

## April 24 Declared Commemoration Day of Armenian Genocide in France



*France - French President Emmanuel Macron speaks during the Co-ordination Council of Armenian Organisations of France (CCAF) annual dinner in Paris, February 5, 2019.*

French President Emmanuel Macron has declared April 24 as a day for the commemoration in France of the 1915 genocide of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey.

Macron announced the move late on Tuesday at an annual dinner of the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations in France (CCAF). The Reuters news agency quoted him as saying that France was among the first nations to denounce “the murderous hunt of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire.”

“France is, first and foremost, a country that knows how to look history in the face,” he said, according to the France24 TV channel.

France officially recognized the World War One-era slaughter of some 1.5 million Armenians as genocide with a law passed by its parliament 2001. It is home to an estimated 500,000 ethnic Armenians, most of them descendants of survivors of the genocide. Macron spoke of his “admiration” for the French-Armenian community and visited the

Armenian genocide memorial in Paris when he ran for president in 2017. The CCAF, which is an umbrella structure uniting the leading French-Armenian organizations, endorsed his presidential candidacy.

Turkey strongly condemned Macron’s decision on February 6. According to the Associated Press, a spokesman for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Macron tried to “save the day” and make political gains in the face of “political problems in his own country.”

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## Armenian, Estonian FMs discuss opportunities to expand bilateral relations

Foreign minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan on February 8 met with Estonia's foreign minister Sven Mikser on the sidelines of his official visit in Tallinn, the Armenian MFA told Noyan Tapan

The two ministers exchanged views on the possibilities to expand and enrich the multisectoral partnership between the two countries and the agenda of the Armenian-Estonian relations. Both highlighted that the centuries-old friendship between the two peoples serves a firm base for taking practical steps aimed at completely utilizing the existing potential in the bilateral agenda.

Introducing his meetings held during the visit and their outcomes, the Armenian FM attached importance to the in-

clusion of the representatives of high technologies and e-governance in the delegation which enabled to hold practical discussions with the representatives of the leading Estonian companies of the field. The two FMs agreed that there is a great potential in the fields of high technologies, innovation and creative education, which will open new cooperation prospects by joint efforts.

Touching upon the Armenia-EU ties, FM Mnatsakanyan highlighted the importance of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) for the implementation process of ongoing reforms in Armenia and the promotion of the government's development agenda.

The officials also praised the cooperation of the two countries



in the international structures.

The meeting also touched upon urgent regional and international issues.

Zohrab Mnatsakanyan introduced the Estonian counterpart on Armenia's position and approaches on the exclusively

peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. He highlighted the importance of creating an atmosphere contributing to peace, emphasizing the necessity to refrain from steps that lead to escalation of the situation and aggressive rhetoric.

## Armenian, Azeri FMs may meet again

Armenia's Foreign Ministry on February 5 did not rule out the possibility of yet another meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers later this month.

The ministry spokeswoman, Anna Naghdalyan, said that Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan will participate in an annual security conference that will be held in Munich, Germany on February 16-18. "As far as we know, Azerbaijan's foreign minister [Elmar Mammadyarov] has also confirmed his participation [in the conference,]" she told a news briefing in Yerevan.

Commenting on the possibility of Mammadyarov and Mnatsakanyan meeting on the sidelines of the Munich forum, Naghdalyan said: "Whenever there is an agreement on a meeting between the two ministers, we announce it in a coordinated manner ... We have always adhered to that principle and we will not breach it if there is such an agreement."

Mnatsakanyan and Mammadyarov have met for four times in the last seven months. According to international mediators, at their most recent talks held in Paris on January 16 the ministers acknowledged the need for "taking concrete measures to prepare the populations for peace."

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashin-



yan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev have also held a series of talks in recent months. Their last meeting took place in Davos, Switzerland on January 22. It fueled more talk of major progress in long-running efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Pashinyan downplayed last week his "informal contacts" with Aliyev. He also stated that the Armenian side will not agree to territorial concessions Azerbaijan in return for mere peace in the region. "We can't even discuss the lands-for-peace formula," he said.

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry criticized those remarks, saying that "with-

drawal of Armenian from the occupied Azerbaijani territories" has long been at the heart of the negotiation process mediated by the United States, Russia and France. "Does that statement by Pashinyan mean a renunciation of negotiations?" it said in a statement.

Naghdalyan insisted in this regard that Yerevan remains committed to further negotiations with Baku under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group co-headed by the three world powers. "For Armenia the status and security of Artsakh (Karabakh) are the overriding priorities in this process," she said.



## Pashinyan declares start of Armenia's "economic revolution"

Armenia's government formally approved its five-year policy program on February 8, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan saying that it marks the beginning of an "economic revolution" promised by him.

"We have declared the concept of an economic revolution and with this program are announcing the start of the economic revolution," Pashinyan told a cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

The program was submitted to the Armenian parliament later in the day. Its almost certain approval by the National Assembly will amount to a vote of confidence in Pashinyan's cabinet reappointed after the December 9 parliamentary elections.

Opposition politicians and commentators have already criticized the 70-page action plan, saying that it is short on specifics. They point to few so-

cioeconomic targets that have been set by the government for the next five years.

Pashinyan mentioned "certain reactions" to the program. He insisted that the document "fully corresponds" to his vision for the country's future which was backed by the majority of voters in the recent elections.

Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan indicated that the government will set more detailed targets for various spheres after the program is approved by the parliament.

