

Armenian Parliament approves Government's Action Plan



The Armenian National Assembly voted 82 to 37 on February 14 to approve the government's Action Plan after three days of debates. The ruling My Step faction was the only force to back the program, while Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia voted against the document.

Pashinyan wins confidence vote, slams opposition party

(Yerevan – RFE/RL)- Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan lambasted one of the two opposition parties represented in Armenia's parliament as he secured parliamentary approval of his government's five-year policy program on February 14.

In what amounted to a vote of confidence, the National Assembly endorsed the program by 88 votes to 40 after three days of

heated debates which involved bitter re-creminations between some opposition lawmakers and Pashinyan.

The government's action plan was rejected by the deputies representing the opposition Bright Armenia (LHK) and Prosperous Armenia parties. Both parties said that it lacks concrete socioeconomic targets that would back up Pashinyan's re-

peated pledges to carry out an "economic revolution."

The LHK was particularly scathing about the 70-page document. Its leader, Edmon Marukian, said that an annual economic growth rate of 5 percent promised by the government is too modest.

Marukyan also claimed that the government is full of "second-tier players" from
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Armenian PM, Swiss Ambassador discuss development of cooperation



Armenian PM, Swiss Ambassador discuss development of cooperation

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received on February 15 Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the

Swiss Confederation to the Republic of Armenia Stefano Lazzarotto, Noyan Tapan was informed from the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia.

Noting that Armenia is keen to promote political, economic and humanitarian ties

with Switzerland, Prime Minister Pashinyan expressed the hope that the Ambassador would contribute to the development of cooperation between the two countries.

Ambassador Lazzarotto assured that he will make every effort to strengthen and expand the Armenian-Swiss friendly relations during his tenure.

The meeting focused on issues related to the Armenian-Swiss cooperation agenda. Reaffirming their willingness to continue with the ongoing joint programs, the parties looked at the opportunities for cooperation in different areas. Agriculture, water management, resort tourism, nature protection, pharmaceuticals and a number of other areas were considered to be the most promising areas for interaction.

The parties agreed to put in touch the relevant agencies on either side and discuss the details of future activities at the interagency level.

French parliament expected to ratify Armenia-EU CEPA soon

Speaker of Parliament Ararat Mirzoyan has held a meeting on February 15 with Ambassador of France Jonathan Lacote, Mirzoyan's Office said.

Highlighting the existing level of the Armenian-French ties, the Speaker noted that the foundation of these relations also includes the many century-old historic-cultural relations and the existence of the Armenian community of France.

Noting that France is the first country to have recognized the Armenian Genocide by law, the Speaker attached importance to French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement on declaring April 24th a National Day of Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.

He also praised the efforts of France as a OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairing country in the peaceful settlement of the NK conflict.

The Speaker of Parliament also highlighted the enhancement of commercial and cultural ties.

The French ambassador expressed readiness to make efforts for elevating bilateral ties to a new qualitative level, given the fact that Armenia is already a country with par-



liamentary system of administration.

He noted that there are many ethnic Armenian lawmakers at the French parliament who are actively cooperating with the Armenian community. He said that in addition to the ethnic Armenian MPs, French lawmakers in general consider themselves friends of Armenia.

The sides also discussed the ratification

process of CEPA signed between Armenia and the European Union.

Issues related to launching dialogue over visa liberalization for Armenian citizens to the EU were also discussed.

According to the ambassador, the ratification issue is already on the agenda of the French parliament. He emphasized that the ratification won't be delayed.

Pashinyan wins confidence vote, slams opposition party

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former President Serzh Sarkisian's administration. "With those cadres it's impossible to do an economic revolution," he said.

"My worry is that the majority of the public has started losing faith in their future," said Mane Tandilyan, another LHK leader who served as labor minister in Pashinyan's cabinet until last December.

A furious Pashinyan rejected the criticism in his final speech before the parliament vote. He was especially incensed by parallels drawn by the LHK between the current and previous Armenian governments.

"Don't you try again to put me and them on the same plane," he said. "Put yourself and them on the same plane because you were saying the same thing in 2018."

Pashinyan recalled in this regard that the LHK refused to back him and his Civil Contract party when they started campaigning in March 2018 against Sarkisian's attempt to cling to power. He charged that Marukyan's party, which holds 18 seats in the current parliament, favored instead behind-the-scene deals with Sarkisian and is now keen to whitewash the latter's legacy.

"They're saying that there was no revolu-



tion," scoffed the premier. "Look around you. If there was no revolution, what are 18 of you doing here?"

The LHK, Civil Contract and another party, Republic, made up the now defunct Yelk parliamentary alliance which was in opposition to the former regime. Pashinyan managed to organize last spring a successful popular movement against Sarkisian's continued rule, widely referred to as the

"velvet revolution," without the backing of his Yelk allies.

The government program was drawn up and submitted to the parliament for approval last week two months after Pashinyan's My Step alliance scored a landslide victory in snap general elections. The LHK finished a distant third in those polls.

Yerevan-Iranian border roads equipped with 4000 modern traffic signs

Transportation authorities are installing modern traffic signs along the roads from Yerevan to the Iranian border.

