

Armenia PM's bloc wins landslide victory in snap election



Armenian acting prime minister Nikol Pashinyan votes during an early parliamentary election in Yerevan, Armenia, on December 9, 2018. / Reuters / see page 3

Fitch affirms Armenia at 'B+', outlook positive

p. 7

Interview with T. Mazejian

p. 8

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator: Housewarming as an Outcome of Partnership

p. 9

An interview with third-time Grammy nominee Constantine Orbelian

p.p. 12-13

Armenian, Spanish FMs discuss broad range of bilateral cooperation issues

Armenia's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation Josep Borrell Fontelles held a meeting within the framework of the 25th ministerial council of the OSCE in Milan, Italy.

During the meeting a broad circle of agenda issues of bilateral cooperation was discussed, the ministry said.

Both sides attached importance to holding regular consultations between the foreign ministries and organizing high level mutual visits.

Mnatsakanyan and Borrell expressed readiness to boost the Armenian-Spanish cooperation



through joint efforts, and pointed out the commercial, energy and infrastructure sectors as priority directions.

In the context of enriching the bilateral agenda, the sides

attached importance to the creative education and high-tech sector and implementing exchange of experience.

The Armenian-EU partnership was also addressed.

Mnatsakanyan stressed the importance of CEPA in terms of developing bilateral and multilateral relations with EU members. He also said that CEPA is an important tool for boosting the reforms process in Armenia.

The Armenian FM addressed the latest developments in the country and stressed the Armenian government's commitment for ensuring an international-standard electoral process.

Mnatsakanyan also briefed his Spanish counterpart on Armenia's stance and approach regarding the NK conflict settlement, noting that Artsakh's security and status are priorities for Armenia.

Armenian, Azeri FMs in fresh talks

The foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan have held fresh negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which they both described as "useful."

Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Elmar Mammadyarov met in Milan on December 5 for a third time in five months.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said afterwards that the two men engaged in a "useful exchange of views" in the presence of U.S., Russian and French mediators co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group.

"I think that the negotiations, which lasted for three hours, were important and useful in terms of better understanding the parties' positions," Mammadyarov said, for his part.

The Trend news agency also quoted Mammadyarov as saying that he and Mnatsakanyan will likely meet again next month. The Armenian Foreign Ministry likewise said the two ministers agreed to "continue their meetings soon" and thus "maintain the current dynamic" of the negotiating process.

Their latest talks came over two months after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Ali-



yev briefly spoke with each other on sidelines of a summit of ex-Soviet states held in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. Pashinyan said they agreed to stop ceasefire violations in the conflict zone, including by launching direct communication links.

The Minsk Group co-chairs noted a significant drop in such violations after visiting Baku, Stepanakert and Yerevan last month. In a joint statement, they praised the con-

flicting parties for "implementing constructive measures in good faith" and voiced support for Aliyev's and Pashinyan's "readiness to continue their dialogue."

Visiting Yerevan in late October, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton said Washington hopes Pashinyan will take "decisive steps" to help resolve the Karabakh conflict after his likely victory in Armenia's December 9 parliamentary elections.

European observers praise Armenia's 'democratic' elections

Observers representing the leading pan-European organizations on December 10 described the weekend parliamentary elections in Armenia as democratic, saying that they witnessed virtually no serious irregularities.

The more than 300 observers mostly deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) gave the most positive assessment ever by a Western-led monitoring mission of major elections held in the South Caucasus nation.

In a joint statement, they said the snap polls won by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step alliances enjoyed "broad public trust" and were marked by a "general absence of electoral malfeasance, including of vote buying and pressure on voters."

"Election day proceeded calmly and peacefully with all stages assessed positively by almost all [mission] observers, indicating general adherence to the procedures," read the statement.

"The vote count was assessed positively in all but two polling stations observed, indicating that the counting process was conduct-



ed without significant procedural violations," it added.

"I congratulate the Armenian people," Aleksander Pociej, the head of a delegation of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) that was part of the monitoring mission.