For his part, Economic Development Minister Tigran Khachatryan said that the program already commits the government to achieving a number of key economic indicators. He singled out a government pledge to increase the share of exports in Armenia's Gross Domestic Product from 38 percent to at least 43 percent by 2023.



"That can happen if our exports grow by 8-10 percent annually," Khachatryan told reporters. "This is a fairly high and ambitious target."

The program also says that the Armenian economy will grow by at least 5 percent annually thanks to government efforts to improve the business environment, spur exports and attract

more foreign investment. It promises "substantial" decreases in poverty and unemployment but sets no concrete targets.

Pashinyan announced later on Friday that he has made a final decision on the new structure of his government. In particular, he said, the number of government ministries will be reduced as planned from 17 to 12.

## Health ministry seeks indoor smoking ban in Armenia

Armenia's Ministry of Health has called for a blanket ban on smoking in cafes, restaurants and all other indoor public places in the country.

A relevant bill drafted by the ministry was sent to the Armenian government for discussion and approval earlier this week.

Health Minister Arsen Torosyan is actively promoting the initiative on his Twitter page. "The time has come!!!" Torosyan wrote on February 6. "Choice must be made now!!! Move to healthier world or stay in sick world?"

"From now on I won't visit any restaurant or cafe in Armenia that allows indoor smoking until our new tobacco control law is adopted," he tweeted in English on February 7. "I will also promote all restaurants that voluntarily prohibit smoking NOW!"

Torosyan attached to that



tweet a selfie with Environment Minister Erik Grigoryan. The two men were pictured in a rare smoke-free restaurant in Yerevan.

Armenia is a nation of heavy smokers with few restrictions on tobacco sales and use. According to Ministry of Health estimates, 55 percent of Armenian men are regular smokers. Medics blame this for a high incidence of lung cancer among

them.

The smoking rate among Armenian women is much lower: 3 percent. But in Yerevan an estimated 10 percent of women aged between 30 and 40 are tobacco addicts.

Armenian authorities have already attempted to curb smoking in the past. A law that came into force in 2005 banned tobacco in hospitals, cultural and educational institutions and

public buses.

Additional restrictions introduced a year later required other entities, including bars and restaurants, to allow smoking only in special secluded areas. But with no legal sanctions put in place against their violation, those measures proved largely ineffectual.

In January 2018, the Ministry of Health put forward a bill that would heavily fine people smoking in indoor public places. The then Armenian government did not send the bill to the parliament before being brought down by mass protests in May.

Torosyan, who was appointed as health minister in May, is behind the ministry's latest attempt to ban indoor smoking. It is not yet clear when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's cabinet will discuss the measure.

## Russia's defense minister praises Armenia for providing humanitarian assistance to Syria

Armenia's Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan and Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoygu held a meeting on February 8 in Russia, the ministry said in a news release.

Shoygu congratulated Tonoyan on being appointed Defense Minister of Armenia and emphasized that Armenia is the reliable partner and important colleague of Russia in the South Caucasus.

The Russian Defense Minister thanked Tonoyan for the humanitarian aid to Syria, noting that Armenia is the first to respond to Russia's call on assisting the peaceful population of Syria.

Armenia's Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan in turn thanked Russia for cooperation in providing humanitarian aid to Syria. Tonoyan noted that Russia's actions in Syria contribute to post-war restoration and attached importance to Armenia's participation in the humanitarian action. "Our assistance to the Syrian people, a part of whom is the Armenian Diaspora, is important," Tonoyan said.

During the meeting the Armenian and Russian defense chiefs also discussed a broad circle of military and military-tech-



nical cooperation issues, including issues related to equipping the Armenian Armed Forces will modern and precision armaments ensuring its deterrent superiority.

Joint plans aimed at increasing the level of combat readiness were also discussed.

Emphasizing that the Armenian-Russian bilateral military and military-technical cooperation is on a high level, the sides expressed conviction that the strategic allied relations will continue to develop, the ministry said in the news release.

## Serzh Sargsyan 'questioned in 2008 probe'

Former President Serzh Sargsyan has reportedly been questioned by Armenian-law-enforcement authorities as a witness in their ongoing investigation into the 2008 post-election violence in Yerevan.

According to the "Haykakan Zhamanak" daily and Hetq.am, the interrogation took place on February 1 and lasted for about six hours. Both media outlets also said Sargsyan will be summoned for further questioning.

The Special Investigative Service (SIS), which is conducting the probe, did not deny or confirm the reports on Monday. "Haykakan Zhamanak" is run by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's wife, Anna Hakobyan.

The SIS has charged Sargsyan's predecessor Robert



Kocharyan and three retired army generals with overthrowing the constitutional order in the wake of a disputed presidential election held in February 2008. The vote formalized the handover of power from

Kocharyan to Sargsyan, his preferred successor.

The main opposition presidential candidate, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, rejected the official election results as fraudulent, staging nonstop demonstra-

tions that were broken up on March 1-2, 2008. Eight protesters and two policemen were killed in vicious streets clashes in Yerevan on that night.

The SIS blamed the Ter-Petrosian-led opposition for the bloodshed until last spring's "velvet revolution" which brought Pashinyan to power. But it now says that Kocharyan illegally used army units against the protesters in order to enforce the vote results.

Kocharyan, who denies the accusations as politically motivated, was again arrested in December. Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia strongly condemned the arrest, saying that Pashinyan is exacting "personal revenge" against the man who ruled the country from 1998-2008.