Minister of Transportation, Communication and Information Technologies Hakob Arshakyan said at Cabinet meeting that nearly 4000 signs are being installed.

"We are already reaching the completion of this project," he said. "However, we have noticed a unique fact. These signs are often stolen and used for different purposes. It's gonna sound ridiculous, but they are being used for things ranging from a cover of an [oven], a farming or snow clearing spade". He added that state resources are spent and this is a security matter.

PM Pashinyan asked the minister to present the spending, and Arshakyan said that nearly 1,000,000 dollars is being used for the new signs.

"We are spending the one million dollars, and then it turns out that the issue hasn't been solved and we are forced to spend new funds, and afterwards they are stealing them and so on. As a result, it turns out, no funds have been formed in order to solve the problem of a single emergency building or to increase pensions. I want



our countrymen to clearly imagine this chain, beginning from not taking billing machine checks, not providing them, up to the remaining global issues," the PM said, adding that the responsibility of this chain lies first of all on the government, but it doesn't mean that only the government is responsible.

Armenian Ministries told to spur ‘economic revolution’

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 15 ordered his government to take a set of measures which he said will “stimulate the economic revolution” in Armenia promised by him.

Pashinyan issued 15 mostly economic directives to various government agencies one day after the Armenian parliament approved his cabinet’s five-year policy program.

“Of course, the government will adopt a list of measures stemming from the program but I want to differentiate them from a list of measures to stimulate the economic revolution,” he told ministers before listing those actions.

In particular, Pashinyan said, the government should “review all investment proposals” submitted by local and foreign businesspeople and look into obstacles to their implementation.

The premier made clear at the same time that from now on he and other senior government officials must meet with only those potential investors who have a proven track record of major entrepreneurial activity. He complained that some of his meetings with individuals claiming to be ready to invest in Armenia were a “meaningless waste of time.”

“For example, if a person has never had even \$5,000 on his bank account but now says that he wants to invest \$5 million or \$50 million then obviously something is fishy there,” said Pashinyan.

In its 70-page program approved by the National Assembly on Thursday, the government pledged to achieve a significant increase in foreign direct investment in Armenia. The document stresses the importance of creating “attractive conditions” for foreign inves-



tors, saying that “internal savings will not be enough to achieve high rates of economic growth.”

The government expects the Armenian economy to grow by at least 5 percent annually for the next five years.

Other directives issued by Pashinyan relate to infrastructure projects benefiting the agricultural sector, agricultural export promotion, cheap credit to small businesses and hiring of seasonal workers by commercial farmers. Pashinyan said the government must ensure that the families of those workers are not stripped of poverty or unemployment benefits because of the temporary employment.

The premier said the government should also do more to retrain unemployed individuals and support organizations teaching potential entrepreneurs “business skills and financial literacy.”

Preliminary investigation into Robert Kocharyan’s and 3 other former top officials’ cases over- indictments filed

The Special Investigation Service (SIS) of Armenia has finished the preliminary investigation into the criminal cases connected with the incidents of March 1-2, 2008. The SIS assessed that there are sufficient evidences to file indictments against former President Robert Kocharyan, former Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia Seyran Ohanyan (later Defense Minister), former Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Khachaturov (later CSTO Secretary-General), and former Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Armen Gevorgyan.

As the SIS informed, Robert Kocharyan is charged under Part 1 of Article 300.1 and Point 2 of Part 4 of Article 311 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, which are overthrowing the Constitutional Order and taking bribes of particularly large amount.

Seyran Ohanyan is charged under is charged under Part 1 of Article 300.1, which is overthrowing the Constitutional Order.

Yuri Khachaturov is charged under Part 1 of Article 300.1, which is overthrowing the Constitutional Order.



Armen Gevorgyan is charged under Part 1 of Article 38-300.1, Point 2 of Part 4 of Article 311 and Point 1 of Part 3 of Article 190, which are complicity in overthrowing Constitutional Order, taking bribes of particularly large amount and legalization of property gained through criminal measures

Yerevan downplays U.S. reaction to Syria mission



A senior official in Yerevan insisted on February 14 that Armenia's relations with the United States will not deteriorate after Washington's negative reaction to the deployment of Armenian military personnel to Syria.

Commenting on the dispatch of 83 Armenian army medics, sappers and other servicemen to Syria last week, the U.S. State Department said on Wednesday that it does not support "any engagement with

Syrian military forces" or "any cooperation between Armenia and Russia for this mission."

"Russia has partnered with the Assad regime to slaughter civilians and trigger a humanitarian catastrophe," it said in a statement.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said later on Wednesday that it "took note of the statement." A ministry spokeswoman, Anna Naghdalyan, repeated the official line

that the Armenian deployment is "purely humanitarian."

Ruben Rubinyan, the pro-government chairman of the Armenian parliament committee on foreign relations, downplayed the U.S. reaction when he spoke to journalists the following day.

"I don't think that the statement by the U.S. State Department was very sharp," he said. "I think that our American partners understand the logic of our policy and our motives."

