have so many distinguished members of the California judiciary join us this evening. We thank them for their devoted public service," said Mistress of Ceremonies, Vanna Kitsinian, member of the Executive Board of Governors of the Armenian Bar Association.

The evening began with a high-octane reception where guests networked and socialized before advancing into the grand ballroom for dinner and presentation of the awards. There, solo artist Toukman Khachatourian began the program with a stirring rendition of the national anthems of the United States of America and Armenia. Next, Archbishop Moushegh Mardirossian, Prelate of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, delivered an inspiring invocation and asked for the Lord's blessings to confer on the judges the strength and wisdom to carry on their good work. The Archbishop's invocation was followed by a dinner of delicious Armenian cuisine.

Chairman of the Board, Saro Kerkonian, assumed the podium amidst great fanfare and thanked the honorary guests and their fellow judges for their outstanding contributions in furtherance of the independence of the judicial branch of government. Mr.

Kerkonian paid eloquent homage to the judges' professional examples of instilling in the public the trust that California's courts are bastions where the rule of law reigns supreme. With flags of country, state and organization adorning the stage in the background, he offered reflections into the work of the Association as it relates to the United States, Armenia, the Artsakh Republic and the State of California.

Board member and Association Treasurer Gerard Kassabian introduced the first honoree, Judge Victor Chavez. Mr. Kassabian greeted the guests with a "hello and welcome" in ten different languages and spoke of the 30-year career of Judge Chavez on the bench. In a moving tribute, Mr. Kassabian endearingly Armenianized Judge Chavez's name by adding an "ian" to the end and presented him with a beautiful photograph of the honoree, daughter California Appellate Justice Victoria Chavez and Governor George Deukmejian, on the occasion of Judge Chavez's swearing-in to the bench by his daughter. Judge Chavez fondly recalled as a child how his mother read to him the famed book by Franz Werfel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, recalling the heroic self-defense of the Armenians during the Armenian Genocide. He explained how the book left a lasting impression on his life.

The next honoree was former California State Bar President, Judge Holly Fujie. Judge Fujie was introduced by Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney Amy Ashvanyan. Ms. Ashvanyan shared with the audience the tremendous career Judge Fujie has had and the countless bar activities she has initiated and led. Judge Fujie congratulated the Armenian Bar Association on its work in the field of mentorship and judicial evaluations. She urged collaboration between the Armenian Bar and the California State Bar with respect to their respective mentorship programs.

The third honoree of the evening was Supervising Judge of the Los Angeles Superior Court, Northwest District, Judge Huey Cotton. He was introduced by noted criminal defense attorney and member of the Armenian Bar's Judicial Evaluations Committee, Alexandra Kazarian. Ms. Kazarian praised the evening's final honoree for his leadership on the bench, his activism and his compassion for litigants and young and learning lawyers. Judge Cotton passionately told inspiring stories of Armenians in his life and courtroom.

Judges Chavez, Fujie and Cotton were each presented with a beautiful work of classical art prepared by renowned artist Seron Yeretsian, each with an original inscription of praise and honor. The program concluded with a moving benediction by Reverend Father Vazken Movsesian of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Following the official program, many stayed on and maintained the high-energy levels that lasted throughout the night. Valerie Dean, co-chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association, called the evening "One of the best, diverse, Judges' Nights I have ever been to."

"We are thrilled we could once again showcase the great talent, intellect and diversity that is the strength of the California Judicial System at our annual Judges' Night," said the Association's Judicial Evaluations Committee Co-Chair Lucy Varpetian. "We look forward to continuing this tradition for years to come," said Garo Ghazarian, organizing committee chair and former two-term chairman of the Armenian Bar Association.

Armenian Bar Association Appoints Gayane Khechoomian as Director of Operations

LOS ANGELES, CA – With great upside implications, the Armenian Bar Association has announced the appointment of Los Angeles-based-attorney Gayane Khechoomian as its new Director of Operations. Gayane will occupy and build out the ground floor of the Association's day-to-day administrative functions, lending support and spirit to the various standing committees in order to facilitate organizational activities and community events.

Chairman of the Board, Saro Kerkonian, offered the following observation about the recent appointment: "Gayane comes to us fully-conscious of the critical issues facing our community, fully-committed to enhancing the relationships among our members and drawing in new ones, fully-devoted to endowing the Association's future with passion and purpose, and fully-equipped with the tools to make all of that happen."