## Western watchdog hails democratic change in Armenia

The Washington-based rights group Freedom House praised the “velvet revolution” in Armenia and “markedly freer and fairer” elections which followed it, in an annual report on global democracy released on February 5.

The Freedom in the World 2019 report lists Armenia among a handful of countries where “positive breakthroughs” were registered last year. They show that “democracy has enduring appeal as a means of holding leaders accountable and creating the conditions for a better life,” it says.

“Entrenched elites in many Eurasian countries continued exploiting the advantages of incumbency to maintain their grip on power,” reads the report. “However, Armenia broke that pattern with the ouster of an unpopular leader and the election of a new, reform-minded government.”

“In the spring of 2018, Armenians took to the streets in protest of an attempt by Serzh Sarkisian to extend his rule by shifting from the presidency to the prime minister’s office,” it says. “To widespread surprise, the protests culminated in Sarkisian’s resignation and the rise of opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan to the premiership. Pashinyan’s My Step alliance decisively won snap parliamentary elections in December, clearing the way for systemic reforms.”

The polls were “markedly freer and fair-



er than elections in previous years,” added Freedom House.

Accordingly, the watchdog gave Armenia higher scores in various categories of political rights and civil liberties. Still, it continued to rank the South Caucasus states as “partly free” alongside other former Soviet states such as Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.

Armenia’s three other neighbors -- Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran -- as well as Russia were rated “not free.”

The report says that Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Azerbaijani coun-

terpart Ilham Aliyev both won new presidential terms in 2018 through election campaigns that benefited from “strong-arm tactics that included the repression of independent media and civil society, the abuse of state resources, and the persecution of genuine political opponents -- as well as outright fraud.”

It also says that the United States in 2018 saw “a decline in the rule of law” that put American democracy “on a level with Greece, Croatia, and Mongolia,” and well below other long-standing democracies like Germany and Britain.

## Armenia to expand mutual partnership with partner countries of Middle East

The Armenian government will take active steps to develop the unique and friendly relations with Iran and Georgia that will be free of other geopolitical impacts as much as possible, the government said in its draft Action Plan released on February 6, reports Armenpress.

According to the draft, the government will actively work to expand multisectoral broad cooperation with China, develop and deepen the friendly and mutually beneficial partnership with India and Japan.

Armenia plans to expand the mutual partnership with the



partner countries of the Middle East, develop the cooperation with the American, Asian, African and Pacific states.

An importance is attached to Armenia’s active engagement in the multilateral platforms – the UN, OSCE, CoE and

other international structures, as well as protection of its interests including in the fields of security, sustainable development and human rights.

The active cooperation within the CSTO, as well as the development of the bilateral relations with the CIS states, the continuation of political dialogue with the NATO, the consistent implementation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan, the deepening of Armenia’s engagement in the International Organization of La Francophonie and conducting Armenia’s chairmanship at the IOF at the highest level are highlighted.

## Armenian government unveils economic growth targets

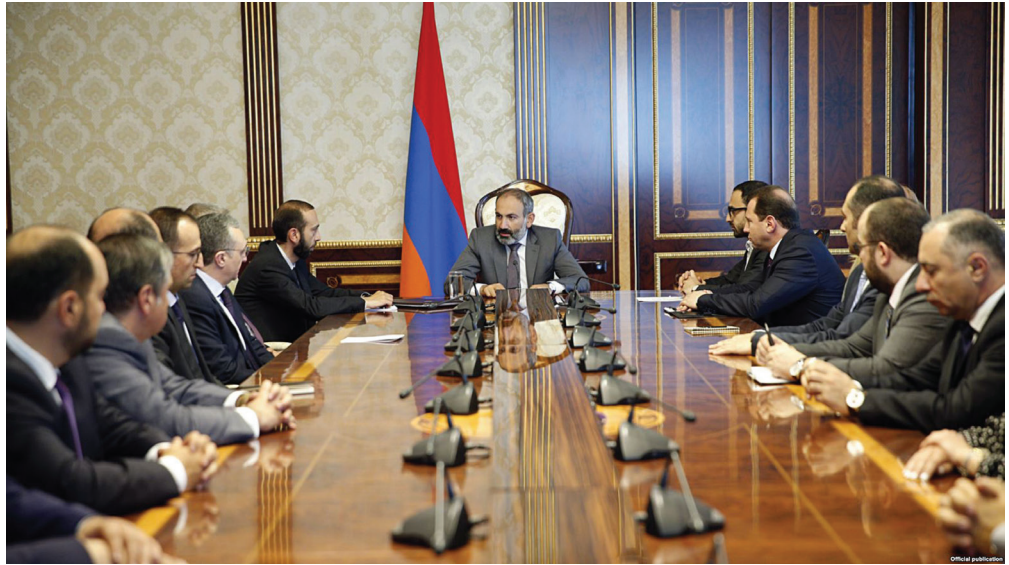
Armenia's economy should grow by at least 5 percent annually and thereby "substantially" cut poverty in the country, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government said in its five-year policy program unveiled on February 6.

The 70-page program laying out the government's priorities and policies was made public two months after Pashinyan's My Step alliance won snap parliamentary elections by a landslide. Speaking at a cabinet meeting in Yerevan, the premier said it will undergo minor "editorial" changes before being submitted to the Armenian parliament by the end of this week.

The document's almost certain approval by the National Assembly will amount to a vote of confidence in the government. My Step holds a two-thirds majority in the parliament.