"Sending a team of specialists to Syria is very important for us because it is first of all aimed at ensuring the physical security of our [ethnic Armenian] compatriots living there and second of all the security of peoples living in Syria. So, this was not a geopolitical or political or military move. This is a purely humanitarian move," added Rubinyan.

The official announcement of the deployment coincided with talks held by Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu and his Armenian counterpart Davit Tonoyan in Moscow on February 8. Shoygu thanked Yerevan for its "humanitarian assistance" to Syria.

Armenia to continue partnership with NATO in existing formats – senior lawmaker



mentary diplomacy in the relations with the NATO. In this context Ruben Rubinyan said that the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations is ready to contribute to the active and effective implementation of the parliamentary partnership agendas with the NATO.

The sides also discussed the processes in Armenia aimed at the development of democracy and reform implementation. Rosaria Puglisi noted that the changes in Armenia will undoubtedly have positive impact on the region.

During the meeting the sides also referred to Nagorno Karabakh peace process. Ruben Rubinyan emphasized that Karabakh issue is not just a territorial dispute, but is about the implementation of the right to self-determination of the people of Artsakh.

The sides also highlighted the exclusion of militaristic rhetoric in the peace process, assessing it as an important step to show commitment to the settlement of the conflict.

Ruben Rubinyan and Rosaria Puglisi expressed readiness for a closer cooperation.

Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations of the National Assembly of Armenia Ruben Rubinyan received the Head of the NATO Liaison Office in the South Caucasus in the South Caucasus Rosaria Puglisi on February 15.

As the press service of the parliament

of Armenia informed, greeting the guest Ruben Rubinyan noted that partnership with the NATO is among Armenia's key foreign policy directions and that Armenia will continue the partnership with the organization in the existing formats.

The sides discussed the role of parlia-

Minister rules out gas price rise for Armenian consumers

Armenian consumers will not pay more this year for natural gas mostly imported from Russia despite a recent 10 percent increase in its wholesale price for Armenia, Energy Minister Garegin Baghramyan said on February 15.

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

Pashinyan, who also met with Putin in Moscow earlier in De-



cember, assured Armenians that the retail prices set by Armenia's Gazprom-owned gas distribution network will remain the same in 2019.

Baghramyan reaffirmed that pledge when he spoke to RFE/RL's Armenian service. "There

is an understanding that in 2019 that [10 percent price rise] will not affect the tariffs for consumers," he said, commenting on the government's ongoing negotiations with the Gazprom Armenia operator.

The minister said that the gas

distributor will offset its additional losses with cost cutting and other "optimization" of its activities. It will cut back on "unnecessary expenditures and investments," he added.

Gazprom Armenia has so far made no public statements to that effect. The company only said on January 7 that it will not ask Armenian utility regulators to raise the retail prices until its talks with the government are over.

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

From body armor to sniper rifles and UAVs, Armenia presents defense technologies at IDEX 2019 in Abu Dhabi



The Armenian military is participating at the [IDEX 2019](#) International Defense Exhibition and Conference in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

The Armenian Defense Ministry is pre-

sending its military production at the event.

According to the IDEX 2019 exhibitor list, the Armenian military will present the following 10 products at the exhibition:

- Electro-optic countermeasure system 3K01
- Pancratic sniper sight 3*9
- Sniper Rifle K-8
- Thermal imaging gunner sight for T72A tank
- Inductive mine detector RIA-1
- Bulletproof vest GS-47/0717
- Various types of reconnaissance UAVs, all in final stages of development, with proven technologies

- Military and tactical boots
- MJ-25 sectoral search semi-stationary VHF radar (Model 1:10)
- Microwave transistor amplifier for target detection HFAS-75G

Defense Minister of Armenia Davit Tonoyan has departed for Abu Dhabi to participate at the exhibition and conference.

Earlier in January, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Ruler of the Emirate of Dubai, [invited](#) Tonoyan to participate at IDEX 2019.

IMF ready to assist Armenian government on ensuring inclusiveness of economic growth



Minister of economic development and

investments Tigran Khachatryan met with the Armenia Mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led by Hossein Samiei.

The meeting aimed at discussing the Armenian government's Action Plan.

The IMF delegation members were interested in the Armenian government's vision in fight against corruption, challenges in improvement of social protection and business climate.

At the same time, the IMF expressed readiness to assist the Armenian government on ensuring an inclusive economic growth as stated in the Action Plan.

The minister introduced the guests on the ministry's future actions aimed at improving the business environment.

The sides agreed to continue the cooperation in accordance with the list of priorities to be developed by the Armenian government.

First Holiday Inn Express Hotel opens in Armenia



The first Holiday Inn Express Hotel, part of the world-famous IHG hotel chain, opened its doors in Armenia's capital Yerevan on February 15.



The investment program was implemented by Ghukas Grigoryan, Founder / President of Harmony International LLC. The construction lasted three years. About ten million dollars were invested, with 50 new jobs created.

The Holiday Inn Express has 130 rooms, a well-equipped conference room. There are computers, comfortable seats, chargers and high-speed Wi-Fi in the lobby.