The Director of Operations will tap into the multiple, positive platforms of the Armenian Bar Association, working closely with the Board of Governors and the nearly-dozen committees led by the nationwide membership's attorneys and students. Each and every year for nearly 30 years, the organization has hosted a continuing series of timely and interesting programs as part of its advocacy of issues which stand at the crux of the Armenian cause.

Importantly, the Association fosters the exchange of ideas and communications among attorneys, judges and law students in different stages of their careers, in different parts of the world, including the



Diaspora and the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh.

Gayane will assume the directorial role while continuing to serve as a volunteer coach in the Armenian Bar Association's Mock Trial Program, which partners with Armenian secondary schools in the Los Angeles County area in a broad inter-scholastic moot court competition under the auspices of the Constitutional Rights Foundation. She has held the role of president of her alma mater's Armenian Law Students Association and has chaired numerous non-profit organizations during her law school and undergraduate studies.

"I am deeply honored for the opportunity to work with the Armenian legal community and look forward to serve the Armenian Bar Association in fulfilling our mission," remarked Gayane, who graduated from Loyola Law School in 2013 with a concentration in international law.

Before joining the Armenian Bar Association, Gayane clerked at the United Nations criminal tribunal prosecuting genocide and crimes against humanity in Cambodia and worked on an international case filed in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. She has a background in civil litigation and experience working with start-ups and small businesses. Prior to her legal career, Gayane worked as editor of Yerevan Magazine, and founded the student-run publication, Armenian Chronicles, based out of UCLA, where she also obtained her bachelor's degree in History and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures.

FSI: It takes more than 44 weeks to learn Armenian

The Foreign Service Institute (FSI), the United States federal government's primary training institution for employees of the U.S. foreign affairs community, has created a list to show the approximate time needed to learn a specific language as an English speaker.

According to the study, it takes about 44 weeks or 1,100 hours to learn Armenia. The Arabic, Japanese, Cantonese (Chinese), Mandarin (Chinese) and Korean are the most difficult languages to learn.

"Armenian is an excellent language to begin to learn if you have an interest in languages themselves. This might sound as though it could apply to any language, but Armenian has some very interesting singularities within the language itself. For example, in the Armenian language, the stress will always fall on the last syllable of the sentence, unless the last syllable is a certain letter, in which case it shifts back to being the second-last," FSI says.

"It is fascinating to look at it in greater depth as a scholar of languages or simply to understand a language that you probably will not have encountered before. The Armenian language is also spoken in many countries around the world by emigrants of Armenia," the report reads.

The Foreign Service Institute reminds that "the Armenian language is the official language of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, although the latter is not inter-



nationally recognized. It has 6.7 million speakers throughout the world with Cyprus, Poland and Romania also recognizing Armenian as one of their minority languages.

"As a pluricentric language (having more than one standardized form: in this case, Eastern and Western) Armenian is also special in this way. Essentially, this is a very fascinating language in terms of origin, influence, and phonetic development," FSI said.

ALC highlights link between property and Armenian Genocide



Kate Nahapetian, Executive Director of the Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC), spoke on a December 6th panel on the Protection of Sacred Sites and Property Rights at the Archon International Conference on Religious Freedom in Washington, DC organized by the Order of St. Andrew, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The overarching theme of this year's discussions was, "Persecution of Christians in the Holy Lands and the Middle East: Consequences and Solutions." Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou of Tufts University Fletcher School for Law & Diplomacy and a former Commissioner with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom opened the conversation by highlighting the purpose of the frequent destruction of sacred sites, which "are designed to humiliate to remind [religious minorities] that they are second class citizens."

In her opening remarks, Nahapetian outlined the historic weight of the issue, telling the audience that, "Property issues were integral to realizing the [Armenian] Genocide because if you dispossess the community, you ensure that they are impoverished and that they cannot resist the persecution. If you take away their religious sites, you ensure that they will not return."

Other panelists, including Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Ecumenical Director and Diocesan Legate of Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

(Eastern), touched on the confiscation of church properties in Turkey pointing out that, "The Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem has 950 pieces of property in Constantinople, Smyrna and some parts of Asia Minor. [They] have been trying to get in touch with the Turkish authorities for the last ten years." According to the Archbishop, to this day not a single piece has been given back.

In a similar vein, Nahapetian further noted that, "Of the over 2000 Armenian churches that existed before the Armenian Genocide, less than 50 of them are operational today in Turkey. Only three of those 50 are outside of Istanbul, and it's no coincidence that there are very few Armenians outside of Istanbul."