"[Armenia's] 2018 peaceful 'velvet' revolution, in conjunction with the political will of the current authorities, enabled the holding of democratic elections," Pociej told a joint news conference with the other mission chiefs.

"Democracy cannot proceed without trust, so I am pleased that broad public trust was the central characteristic of this election,"

said Peter Osusky, who led 250 or so short-term observers deployed by the OSCE.

Heidi Hautala, a European Parliament member, likewise stated that there were "minimum irregularities" in Sunday's vote, unlike in the previous Armenian parliamentary elections that were held in April 2017 and also monitored by her.

A similar OSCE-led mission cited at the time "credible information about vote-buying and pressure on civil servants and employees of private companies." The then ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) was widely accused of resorting to the illegal

practices.

"Positively, electoral stakeholders did not report any systematic efforts of vote-buying and other electoral malfeasance," the European observers said this time around.

In their preliminary findings, they also praised Armenian media coverage of the parliamentary race. They said local broadcasters, who remain the main source of information for voters, "made a visible effort to cover all electoral contestants."

"The public television provided a reasonably balanced coverage," said their statement. "Positively, a number of media, including the public television, organized genuine debates, bringing together candidates from all the contestants."

The HHK claimed throughout the election campaign that its activists across the country are summoned by police officials and warned against telling people to vote for the former ruling party. Urszula Gacek, the head of the European monitoring mission, said her observers were aware of the alleged harassment but found no evidence of it.

Armenia PM's bloc wins landslide victory in snap election

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his allies looked set to gain a two-thirds majority in Armenia's new parliament as they cruised to victory in snap general elections held on Sunday.

According to the preliminary election results released by the Central Election Commission (CEC) early on Monday, Pashinyan's My Step alliance won over 70 percent of the vote.

The strong performance highlighted Pashinyan's continuing popularity more than seven months after mass protests led by the 43-year-old former journalist toppled the country's longtime leader, Serzh Sargsyan. The protests were sparked by Sargsyan's attempt to extend his decade-long

rule.

Businessman Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) finished a distant second with 8.4 percent of the vote. It was followed by the pro-Western Bright Armenia Party, which got 6.4 percent.

Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) apparently failed to clear a 5 percent legal vote threshold for being represented in the National Assembly. They got 4.6 percent and 3.9 percent of the vote respectively, according to the CEC.

The HHK, which won the last parliamentary elections held as recently as in April 2017, did not

immediately say whether it recognizes the percentage of votes attributed to it.

The six other contenders fared even worse.

Nikol Pashinyan declared his victory in the elections shortly after midnight. "It is obvious that we will have an absolute majority in new parliament, which will allow us to implement our reform agenda," he told a news conference held at the My Step headquarters in Yerevan. "There is no doubt that our alliance ... enjoys the trust of the Armenian people."

Under Armenian law, no single party or bloc can control more than two-thirds of the parliament seats. Such a comfortable majority will be more than enough for

Pashinyan to retain his post and push government bills through the parliament.

Pashinyan said his chief priority will be to bring about an "economic revolution" that would significantly reduce poverty, create many jobs and thus raise living standards in the country. He repeatedly made such pledges during the election campaign, saying that his government's efforts to combat corruption and improve the business environment will improve the socioeconomic situation.

The CEC put voter turnout at 48.6 percent, down from about 61 percent reported in the last parliamentary elections held in April 2017.

Pashinyan, Aliyev hold another conversation

Armenia's Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held another conversation on the sidelines of an informal CIS Summit held on December 6 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Pashinyan discussed the conversation with reporters saying that the discussion centered around exchange of captives—or prisoners of war—for which Baku has proposed an even exchange of prisoners being held captives on both sides.

“We didn’t reach an agreement, but we will continue discussions,” Pashinyan told reporters on Thursday.