The opening ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The Premier toured the premises to get acquainted with the work done and the amenities avail-



able in the hotel.

Nikol Pashinyan welcomed the implementation of the investment program and the initiative to build new hotels in Armenia as a whole, which provide tourists with



high-quality services and comfortable conditions.

In turn, Minister of Economic Development and Investments Tigran Khachatryan said that the number of tourists visiting Armenia reached 1.6 million in 2018, and added that the government's goal is to ensure 7-10% annual growth in the area.

Yerevan gets rid of prehistoric 'marshrutkas'

Yerevan will decommission 450 public minibuses, known as marshrutkas, from 2020, Mayor Hayk Marutyan told reporters on February 15.

The marshrutkas are Russian-made Gazel vans which lack modern safety requirements.

"The law envisages a 15-year commissioning of these minibuses. And only next year 450 minibuses will be de-commissioned from the network, when daily nearly 900 are serving Yerevan," he said.

The mayor says the City Hall is currently on the way of solving the problem.

"We are currently trying to urgently solve these issues. If we say that the new network will be ready in two years, it leaves us only to understand what we are going to do during these two years. There are several ways to solve the issue, we will take the most optimal solution," he said.



French enterprises eye Armenia, supercomputer center under discussion



Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia Tigran Avinyan held a meeting on February 14 with Gaelle Assayag, head of the Southern Caucasus office of the French Development Agency.

Ambassador of France to Armenia Jonathan Lacote was also in attendance, Avinyan's office said.

Avinyan noted that the economic cooperation between Armenia and France continues to deepen and expand and the French Development Agency's work in Armenia is additionally boosting mutually beneficial partnership. Assayag said the agency is ready to support the Armenian government in realizing its development

goals.

The Deputy PM noted that the inclusive growth model is the basis of the government's action plan, which implies also the distribution of additional resources for the development of infrastructures, education and healthcare, which will enable to achieve huge progress in the long-term perspective.

The sides pointed out the development of governance system capacity, infrastructures, agriculture, energy efficiency, tourism and urban development as important fields of bilateral cooperation.

The construction of the Vedi reservoir was discussed. It is being built by a 75 million Euro loan provided by the French Development Agency and co-financing of the government.

A 10 million Euro worth grant program on developing irrigation agriculture in Ararat and Armavir was also discussed. The project is under discussion between the agency and the government.

The French Ambassador said that recently French companies have increased interest for Armenia, particularly executives of Dassault Systèmes and THALES are expected to pay a visit to the country.

Scientific and academic cooperation was also discussed, namely issues related to constructing a new building of the French University of Armenia, further development of the French School, and creating a supercomputer center in cooperation of the Armenian Academy of Sciences and several universities of Toulouse.

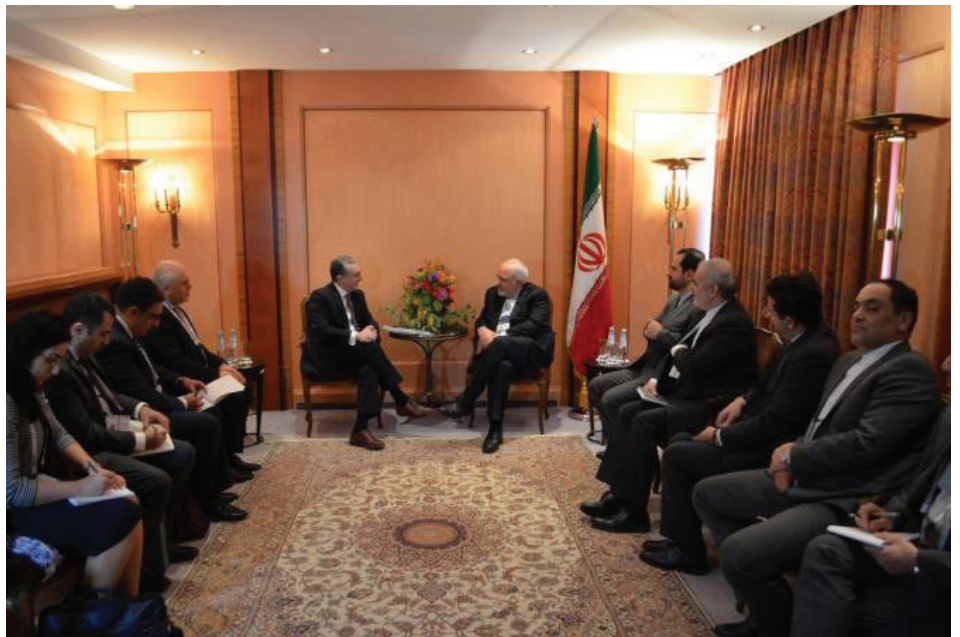
Armenian and Iranian foreign ministers discuss regional, international issues at MSC

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan has held a meeting on February 16 with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif during the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Mnatsakanyan and Zarif addressed a broad circle of issues related to the Armenian-Iranian relations, pointing out commercial, energy, transportation and tourism sectors as important directions for cooperation, according to a news release from the Armenian foreign ministry.

Both sides emphasized readiness to take steps for further development of bilateral relations.