The program declares the government's commitment to a "competitive and inclusive economy" primarily driven by hi-tech industries. It says the government will strive for this by significantly improving tax administration, easing business regulations, guaranteeing fair competition, attracting foreign investment and stimulating exports and innovation.

This, the document adds, should translate into an average GDP growth rate of at least 5 percent in 2019-2023. "At the same time, a considerably larger number of citizens should participate in economic



development, and economic output created as a result of their work should be distributed more evenly," it says.

Armenia's former government set practically the same growth targets in its last five-year program drawn up in 2017. It pledged to reduce the official poverty rate, which stands at around 30 percent, by 12 percentage points by 2022.

Pashinyan's government is likewise promising "substantial" reductions in the poverty and unemployment rates. But it has set no specific targets.

Also, both the current and former government programs describe a steady and rapid increase in Armenian exports as the main engine of faster GDP growth.

Ever since he swept to power in May 2018, Pashinyan has repeatedly promised to carry out an "economic revolution" that will significantly improve the lives of ordinary Armenians. He has said his government has already succeeded in practically eradicating corruption and breaking up economic monopolies that have long hampered the country's development.

According to official statistics, Armenian economy grew by 7.5 percent in 2017. It was on course to expand by roughly 5.3 percent in 2018.

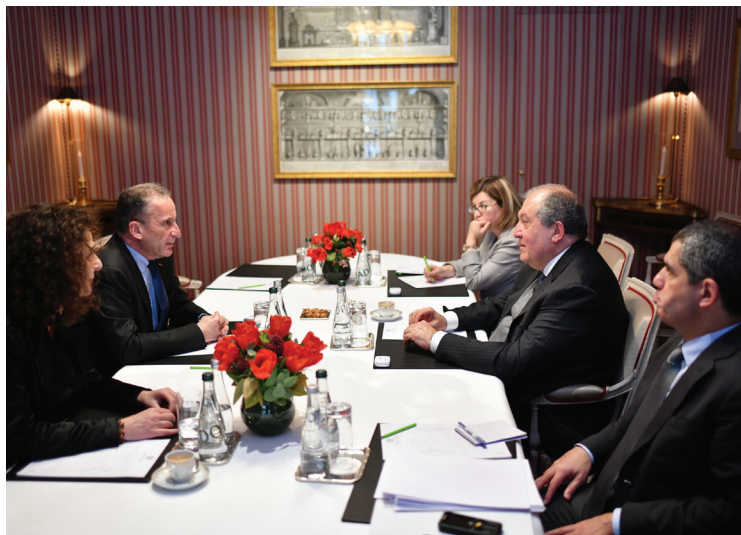
According to the latest World Bank projections, Armenian growth will slow to 4.3 percent in 2019 and accelerate slightly in the following years.

## Alternative energy a prospective field for Armenia: President Sarkissian continues meetings with French business circles

President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian, who is in Paris on a working visit, met with famous French businessman Henri Proglio, the former Chairman of the Board and CEO of Electricité de France and former CEO of Veolia Environnement, the Armenian Presidential Office told Noyan Tapan.

The Armenian President and the French businessman discussed the cooperation opportunities and prospects in the field of nature protection, energy, water resource effective management.

President Sarkissian specifical-



ly highlighted the great potential in the field of alternative energy and the opportunity to implement joint programs. He stated that Armenia is rich of renewable energy resources, and the alternative energy is a prospective business field for our country.

The sides agreed that the businessman, who has a great experience in the aforementioned fields, will visit Armenia in coming months to get acquainted with the opportunities, continue the discussions and give more subjective process to the partnership.



## Government looks at prospects for wine industry development

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held a consultative meeting, attended by representatives of winemaking companies. The meeting discussed issues related to the opportunities and prospects for wine industry development in Armenia.

“We have gathered here to discuss the problems faced in this area in order to understand how the government’s cooperation with the wine industry can develop. Winemaking today is one of the fastest growing industries in our country, and the fact that such a significant presence is ensured already speaks for its volumes. However, I think that we have problems associated with market representation, and this is probably due to both affordability and the need to step up output levels. As far as I understand,

Armenian wines are competitive in terms of price and quality, but in some cases, competitiveness suffers due to limited output; just because sometimes large lots become more attractive to potential buyers than the smaller ones, especially when problems arise with their periodicity. In any case, you know better the existing problems, and I hope that today we can discuss them in all detail,” Prime Minister Pashinyan said.

It was reported that positive developments have been occurring recently in the field of winemaking that helped boost the exports. In particular, instead of 7 million liters in 2016, wine production amounted to 9,700,000 liters in 2017. At the same time, exports amounted to 2.7 million liters, about one million liters more

than in 2016.

Speaking of the problems faced in the given field, the representatives of winemaking companies raised issues related to the possibilities for attracting new investments, the timing of the return of subsidized loans provided to economic entities, exports, tax administration, improvement of the legislative field, prevention of diseases in vineyards, the state program on the implementation of drip irrigation system, and effectiveness of Armenia’s Viticulture and Wine Fund (hereinafter the Fund).

Summing up, Prime Minister Pashinyan noted that the government attaches great importance to the continued development of winemaking and is ready to periodically hold such meetings to identify the existing problems

and search for solutions. As to development prospects, including disease prevention, the Premier stressed the importance of using and realizing the scientific potential of the Armenian National Agrarian University.