“As you know, they [Azerbaijan] have proposed the ‘all for all’ principle, but we have a problem here. We must discuss it also with the Artsakh authorities. We have also talked about the previous episodes of the negotiations process,” added Pashinyan. He was referring to a similar conversation the two had on the sidelines of a CIS Summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in November, when they agreed to set up communications mechanism between the two and pledged to significantly curtail cross border attacks.



The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmen, meeting with Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers on Thursday in Milan hailed the sides’ adherence to the Dushanbe agreement by pointing out the significant drop in cross-border incidents.

As for the prisoner exchange, the authori-

ties in Artsakh have unequivocally rejected Baku’s “all for all” proposal, citing that two of the prisoners identified by Azerbaijan are currently serving sentences in Artsakh for murder after a court there found them guilty of killing civilians once they crossed into Artsakh territory.

U.S. congratulates Armenia on general election, looks forward to work with new parliament, government

This year has been a time of remarkable change in Armenia, the U.S. State Department said in a press release on the early elections of parliament that were held on December 9.

“The United States congratulates the people of Armenia on the conduct of their December 9 parliamentary elections. We welcome the assessment by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights that Armenia’s parliamentary elections were competitive and that candidates were able to campaign freely. The United States concurs with the OSCE’s preliminary conclusions that the elections process enjoyed broad public trust and respected fundamental freedoms. We encourage the authorities to address OSCE and Venice Commission recommendations for future elections.

This year has been a time of remarkable change in Armenia. For 27 years, the United States has sought to support the development of democratic processes and institutions in Ar-



menia, and we will continue to do so.

We look forward to working with the new Armenian Parliament and Government to deepen our bilateral partnership and cooperation to strengthen the rule of law and demo-

cratic institutions, combat corruption, promote trade and investment, and safeguard regional and global security”, deputy spokesperson of the Department of State Robert J. Palladino said in the press release.

No alternative to peaceful settlement of NK conflict, Armenia says at OSCE Ministerial Council

Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan delivered remarks at the 25th OSCE Ministerial Council session.

Below is the transcript of the minister's speech, as reported by the ministry.

"Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I also want to thank our Italian colleagues and the Chairman-in-Office, Minister Milanesi, for their able leadership of the Organization throughout the year.

Mr. Chairman, this is a special year for Armenia. The victory of the peaceful Velvet Revolution in May manifested the decisive resolve of the Armenian public to embrace progress and reforms aimed at fighting corruption, strengthening the justice system and the rule of law, consolidating democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The public protests in Armenia and their outcome have demonstrated the strength of our public, its institutions, the civil society and their evolution to a considerably high level of political maturity and legal literacy. Of particular significance is the distinctly strong role of the youth and women, who stood at the forefront of the Revolution.

In three days, we will hold early parliamentary elections. The Armenian people will be guaranteed to make a genuinely free choice. This is our firm and unwavering political will. In line with our commitments and to ensure transparency of the electoral process the Armenian Government has invited relevant international organization, including the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to observe the elections. Mr. Chairman, 30 years ago the people of Nagorno-Karabakh stood up in a renewed struggle against historical injustice and for self-determination, human dignity and freedom. The rejection to acknowledge these basic human rights and the use of force against their peaceful aspirations is the root cause of the conflict. The existential threat to the security and lives of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh is the root cause of the conflict. For three decades the people of Nagorno-Karabakh have been resolute in building life and institutions in dignity and resisting atrocities, coercion and aggression from Azerbaijan. The continuation of the coercive policies, the use of force and the threat of use of force by Azerbaijan prolong the resolution of the conflict, incurring further sufferings on



all peoples of the region. There is no alternative to the peaceful and negotiated settlement. The illusions of making gains under the barrel of the gun are doomed to failure. The new government of Armenia has firmly reiterated its commitment to the exclusively peaceful resolution of the conflict under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship. The political transformation in Armenia has not affected the peace process and in the past seven months we have been engaged in a dynamic way in meetings and discussions. During the meeting between the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan at the end of September in Dushanbe practical agreements were reached on reducing risks of escalation, consolidating ceasefire and the establishment of an operational direct line between the sides.