The ministers attached importance to conducting regular contacts and meetings, and in this context emphasized the upcoming visit of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to Iran, which is a good chance to address the multi-sector bilateral cooperation and to outline joint steps.



A number of regional and international issues were also on the agenda.

FM Mnatsakanyan presented to FM Zarif

Armenia's approaches in the direction of the NK conflict settlement.

Turkey's Support of Terrorists in Syria Exposed in Secret Wiretaps

By Harut Sassounian

Turkish journalist Abdullah Bozkurt exposed in *The Investigative Journal* of the Stockholm Center for Freedom that “hundreds of secret wiretap records obtained from confidential sources in the Turkish capital of Ankara reveal how the Islamist government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has enabled — and even facilitated — the movement of foreign and Turkish militants across the Turkish border into Syria to fight alongside jihadists in the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS or Daesh).”

These secret documents revealed by Bozkurt “indicate that an implicit agreement existed between ISIS and Turkish security officials that allowed traffickers to operate freely on both sides of the porous 511-mile (822-kilometer) Turkish-Syrian border without repercussions from the Erdogan government. The agreement also permitted ISIS to run logistical lines across the border and to transport wounded fighters back into Turkey for medical treatment.”

At the helm of this sinister ISIS smuggling operation is a 36-year-old Saudi born Turk, Ilhami Bali, with the code name Abu Bakr. He facilitated and orchestrated “the movement of large numbers of foreign and local militants back and forth along the Turkish-Syrian border. ... Bali [also] moved goods across the border for ISIS, ranging from shoes and clothing to handcuffs, drone parts, binoculars, tents, a spotlight projector and even a boat. Additionally, the wiretaps show the Turkish government knew the names and locations of 33 Turkish nationals who pledged to work as drivers in ISIS’s smuggling network,” Bozkurt reported.

According to indictments filed by Turkish prosecutors, “Bali is accused of being the mastermind behind three deadly 2015 terrorist attacks in Turkey’s capital city, Ankara, that claimed the lives of 142 people. A year later, a criminal court issued another warrant for Bali’s arrest for his alleged role in a suicide bomb attack — the deadliest in Turkey’s history — on October 10, 2015 in Ankara. The explosion killed 105 civilians, including the two suicide bombers, as ISIS

militants targeted NGOs and the supporters of left-wing and pro-Kurdish parties, who were holding a peace rally outside the city’s main train station weeks ahead of the November 1, 2015 snap elections,” Bozkurt revealed. Although the Turkish authorities knew Bali’s exact location and Turkish courts issued several arrest warrants against him, the Erdogan government had let him roam freely between Turkey and Syria.

The wiretap records also indicated that ISIS had a hot line between the terrorists in Syria and Turkey. Bali monitored the phone calls and organized the transfer of militants from Turkey to Syria. In one wiretap, a Georgian militant named Lasha Nadirashvili told Bali that four jihadists were awaiting pickup at a shopping mall in Gaziantep, one hour drive from the Syrian border. Bali notified the jihadists the designated meeting place where he would pick them up and help them cross the border. In another wiretap, a Russian jihadist Oleksandr Pushchuk told Bali that 11 jihadists in Gaziantep were waiting to be picked up.

Bali was also heard on a wiretap giving a report to ISIS on the number of jihadists he had helped smuggle into Syria. “On average, in a single day at one crossing point, ISIS smuggles anywhere from 50 to more than 100 militants across the Turkish-Syrian border according to wiretaps, bringing yearly conservative estimates to well over 15,000 smuggled individuals,” Bozkurt wrote.

Another important service Bali provided for jihadists was their medical treatment at M.I.S. Danismanlik hospital in Ankara. One wiretap revealed a conversation between Bali and M.I.S. Danismanlik’s owner Savas Dogru regarding a \$62,000 payment for treating 16 ISIS militants. In another conversation, Dogru complained about unpaid bills of \$150,000 for surgeries to ISIS terrorists smuggled from Syria.

The wiretaps also implicated MIT (Turkish National Intelligence Organization) for helping jihadists evade the local police. Hakan Fidan, the head of MIT, is a close confidante of Pres. Erdogan. In 2014, MIT officers were caught at the border smuggling truck-loads of weapons for jihadists in Syria. The Turkish government quickly

released the MIT officers and charged with treason the reporter who disclosed the smuggled weapons.

In a recorded conversation between Bali and a Turkish soldier, Bali was told that he would get whatever he needed. The two agreed to ensure that there was no confrontation between ISIS and Turkish security guards.

Surprisingly, then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced on television that the government could not arrest suicide bombers until they acted, even though Turkey had advance warning and the list of names of potential suicide bombers. These suicide bombings in fact boosted Erdogan’s ruling party’s ratings in advance of the November 2015 Turkish parliamentary elections!

Bozkurt went on to state that there are serious questions regarding “cases involving ISIS, al-Qaeda and other armed jihadist groups [who] are being investigated, prosecuted, and tried in Turkey. The astonishingly low number of convictions in ISIS cases illustrates how the government is unwilling to successfully prosecute ISIS cases.”