Nahapetian suggested several solutions to the issue, including creating third party arbitration for issues of religious minority property confiscation, as the court systems in offending countries like Turkey are frequently hostile to such claims and often mount numerous bureaucratic and judicial obstacles to pursuing them.

However, she also explained the frequent insufficiency of treaties in protecting religious minorities and their properties from politically motivated destruction and dispossession, reminding the audience that, "[Treaties protecting the Christian community] are not enough. Before the genocide there were treaties that protected the Christian community of the Ottoman Empire."

Instead, Nahapetian offered another possible solution, "to document the properties to make them toxic for third party use." She argued that even in the absence of proper legal remedies, which will inevitably take time to establish, "You can decrease the profit motive in using these properties by third parties who care...including corporations or other investors." If these properties came with significant political consequence down the road, investing in them, "repurposing" them, would become too expensive an endeavor for third parties to undertake, increasing the incentive to voluntarily return them to the expelled communities.

Nahapetian went on to introduce the ALC's long term project for doing just that, its Property Documentation Database, announced earlier this year, which catalogues stolen and confiscated properties in modern day Turkey.

Other panelists included Ambassador Patrick Theros, Representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the United States and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, founder of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. The panel was chaired by Dr. Anthony Limberakis Commander, Order of Saint Andrew, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Members of Congress from both the Senate and House Foreign Relations Committee, academics from across the country, and religious leaders and human rights advocates from the Greek, Armenian, Syriac and Coptic communities addressed other panels during the three day conference from December 4-6, 2017.

The Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC) fights to redress human rights violations emanating from the Armenian Genocide that continue to this day and undermine stability in a region that has for far too long been marred by policies founded on genocide, not human rights and justice. ALC promotes scholarship on the legal avenues for addressing the challenges emanating from the Armenian Genocide, in addition to pursuing cases in national and international courts, while promoting the protection of Armenian cultural heritage through the return of stolen properties and artifacts.

**On December 27, the world acclaimed pianist
Evgeny Kissin will have a piano recital in Al. Spendiarian
National Academic Theater Opera and Ballet with
the following programme:**



**Beethoven. Sonata # 29,
“Hammerklavier”**

**Rachmaninoff. Preludes opus 23 ##
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, opus 32 ## 10, 12, 13.**

Evgeny Kissin was born in Moscow in 1971 to a Russian Jewish family. At six years old, he entered a special school for gifted children, the Moscow Gnesin School of Music, where he was a student of Anna Pavlovna Kantor, who has remained his only teacher. At the age of ten, he made his concerto debut playing Mozart's Piano Concerto K. 466 and gave his first solo recital in Moscow one year later. He came to international attention in March 1984 when, at the age of twelve, he performed Chopin's Piano Concertos 1 and 2 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with the Moscow State Philharmonic under Dmitri Kitaenko (recorded live by Melodia). In 1987 he made his West European debut at the Berlin Festival. In 1988 he toured Europe with the Moscow Virtuosi and Vladimir Spivakov and also made his London debut with the London Symphony Orchestra under Valery Gergiev. In December of the same year he performed with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic in a New Year's concert which was broadcast internationally, recorded by Deutsche Grammophon. In 1990 Kissin made his first appearance at the BBC Promenade Con-

certs in London and that same year made his North American debut, performing both Chopin piano concertos with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta. The following week he opened Carnegie Hall's Centennial season with a spectacular debut recital, which was recorded live by BMG Classics. Musical awards and tributes from around the world have been showered upon Kissin. In 1987 he received the Crystal Prize of the Osaka Symphony Hall for the best performance of the year 1986. In 1991 he received the Musician of the Year Prize from the Chigiana Academy of Music in Siena, Italy. He was special guest at the 1992 Grammy Awards Ceremony and became Musical America's youngest Instrumentalist of the Year in 1995. In 1997 received the prestigious Triumph Award for his outstanding contribution to Russia's culture. He was the first pianist to be invited to give a recital at the BBC Proms (1997), and, in the 2000 season, was the first concerto soloist ever to be invited to play in the Proms opening concert.

In May 2001 Kissin was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Music by the Manhattan School of Music. In December 2003 in Moscow, he received the Shostakovich Award, one of Russia's highest musical honors. In June 2005, he was awarded an Honorary Membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London. He was recently awarded the 2005

Herbert von Karajan Music Prize.