Nikol Pashinyan urged the representatives of winemaking entities to generate new ideas in the near future and submit them to the government for joint implementation. Touching on the Fund’s future activities, the Head of Government invited private sector representatives to hold a discussion in the near future in order to understand its effectiveness.

In conclusion, the Prime Minister emphasized that the discussion will result in an appropriate decision that will take account of all stakeholders’ positions.



## Discussions on change of gas tariff continue: Gazprom Armenia not in a hurry to present details

Discussions are being held at all directions in connection with the change of gas tariff supplied to Armenia, Vakhtang Mirumyan – deputy director general of the Gazprom Armenia CJSC, told reporters after the session of the Public Services Regulatory Commission. He stated that as long as the discussions are not over, he cannot provide information about the change of the gas price and the subsequent developments.

“The press service of the Gazprom Armenia CJSC has issued a respective statement in regards to the gas tariff. There is no other information yet. Whether debt is accumulated or not, how the financial-economic activity must be carried out, I cannot say anything at this moment, all issues are currently being discussed. Moreover, these discussions are being carried out at all directions, including investment, capital renovations

programs, losses and etc. The goal is to avoid harming the company’s activity, as well as leading to undesirable consequences”, he said.

Mirumyan informed that Gazprom Armenia CJSC is engaged in the discussions and is actively cooperating both with the Public Services Regulatory Commission and the authorized bodies of the energy field. As for the discussion timetables, he said two months are scheduled, but with the

possibility to be extended.

Gazprom CJSC increased the gas price supplied to Armenia from 150 USD to 165 USD starting from January 1, 2019. Following this Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that the gas tariff for the domestic consumer will not increase, noting that the Armenian government will continue the talks with the Gazprom Armenia CJSC to reach a final agreement.

# Israel lifts ban on 'suicide' drone sales to Azerbaijan

Israel's Defense Ministry has lifted its ban on exports to Azerbaijan of "kamikaze" drones that are manufactured by an Israeli company accused of hitting Armenian positions in Nagorno-Karabakh with one of them in 2017.

According to Israeli media reports, the company, Aeronautics Defense Systems, was working on a potential \$20 million deal with Baku when Azerbaijani officials asked its specialists to demonstrate its Orbiter 1K unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) on Karabakh Armenian soldiers in the summer of 2017.

The reports said two Aeronautics employees refused to carry out the attack before two higher-ranking executives eventually agreed to do it. They said the drone did not directly hit their targets but two soldiers were injured in the attack.

Aeronautics' export license was suspended after a complaint was filed with the Israeli Defense Ministry. Israel's Justice Ministry moved in August 2018 to charge the company's chief executive, deputy CEO, and other employees with violating an Israeli law on security export controls. The com-

pany denied any wrongdoing.

The Times of Israel newspaper reported that the Defense Ministry returned the export license on Monday, leading the company to inform the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange that the ban on Orbiter 1K sales to its "central customer 'A'" has been lifted. "The company can continue to supply the UAV to the aforementioned customer as soon as possible," Aeronautics said in a statement.

The ministry's decision came three weeks after Aeronautics was purchased by another, state-owned Israeli defense company, Rafael, in a \$231 million deal.

The Azerbaijani army heavily used similar suicide drones manufactured by another Israeli company during the April 2016 hostilities in Karabakh. Baku had bought the Harop drones as part of multimillion-dollar defense contracts signed with Israeli arms manufacturers.

In 2012, Israeli defense officials confirmed a reported deal to provide the Azerbaijani military with more weapons worth a combined \$1.6 billion. Those included, among other things,

sophisticated anti-tank rockets which were also used by Azerbaijani forces in April 2016.

Armenia has long expressed concern at the Israeli-Azerbaijani arms deals, saying that they undermine international efforts to end the Karabakh conflict. A senior Armenian military official hailed in September 2017 the freeze of Orbiter 1K sales to Baku.

Commenting on the lifting of the Israeli ban on February 5, an Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said: "We will raise this issue both in our bilateral meetings [with Israeli officials] and on multilateral platforms ... We will keep telling our international partners that an arms race is extremely dangerous for our region."

The "suicide" drone scandal was exposed by the Israeli press more than two weeks after Israel's Minister of Regional Cooperation Tzachi Hanegbi visited Yerevan in an apparent bid to improve his country's frosty relationship with Armenia. Then Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian visited Israel and met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in November 2017.





## Political component of Armenia-Iran relations at high level – Ambassador Tumanyan’s interview

(Yerevan- Armenpress) The favorable conditions created for Armenia thanks to the free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Iran will be effectively served for ensuring the growth of trade volumes, Armenia’s Ambassador to Iran Artashes Tumanyan said in an interview to Armenpress, talking about the Armenian-Iranian relations, as well as the upcoming visit of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to Iran.

**-Mr. Tumanyan, PM Nikol Pashinyan plans to visit Iran in late February. What kind of meetings and agenda of issues are scheduled?**

-Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will depart for Tehran on February 27 at the invitation of President of Iran Hassan Rouhani. This is Pashinyan’s first visit to Iran. The organizational issues of the visit are being discussed at the moment. The agenda of meetings will cover a broad range of bilateral issues. During the talks the officials will touch upon the regional security and bilateral cooperation affairs.

**-This year marks the 28th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties with Iran. How would you assess the current level of Armenia-Iran relations?**

-From the time of their formation to this day Armenia and Iran had friendly and partnering relations. However, not all opportunities of both sides have been utilized.