Bozkurt correctly pointed out that Erdogan’s government uses draconian measures to arrest innocent journalists, human rights activists, academics and political opponents, but is very lenient on real terrorists: “The fact that, in many cases, detained ISIS and al-Qaeda members have been let go with a mere slap on the wrist can only be explained by the political cover and protection provided by the government.”

In my opinion, the European countries and the United States have to take strong measures to curtail Erdogan’s support of terrorists in Syria. It is strange that Turkey as a NATO member is aiding and arming terrorists who have been committing murders in several other NATO countries. This cannot be allowed to continue. Pres. Trump’s announced pull-out of American forces from Syria under the pretext that the Turkish military will continue the fight against ISIS is a dangerous decision which will give Turkey a free hand to strengthen the terrorists in Syria and elsewhere!

News from the Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator: Strengthening the Borderland and Protecting Wild Nature...

Streets in more borderland communities get outdoor illumination systems



For four years now the FPWC and VivaCell-MTS are successfully implementing "Alternative Energy" program in the village of Berdavan, Tavush region. The parties have implemented two projects of outdoor illumination in the village, installing lighting system along the roads to the village kindergarten, school, and other centers of community importance. The kindergarten and the musical school have also been provided with solar heating systems.

The two programs implemented since 2016 have helped the village get 202 LED lights illuminating a 6100 meter long area. 67 more LED lights have been installed recently, illuminating additional 2400 meter long section of roads.

The opening ceremony was attended by

VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph C. Yirikian, FPWC senior engineer, program coordinator Martin Maralchyan, head of Noyemberyan community Karen Abazyan, administrative head of Berdavan Smbat Mughdusyan and residents of the village.

"Hand in hand with our partners, we strive to implement programs, which solve several problems: those programs help provide the farther villages with modern infrastructures, help save funds, as well as energy, and show people the civilized approach in using natural resources. Problems will be solved faster if people learn to save what they have and look for efficient solutions. Our nature gives us an opportunity for that. In 2016 we joined our efforts to solve the problem of illumination on the central streets in Berdavan. We launched a solar heating system in the village school last year. Today we have installed lighting system for the secondary streets. But our greatest achievement will be when we see people reject consumeristic approaches," VivaCell-MTS General Manager Ralph



Yirikian said.

The implementation of energy saving systems in the communities helps to ease their financial burden, liven up community life, and solve the problem of street safety in the nighttime, which is crucial in borderland areas. Berdavan is one of those rare borderland villages, where the street lights stay on throughout the night. The LED lights are also important in keeping environment sustainably clean.

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

Another Caucasian leopard spotted by cameras in Armenia



The Caucasus Wildlife Refuge (CWR) has become a safe haven for the Caucasian leopard. The cameras located in the area have spotted the movements of the leopard for the third time in a row in January. This is another proof that the habitat is safe and there is enough food for this large feline which caught the interest of biologists and wildlife advocates.

The trap camera footages of the leopard and other wild animals provide important information to analyze and evaluate the conservation work done so far aimed at

protecting the area against any negative impact.

Starting from 2011, the FPWC foundation with the support of VivaCell-MTS and British World Land Trust is undertaking clear steps towards the protection of nature and preservation of biodiversity in Armenia. The modern trap cameras purchased with the support of VivaCell-MTS provide the necessary monitoring tools for biodiversity. With the help of those cameras it was possible to track a number of rare animals 24 hours a day, seven days a week: bezoar goats, brown bears, bearded vultures, as well as common species such as boars, foxes and wolves were spotted.

The recently obtained footage is especially important. The location is not revealed though in order to prevent possible poaching and illegal hunting.

Within the last 8 years, the CWR is being protected by FPWC against poaching, logging and negative human impact. From this perspective, the cooperation both with the

Ministry of Nature Protection on a state level, with international partners, as well as within local environmental organizations working in the field is of crucial importance.

Remote and bordering communities also play a vital role in preserving the leopard. This species is migratory and passes hundreds of kilometers in one day. Communities, which realize the importance and role of this majestic feline, can have a major impact and support for the conservation of the species.

The CWR is a safe corridor for a number of different species. For instance a major increase of Bezoar goats was recorded recently by cameras located in the area, which is another crucial factor as the existence of leopards is based on the availability of its prey. According to existing data, was possible to track only 3-5 leopards through trap cameras it in the whole territory of Armenia.

Portantino Introduces Bill to Re-Establish the California-Armenia Trade Office



SACRAMENTO—Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D – La Canada Flintridge) introduced SB 302 to reestablish the California-Armenia Trade Office on February 14.

In 2005, the original trade office was established through legislation authored by former State Senator Jack Scott, the Schwarzenegger Administration later terminated it in 2008. Senator Portantino and co-authors Senator Scott Wilk, Senator Henry Stern, Senator Scott Wiener, Senator Melissa Hurtado and Assemblymember Autumn Burke and Assemblymember Evan Low hope to build a vibrant business relationship between California and Armenia. Several of these co-authors attended the September Tech Trade trip to Armenia.