Mr. Kissin's recordings have also received numerous awards and accolades, having contributed significantly to the library of masterpieces recorded by the world's greatest performers. Past awards have included the Edison Klassiek in The Netherlands, 2 Grammy awards, and the Diapason d'Or and the Grand Prix of La Nouvelle Academie du Disque in France.

“When we speak of virtuosity, we generally mean technical ability. It takes a different kind of virtuosity to play four musical pieces and declaim 13 poems in Yiddish ... entirely from memory, all with equal mastery. I wish that Kissin were creating a new world of possibilities for all star performers, but I'm not sure anyone else has the virtuosity to step this far outside the box with such honesty and dignity and power.”

The Washington Post

“Without question he is a phenomenal pianist, a deeply intuitive and sensitive musician”

The New York Times

In 2017 within the framework of Yerevan Perspectives International Music Festival the world famous musicians gave concerts in Yerevan

Pinchas Zukerman & Amanda Forsyth (with the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra)

Arcadi Volodos recital

Vladimir Fedoseev & P.I. Tchaikovsky Russian Big Symphony Orchestra (soloist Diana Adamyany, violin)

Renée Fleming recital (with Al. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre Orchestra), conductor Constantine Orbelian

Emerson String Quartet

Evgeny Kissin recital

Yerevan Perspectives International Music Festival also organized master classes, events in Byurakan Art Academy – the recent one was the jubilee evening for Medea Abrahamyan and the book launch about her.

Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

The next 2.5 years is a highly productive period. For those who were happy with life goals of 2016, the following two years brings greater responsibility. Long term goals and desire for achievement

in your outer life may press you to temporarily sacrifice personal life and leisure. It is likely you are either adding responsibilities or departing an old lifestyle to begin a fresh adventure.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

The new Saturn cycle calls upon you to study your beliefs for flaws. If they are sound, then commit yourself to establish practical ways in which to manifest them. The arena may be legal, religious, philosophical or educational. You must apply what you have learned in the

secular world. You must “walk your talk”. The world requires that you expand your usual territory to include a larger perspective.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Saturn in Capricorn will require you to focus on the consequences, responsibilities and liabilities of sharing resources with others. There may be work to do related to managing your own finances or those of someone else. This is a good

period to tackle internal roadblocks that interfere with your ability to achieve genuine intimacy. Resources may be reduced for a time.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

The new Saturn cycle rivets attention on the quality of your important relationships. It is time to begin realistically considering your responsibilities in this area and clarify your commitment. Existing relationships will be evaluated and new

purposes carved. On the other hand, it may be time to release those persons who are wasting your precious time and energy.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

This cycle of Saturn will be a period of apprenticeship. Now is the time to perfect your broad index of experience and knowledge, to practice until the accumulated bits of wisdom become second nature and highly efficient. The subsequent cycle will yield the improvement

in status resulting from work now. Give thorough attention to the needs of your physical body from now through March 2020. Neglect could be costly.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

This is the time for intentional application of your creative energy and to take steps toward manifesting your dreams of fulfillment. Something deep inside you, no more than 3 years in your consciousness, wants to be expressed. Don't anticipate

grandiose results on this cycle, but there should be reasonably positive responses from the world if you are on the right track.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

In terms of worldly influence, you are at the lowest point in the Saturn cycle. It is time now to lay the foundations for the next 28 years and it begins with inner work. We can produce little in the outer

world until we develop a sense of a stable internal sanctuary. Define what you must have to feel solidly secure and initiate the steps that will produce it. Family and property concerns may dominate for a time.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

This is the beginning of a period for you to define and clarify your level of knowledge. You may be called upon to adopt a project requiring close concentration and sharpened communication skills. Learning to speak or write vol-

umes in a few chosen words will become important as this cycle progresses. Work toward efficiency and streamlining all communication methods over these two years.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

This Saturn cycle asks you to more clearly define your values. You may have fewer resources available now, whether that refers to money, energy or

time. Discrimination will be necessary to maximize efficiency. You are likely to voluntarily forego expenditures on immediate pleasures for longer range objectives. People commonly purchase a home or make important investments on this cycle.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

It is time to redefine yourself. The old way was good for many years but it has outlived its purpose and you must now look at yourself more deeply. What are the potentials not yet developed? What

is the best way to contribute your gifts to a greater whole? Focus your attention on personal identity and tighten up all life agendas to match who you wish to become