**-What achievements will you identify in the Armenian-Iranian diplomatic relations in the recent period?**

-The main achievement is the high level of political component of the bilateral relations. The sides have always managed to avoid lined problems. But as for the recent period, we can mention the facts of distribution of various information about Armenia among the Iranian circles, mutual awareness raising. Many Iranian businessmen visited Armenia to discuss the opportunities of conducting an economic activity.



**-Iran remains one of Armenia’s key partners. What prospects do you see for expanding the economic cooperation between the two countries?**

-Iran is really one of the key partners of Armenia, and the development of the relations derives from Armenia’s interests. Of course, Armenia also has an important place in Iran’s foreign policy agenda.

The level of bilateral economic relations is far from being enough, and both sides need to take serious actions in this regard. I would like to inform that the Armenia-Iran trade turnover has never crossed 300 million USD (also given the gas-electricity exchange), and the import volumes of goods from Armenia to Iran have always been quite small.

Currently the possibilities to serve effectively the favorable conditions created for Armenia thanks to the EAEU-Iran free trade deal for ensuring bilateral trade growth are being discussed. I want to state that serious obstacles emerged here due to the US sanctions, but in order to overcome them certain mechanisms will be needed.

**-There is quite activeness in tourism sector in the recent years. What development prospects do you see on this direction?**

-Before the US sanctions and the unfavorable financial-economic developments in Iran, the number of Iranian tourists visiting Armenia was constantly increasing. But now, due to the current situation in Iran, their number is decreasing. It’s understandable that under the current circumstances some changes will be needed in the works of this field, at least for preventing the further negative developments.

**-Mr. Ambassador, the Armenian community plays an important role for strengthening and developing the Armenian-Iranian relations. What are the main activities of Armenians in Iran? In which sectors they are represented and what are the agenda issues relating to the community?**

-The Armenian community of Iran has passed a great path and enjoys a great respect for the great contribution in Iran’s life. The community members are represented in different sectors-science, education, culture, economy and etc. According to Iran’s Constitution, Armenians have a status of a religious minority which allows to have two MPs in the Iranian Parliament.

The community structures constantly carry out great works for the preservation of the Armenian identity and cultural values.

# Being President is a Job and a Mission at the same Time.

## Armen Sarkissian's interview to "SOCIETY" Magazine

President Armen Sarkissian gave an interview to the Austrian SOCIETY Magazine.

You are President of the Republic of Armenia since April 2018, could you tell me a bit about your country?

Armenia has always had a dynamic, turbulent and history-charged past, especially concerning culture, art and music but unfortunately also in respect to tragedies. More than 1700 years ago, the Armenians were the first worldwide to become Christians. In 11th century Armenian Bagratid lost their Kingdom in Armenia. Later, the country lost the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, the main bastion of the crusaders. Despite this loss, Armenians were always well-organized and a very active nation and the strength and emotions were led by the church and communities surrounding it. At the beginning of the 20th century, Armenia faced the tragedy of the holocaust that was due to the genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, where millions of compatriots lost their lives. Every family has a story relating to that tragic event. The family of my grandmother lost her first child because of the genocide. This tragic occurrence created a big wave of Armenian diaspora in the world, from the United States to Australia or France. Since then, we gained our independence 100 years ago, but only briefly after the first Republic of Armenia was proclaimed in 1918, it became a part of the Soviet Union. Following the end of the affiliation, problems blew up especially in Nagorno-Karabakh and elsewhere. We hope to resolve that in the 21st Century.

Before being President of the Republic of Armenia, you already served as a diplomat to Great Britain, so you know diplomacy in all its glory?

Diplomacy is a craft and I was lucky enough to meet those who are the great arts men of it. You could say that I had several lives so far. The first one was marked by my passion for theoretical physics



and relativistic astrophysics. Later I became a diplomat, serving in many countries, even in seven countries simultaneously, and then as a senior Ambassador to Europe in London. My third career was my advisory activity for big companies like British Petroleum, helping them to make business in Eurasia. I also had offices in Vienna, as a non-executive advisor for a high-tech company. We created games, mostly presented in China and Korea. Being President is a job and a mission at the same time because it is on the one hand my duty as the President of Armenia, but on the other hand I also really enjoy doing it.

What are your main goals as President of the Republic of Armenia?

The most important points are to resolve the conflicts and to develop Armenia in general. Our nation has a big chance in the 21st century. Our strength is not natural resources but human resources. We are a small state but a global nation, there are as many Armenians living in Russia as there are living in Armenia itself, for example. In the 21st century, this is an advantage because the globe is getting smaller and life is getting faster. The biggest companies in the world are not the oil or gas companies but rather IT companies like Apple and Google. Armenia has a chance of being part of a so-called virtual silk road – a trade route of technologies and communications. This silk road already exists as the global network of people

connected to each other virtually and this is the field where you can expand your influence today. It can become the century of Armenia, if we are using our advantage of being a global and highly educated nation, that is very well integrated in many societies. In addition, we are the only country of our region that has strong relations both with the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union.

In a Parliamentary Republic, the President is not the executive leader of the country but he functions as the head of the country, showing the way, the vision or the strategy for the nation. Only a concept with a specific plan can work in harmony with the tendencies of this world. A President has to recognize what the strengths and weaknesses are and find the country's place in the world. The world is getting smaller and more interconnected and therefore, the national interest of Armenia lies beyond its borders.

Who are your main partners worldwide?