Through this legislation, Senator Portantino hopes to capitalize on the trade trip's positive momentum with establishing the trade office. California is home to one of the largest Armenian populations outside of the capitol Yerevan, Armenia. The 25th Senate District represented by Portantino has the largest Armenian population of any state legislative district in the country.

"There is so much excitement and optimism in Armenia under the leadership of Prime Minister Pashinyan and in California under Governor Newsom that we should capitalize on the moment and formalize a positive economic relationship with Yerevan. I was a young politician sitting in the audience when the Jack Scott Bill was signed and I am very pleased to be in a position to help bring it back," commented Portantino.

"We were pleased to host Senator Portantino, Senator Stern, Assemblymember Low and Assemblymember Burke on a legislative trade study trip to Armenia a few months ago and to show them first-hand how Armenia has progressed in such a positive way. We are grateful to them for recognizing the potential that a new California-Armenia Trade Office can bring both for American entrepreneurship and for the Armenian economy, and we look forward to continuing to work with them and the State to advance this important initiative," said Nora Hovsepien, the chairperson of the Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region.

"For years, the ANCA-WR has been advocating for the re-opening of the Trade Office first with Governor Brown and more recently with Governor Newsom and has received assurances that it will be re-established soon. Senator Portantino's welcome introduction of SB302 will help to ensure that this happens. As the fifth largest economy in the world and home to the largest Armenian Diaspora Community, California is uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in Armenia's progress and economic development, and the ANCA-WR remains committed to use the resources at its disposal to help accomplish this goal," added Hovsepien.

Consul General Dr. Armen Baibourtian and Glendale Mayor Zareh Sinanyan joined

Senator Portantino in Sacramento to introduce SB 302. Dr. Armen Baibourtian made his first trip to the State Capitol while serving his second term as Consul General representing Armenia in Glendale. On Friday, he will be formally recognized on the State Senate and the State Assembly floor.

"This is truly an important development for both California and Armenia. We have long-wanted to reestablish the trade office and are very grateful to Senator Portantino and his colleagues for authoring this promising proposal. I know it will be well-received by the Armenian Community in California and business and political leaders in Yerevan," added Consul General Baibourtian.

In September, Portantino, Stern, Sinanyan and the ANCA completed a tech trade trip to Yerevan and Guymri. The trip was Portantino's second trip to Armenia. Attending Senators and Assemblymembers were introduced to the many facets of the Armenia tech and education communities in Armenia's two largest cities. The goal of the trip was to strengthen economic ties between California and Armenia. During his first term in the Senate, Portantino established the Senate Select Committee on California, Armenia and Artsakh Mutual Trade, Art and Cultural Exchange. Establishing the trade office is a natural extension of these efforts.

"Our community in California is igniting a renewed optimism toward the Armenian economy, something Senator Portantino witnesses first-hand. We are lucky to have him championing and fostering this formalization effort. Now, the responsibility falls upon all of us to ensure its success. I am confident that the trade offices will lead to mutual economic and social benefit," commented Mayor Sinanyan.

SB 302 seeks to establish the trade office under the umbrella of Go Biz, the official economic development arm of the Governor's Office. The legislation calls for the trade office to be funded by private funding. Before funds can be raised, the office needs formal designation and creation. On Thursday, that effort took its first giant step.

"We are excited to be part of this effort. The wonderful entrepreneurial spirit of Armenian Americans has a new avenue to pursue success. It is truly exciting times in California and in Armenia," concluded Senator Scott Wilk.

Turkish scholar to speak about Armenian Genocide denial at USC



On Friday, March 22, Professor Taner Akcam (Clark University), will deliver a public lecture at the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research, co-sponsored by the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies. The lecture is co-sponsored by the two organizations, the Armenian Mirror-Spectator reports.

A unique feature of the Armenian Genocide has been the long-standing efforts of successive Turkish governments to deny

its historicity and to hide the documentary evidence surrounding it. Denialists have claimed that there was no central decision taken by Ottoman authorities to exterminate the Armenians and that all available documents that indicate otherwise are either fake or were doctored by Armenians. In this lecture, Professor Taner Akcam will explore how his latest research provides a major clarification of the often-blurred lines between facts and truth with regard to these events.

Akcam both brings to light documents either hidden or destroyed by the Turkish government that contain the killing orders, and demonstrates the authenticity of these orders, which had been signed by Ottoman Interior Minister Talat Pasha. He will introduce this new evidence and the online archive he has developed to provide the

public access to these documents.

Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies at Clark University, Akcam is widely recognized as one of the first Turkish scholars to write extensively on the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide of the Armenians in the early 20th century.

He is the author of more than ten scholarly works as well as numerous articles in Turkish, German, and English on the Armenian Genocide and Turkish nationalism. His most known books, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (Metropolitan Books, 2006) and *Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2012) have received several awards.

Armenia to host the prestigious Summit of Minds in June



Armenia will host the prestigious Summit of Minds in June, the President's Press Office reports.

This will mark the first time the summit is held outside Chamonix, France.

Dubbed "Armenian Summit of Minds" the event will take place in Yerevan and Dilijan on June 7-9.