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

The new Saturn cycle asks that you be directed inward and you may choose to withdraw from the world (if not physically, then mentally). Attempts to capital-

ize on the social and political power of the last few years will fail to make you happy. You may be drawn to work with those who are deprived or mistreated. Now is a time for spiritual refurbishing and R&R before the next 28 year cycle begins in 2.5 years.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Saturn's new cycle calls you to take responsibility for your niche in life and clarify the role you wish to play in society. You have much knowledge coupled with many social and communications skills and talents. It is time to consider

extending these gifts beyond the personal and offer them in service to a larger group. You will experience the outcome of many years' work during the next three years.

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Paris Office: 34 Avenue des Champs Elysees
Phone: 011 33 1 43 59 66 72
Yerevan Address: 8, Khorenatsi St.

Saroyan's "Cave Dwellers" performed in Armenia

The talented mind of well-known American-Armenian writer and playwright William Saroyan is on display in the Goy Theater's staging of "The Cave Dwellers." With support from the U.S. Embassy in Armenia, the Theater is bringing to Armenian audiences, for the very first time, this fable during the holiday season.

"William Saroyan is the perfect example of a person who, inhabiting two worlds, American and Armenian, understood that we are all connected, regardless of where we come from," said U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills, Jr. "Saroyan's play underlines that a compassionate heart carries people even through dark times."

The play tells the allegorical story of several characters who are together in an abandoned theater building, which is facing imminent demolition. With its heartwarming moments of sentimentality amidst a bleak setting, the story reminds us of our common humanity.

"This performance is dedicated to the 110th birthday of William Saroyan, trum-



pet herald of love and kindness. The world is so much in need of love and kindness. In this harsh reality of the civilization the dwellers of the cave, a group of misfits in an abandoned theater to be demolished soon, are not embittered or desperate. These characters are full of life. They preach for love. And love re-

sponds to them: a baby is born. Young ones meet each other," said Arthur Sahakyan, Art Director of Goy Theater.

Performances will take place December 14th, 16th, and 19th; and the play will become a permanent part of the Goy Theater's repertoire. More performances will be announced in 2018.

AZAD

AZAD Pharma AG AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Switzerland

AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Durachweg 15
CH-8200 Schaffhausen
Phone No: +41 52 632 09 10
Fax: +41 52 632 09 11

AZAD Pharma AG

Bahnhofstrasse 9
CH-3125 Toffen
Phone No: +41 31 810 40 10
Fax: +41 31 810 40 11

Canada

AZAD Fine Chemicals Ltd.

1895 - 55th Avenue
Dorval, Qc H9P 1G9
Phone No: +1 514 636 19 99
Fax: +1 514 636 75 55

Atlit Inc.

16 Westminster Ave.,
Suite 306A
Montreal, Qc H4X 1Z1
Phone No: +1 514 369 25 91
Fax: +1 514 369 81 67

China

Hangzhou Representative Office of AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Room 801-087, Lixin Plaza,
#102 Moganshan Road
310051 -Hangzhou China

Phone +86-571-8761 5336
Mobile +86-153-5505-0903
Fax: +86-571- 8895 8963

Germany

AZAD Pharma GmbH

Fritz-Reichle-Ring 6a
DE-78315 Radolfzell
Phone No: +49 7732 939101510
Fax: +49 7732 9391016

Armenia

AZAD Pharmaceuticals LLC

Vanahovit 8, Proshian
Ashtarak Ave., Kotayk Marz
Phone No: +374 93 40 40 62
Fax: +374 93 40 34 40

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Editor-in-Chief of the Media Holding:
Gayaneh Arakelyan
Director of the Weekly:
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Chief Correspondent: **Gourgen Khazhakian**
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E-mail: contact@nt.am
URL: www.nt.am

Address in Armenia: 28 Isahakian Str., Yerevan, 0009, RA.
Tel.: (+374 60) 35-11-23
(+374 60) 35-11-22

Address in France: Masion De L' Armenie, Paris 17e - 95
Bld. Gouvion, France.
Tel.: (+33) 01 43 59 66 72

Address in USA: 1146 E. Lexington Dr., #112, Glendale,
CA, USA, 91206.
Tel.: (+1 818) 646 10 72

Հասցի՝ Բաժնեական 28, Երևան, ՀՀ, 0009