Historically we have a good relationship with Russia. Formerly, a part of Armenia was part of the Russian Empire and we were supported by Russia in difficult times. We have also very good connections to our neighbors Iran and Georgia. In general, Armenia should continue having deep and good relations with Russia, deepen the ones with the European Union and with China and it should definitely have very good relations with the United States

and other nations.

Your country recently had a very big growth-rate – What is the reason for it?

There could have been several reasons: Either the government was doing well, the people were working hard, the international conditions were favorable or it was a combination of all of these factors, but I think we could have an even higher growth-rate. Armenia has one of the best banking sections in the whole region and also the best IT section.

What do you have in mind for the relations between Austria and Armenia?

I am ready to get engaged deeper in our relations. We highly appreciate your stand in the recognition of the Armenian genocide and also the support of the idea that there is no other solution in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a political one. I am looking forward to my future discussions with the Austrian President, the Government and the Prime Minister in order to promote and develop our relations, not only politically but culturally as well. Somehow, I am an Ambassador of Austrian culture as I have been visiting the lake Fuschl and Salzburg for 18 years now, has any other President ever done that?

Which was the last book that made a deep impression on you?

I read a lot in general, but the book I currently engage with the most is the one I am writing on. It is about how politics work in the 21st century and I name it "Quantum Politics".

In your opinion, what matters most in life?

There are some basic things that are important in life – time, for example, is one of these. We all only have a certain amount of time on this planet and there are only a few things that are more precious than this time – like love for the people that are close to you or love for your country. You can sacrifice your time for love. So, if you don't love your job why would you be doing it?



## Ter-Petrosian also questioned in 2008 violence probe

Former President Levon Ter-Petrosian was questioned by an Armenian-law-enforcement body on February 7 as a witness in its ongoing investigation into the 2008 post-election violence in Yerevan.

As his press secretary, Arman Musinyan, informed, the interrogation lasted for around 90 minutes. Musinyan gave no other details.

Ter-Petrosian, who served as Armenia's first president from 1991-1998, was the main opposition candidate in a presidential held in February 2008. He staged nonstop street protests in Yerevan after rejecting as fraudulent official vote results that gave victory to Serzh Sarkisian, outgoing President Robert Kocharyan's preferred successor.

Security forces broke up those protests on March 1, 2008. Eight protesters and two policemen died in street clashes that broke out in Yerevan on that day.

Citing the deadly violence, Kocharyan declared a state of emergency and ordered Armenian army units into the capital. He accused Ter-Petrosian of attempting to forcibly seize power. Dozens of Ter-Petrosian allies, including Armenia's



current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, were subsequently jailed on charges of organizing "mass disturbances" which they strongly denied.

Ter-Petrosian rejected the official version of events, saying that Kocharyan resorted to lethal force to enforce the official results of a rigged election.

The Special Investigative Service (SIS)

blamed the Ter-Petrosian-led opposition for the violence until last spring's "velvet revolution" which brought Pashinyan to power. It now says that Kocharyan illegally used army units against the protesters.

Kocharyan, who denies the accusations as politically motivated, was arrested in December.

## Russia comments on current situation over appointment of CSTO Secretary General

The current uncertainty over the issue of the appointment of the CSTO Secretary General is painful for the organization, but it will not affect the CSTO effectiveness and efficiency, Russian deputy foreign minister Alexander Pankin told RIA Novosti.

On November 2 Armenia's Yuri Khachaturov was dismissed from the position of the CSTO Secretary General after Armenia applied to the CSTO member states to launch the process of recalling him as criminal case was filed against Khachaturov over the 2008 March 1 unrest in Yerevan. CSTO Deputy Secretary General Valery Semerikov temporarily assumed the duties of the CSTO Secretary General.

President of Belarus Alexan-

der Lukashenko on December 21 signed a draft decision of the CSTO Collective Security Council on appointing Stanislav Zas, the State Secretary of Security Council of Belar-

us, as CSTO Secretary General following the working meeting with the latter. Earlier Zas visited Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia for the approval of his

candidacy. Moreover, Armenia said visit of Stanislav Zas to Yerevan is not planned. Zas said that he is ready to visit Armenia at any time comfortable for the Armenian leadership. He expressed hope for reaching consensus on his appointment.

"The fact that after Armenia recalled the CSTO chief we still do not manage to appoint a new Secretary General is painful for the organization", Pankin said, adding that the situation should be solved as soon as possible.

He ruled out the negative impact of the current situation on the CSTO efficiency. The Russian deputy FM said the CSTO is a key tool of maintaining regional peace and stability, therefore it must operate concretely.



## President Sarkissian attends AGBU 90<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Paris

President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian attended the 90th General Assembly of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in Paris, France, the Presidential Office told Noyan

Tapan

The General Assembly was attended by the delegates from different countries of the world.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is the world's

largest non-profit organization devoted to upholding the Armenian heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs. AGBU has played a significant role in upholding Armenian tradi-

tions and values by adapting to the needs of the worldwide community and the demands of the times.

Armen Sarkissian is a member of the AGBU Central Board of Directors since 2016.



## Sevan Startup Summit 2019 dates announced



[www.sss.am](http://www.sss.am)

The dates for Sevan Startup Summit are already announced. Tent camp business forum will be held from 28th of July to 4th of August..

Over 1000 entrepreneurs and business experts will gather at the shore of lake Sevan, Armenia.

The aim of the Summit is to encourage innovative ideas as well as create a unique

non-formal environment for the main stakeholders of the business world. During the 7 days of the Summit the participants get a chance to take part in various workshops and discussions with influential and successful founders and business people. This year also the founders of successful startups will be invited to Armenia in order to share their experience and success stories with

young entrepreneurs. It's expected to host over 100 business experts and mentors.