The Monthly Barometer analytical newsletter will be the general partner of the summit.

An agreement on organizing the event in Armenia was reached in September 2018, when Armenian President Armen Sarkisian was invited to participate in the summit as keynote speaker.

Every year the Summit of Minds brings together 300 politicians, scholars, businessmen and investors, heads of largest companies and media outlets from around the

world.

The event aims to inspire guests with tangible outcomes and see them walk away from the Summit of Minds with at least a new idea, a new friend and a new project.

The Armenian Summit of Minds will mainly focus on "Regional geopolitics, economy and investments: The impact of multipolarity on trade and investment flows."

The summit is a unique opportunity for Armenia to present its potential, develop cooperation in new directions and establish business ties.

Alzheimer's Disease Training Academy Certification Program launched in Armenia

The Armenian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Alzheimer's Care Armenia have partnered with Silverado and the Alzheimer's Disease Association of Armenia to create a 9-month Alzheimer's Disease Training Academy Certification Program.

The program is designed to assist in educating Social Workers, Primary Care Physicians, Nurses, Caregivers, and Psychologists. This program covers understanding the disease, its progression, and treatment as well as understanding the behaviors of a person with dementia along with communication techniques to help lessen

the friction caused by this disease.

Alzheimer's Care Armenia's mission is to raise awareness and offer solutions for care and treatment of people with Alzheimer's disease in Armenia.

Alzheimer's Care Armenia was founded in 2017 by Dr. Jane L. Mahakian. Alzheimer's Care Armenia is a registered nonprofit organization in the State of California and is a registered NGO in 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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Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

You are entering a new phase of attention which will continue through mid-April. Issues of money and resources, or matters of personal values will be prominent as motivators. Be aware of the temptation to overly identify with things that you deem important, whether it is a material object or an idea. Do not confuse your individual identity with these things of the world



Leo (July 22–August 21)

You want to do things your own way this week. There is no blame in that. It will help your relationships if you explain your need to be independent without seeming critical of the Others in your life. By the end of the week your attention will change focus to organizing your estate and planning for the financial future.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Jupiter is your planetary avatar. It is amazing that He has no aspects this week, when there is so much traffic among the other planets. You may be relaxed and unscathed by events, while you watch others run back and forth. Enjoy!



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

Mars, the warrior, enters your sign this week and will be traveling with you for seven weeks. This energy is especially helpful in defining our boundaries. Periodically we need to examine who we are as well as who we are not. Often something is eliminated. In general, it increases your courage and physical strength.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

You may have more than one experience of déjà vous or odd coincidences during this week. They are likely to be experienced with your partner (business or personal) or through his/her interactions with others. Don't ignore anything which seems meaningful. The information may serve you later.



(December 21–January 19)

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



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Please read the lead paragraph carefully. Your planetary ruler is Mercury and it is making four septiled aspects this week. Watch and listen carefully for subtle cues about what is going on around and within you. The general area of activity is career and life direction. Septiled aspects are easy to miss, but enormously gratifying if you follow the pointers.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

It is common for you to need to curl up on the sofa with a good book or movie during February every year. Librans give of themselves a lot during the winter holidays. Even though you are a normally a people person, it is important to pull yourself together and be still now. The middle of winter may be the only time you have a break in the whole year. Enjoy!



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

You are likely finishing one or two projects at this time while the Sun is in the last few days of your sign. The closure date is February 18, 2019. Then you will turn your attention to working more in the background. It likely will be a relief.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Your heart and mind may be in conflict over just how to proceed with your next projects. This is a good time to reorganize drawers, closets, or maybe your desk. The act of putting clutter into order will clear your mind and then the solution is likely to surface.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Your partner may take on an uncharacteristic manner of self-assertion. He or she is not so likely to back down from a fight. Life will be generally more harmonious if you stay off the hot topics. If it is important to tackle them, seek a counselor, a trusted friend, or a negotiator to keep things fair.

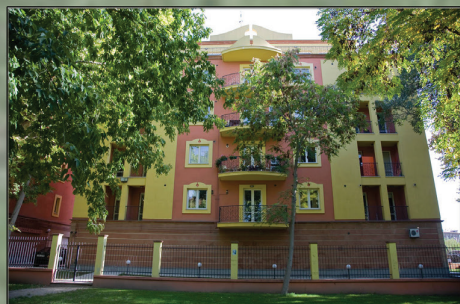


Pisces (February 18–March 19)

You are likely finishing one or two projects at this time while the Sun is in the last few days of your sign. The closure date is February 18, 2019. Then you will turn your attention to working more in the background. It likely will be a relief.

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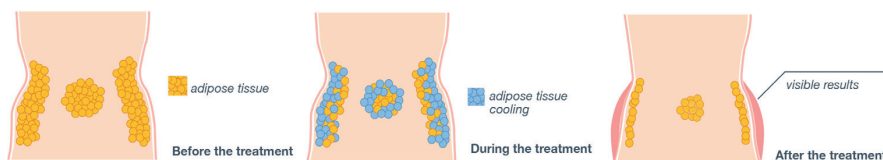
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