The prize fund of Sevan Startup Summit 2019 will reach \$100,000 which will be distributed between the winners of the pitching sessions. Over 10 venture funds will have their representatives in the Summit and representatives of famous international acceleration programs will attend the event.

Vahagn Raptan, the CEO at Seaside Startup Summit, has mentioned: "The Summit has already become one of the most awaited startup events not only in Armenia, but in international level. We try to engage more and more influential investment funds and successful entrepreneurs year by year. I'm proud to announce that this year besides the prize fund, also the guaranteed \$100,000 investment fund will be provided by Seaside Startup Holdings".

For the first time the Summit was held in 2016 in Armenia and by now over 2000 entrepreneurs and startup founders took part in the Summit. The prize fund exceeds \$150,000 and the investments of over \$1,000,000 have been committed there. In 2018 the Summit was held 3 times: in United Arab Emirates, India and Armenia.



**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 liposaction, 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 Wellshape 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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# Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator News: Strengthening the Homeland's Borders and Discovering/Supporting Young Talents...

## The second stage of street illumination program in borderland Dovegh community completed

The village of Dovegh in Tavush region has a 15 km long international border on the east. Despite the need for a full outdoor illumination system this borderland village has been compelled to get along with only temporary solutions of the problem for years. The problem has been partially solved owing to support that came from varying sources, which in the long-run, however, could not keep the village from the necessity of spending additional funds on replacing the frequently damaged bulbs.



*nighttime, with this program. In borderland villages, though, we also help in safeguarding against the adversary's activities. People on the borderlands are the back we lean on. They should feel that we are there for them, too. People in this village do not need to feel alone facing their problems; they should always feel that they are in the focus of our attention. This is the approach we are guided by,"* VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said.

Environmentally friendly energy saving LED-lights are economically efficient for rural communities with scarce budgets. Implementation of this system drastically cuts the energy consumption and eases the financial burden of the communities owing to the sav-



Armenia opportunity to learn business ethics and to develop practical professional skills in real-time working environment at the Company's service centers. Besides, the students also learn how to pass job interviews and prepare resumes and CVs. The purpose of this is to help them enter the job market with more professional confidence.

At the event organized at the Company's headquarters VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** handed certificates to the last group of students of "VivaStart" 2018. The group included 38 students from various regions and universities. In two-month period the young people mastered efficient communication with subscribers, learned the specifics of the services and offers of the



FPWC and VivaCell-MTS undertook the solution of this problem in 2017, and installed a brand new energy saving outdoor lighting infrastructure in two stages.

In the frame of the implemented program, the partner organizations, which prioritize community development, 131 LED lights have been installed encompassing around 4800 m long area, which includes almost all the village area.

The opening ceremony was attended by VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian**, FPWC senior engineer, program coordinator **Martin Maralchyan**, as well as the head and the residents of Noyemberyan community.

*"There are settlements, where outdoor lighting program solves problems more important than the problem of providing minimum living conditions. Borderland Dovegh is one of those villages. As a rule, we emphasize our willingness to ease the financial burden of the village communities and to help keep wild animals away from the populated areas in the*

ings.

As compared to other types of bulbs the LED bulbs are more efficient and have longer life span, consuming up to 80% less energy.

The streets in Dovegh will be illuminated from 21:00 till 01:00 in summer, and from 18:00 till 24:00 in winter. During holidays, illumination will be provided all night long.

## «VivaStart»: unlocking one's talents and 'finding own place' in the jobs market Yet another group of graduates gets program certificates

Armenia's leading telecommunications operator continues supporting students in specializing in the disciplines they have chosen for their future careers. "VivaStart" educational program, which was launched in 2015, is a good starting point for program participants to discover own potential and to define perspectives of professional development. The program gives the students from various universities of

Company, and developed their marketing skills. Three of the best performing students got Samsung J6+ smartphones. "VivaStart" in 2018 involved 110 students. Ten of them have been accepted to work at various service centers of VivaCell-MTS.

*"VivaStart" is an important starting point to develop professionally in a working environment, to understand the interaction between employers, employees, and third parties, and to master skills in finding agile solutions. I am sure before your participation in the program your understanding and approaches were different from the vision you have about work now. It is crucial that you apply the knowledge you gained, in practice, and that you value the civilized model of communication. Congratulations on your successful completion of the program! I hope you will do the best in whatever you choose to do in future,"* VivaCell-MTS Founding GM **Ralph Yirikian** said.

The overall number of students involved in the program since 2015 is 294. 43 of the best performing students have joined VivaCell-MTS staff since 2015.



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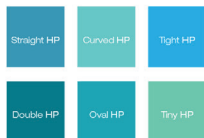
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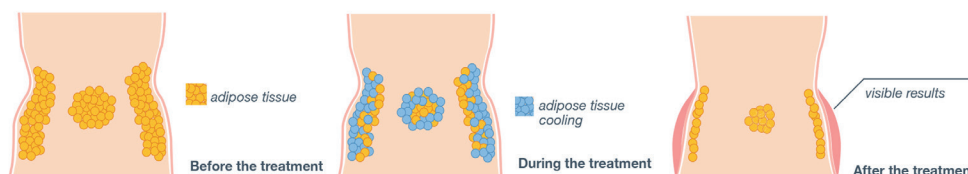
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