Yesterday I had a meeting with my Azerbaijani colleague for the third time in six months. We came up with a joint statement together with the heads of delegations of the co-chair countries. It is encouraging indeed that we managed to agree on a common text. It reiterates the importance of the implementation of the understanding reached in Dushanbe to work intensively to further reduce tensions in the conflict zone and prepare the populations for peace. An atmosphere conducive to peace is essential for the process of negotiations. The Dushanbe arrangements as well as the implementation of the previous agreements on confidence building measures will make a tangible contribution in this regard. Gen-

uine efforts to prepare the populations for peace on all sides of the conflict and abandoning bellicose rhetoric and hate speech are as significant. Risk reduction measures need to be strongly supported by all OSCE participating States. Sale and delivery of offensive weaponry promotes the use of force and the threat of it. The involved participating States should reconsider their practices. What some may claim as business is a weapon of death to our people. The status and security of Nagorno-Karabakh are at the core of the conflict and thus of its resolution. Mr. Chairman, In three days, on 9 December the world will mark the 70th anniversary of the UN Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In March this year the UN Human Rights Council unanimously adopted a resolution on genocide prevention, initiated by Armenia. In 2015 at our initiative the UN General Assembly proclaimed 9 December as an International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. Mr. Chairman, We have initiated a respective Declaration with the delegation of Cyprus on the 70th anniversary of the Convention and we hope that the opportunity is still not lost for this body to express the resolve of the OSCE in support of this Convention, which remains as relevant as ever. Mr. Chairman, In conclusion I would like to welcome Slovakia as the incoming Chair and wish them every good luck and our support.

Thank you."

IMF: Armenia's macroeconomic performance satisfactory

Armenia's macroeconomic performance has been satisfactory, and the financial system has been stable, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) says.

"Armenia's banking sector has weathered the 2014 economic slowdown, aided by additional capital injected by shareholders, several mergers, and improved regulation and supervision. At present, financial soundness indicators show signs of improvement," the IMF said Executive Board concluded during a November 30th discussed the Financial System Stability Assessment (FSSA) of Armenia.

"Bank profitability has gradually recovered, although it is still below pre-crisis levels. Non-performing loans (NPLs) have fallen, of which a substantial proportion is covered by provisions, although NPL ratios are still high in a few banks," the IMF said.

It added that since the 2012 FSAP the Cen-



tral Bank of Armenia has made progress in strengthening Armenia's financial system. The CBA has adopted measures to mitigate risks from dollarization.

"Higher risk-weights and provisioning were imposed on dollar assets to absorb the credit risk due to unhedged borrowing. Liquidity requirements were introduced in 2012 to mitigate the higher liquidity risk of foreign exchange funding. At the same time, the CBA has pur-

sued an ambitious agenda to strengthen financial oversight, which includes adopting a risk-based supervision framework and addressing gaps in the regulatory framework identified in the previous FSAP," the Fund stated.

Executive Directors agreed with the main findings and recommendations of the Financial System Stability Assessment (FSSA). They welcomed the progress made by the authorities in strengthening financial sector oversight and promoting financial deepening to further enhance financial sector resilience.

Directors commended the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) for the reforms undertaken since the 2012 FSAP review, notably in adopting the prudential measures to mitigate risks from dollarization and upgrading the risk based supervision framework. They encouraged the authorities to prioritize reforms, recognizing capacity constraints.

Armenia second largest exporter of diamonds in CIS: study

Business Armenia has released a marketing package presenting investment opportunities in the jewelry sector. According to the research included in the package, Armenia is the second largest exporter of diamonds in the CIS region.

Last year, more than 50% of Armenian jewelry industry production was exported to Switzerland. The sector accounts for 13% of the country's total exports. The jewelry production increased by 36% in 2017 alone and the average annual growth of diamonds processing was more than 50% between 2014 and 2017.

Among the incentives in the jewelry industry is VAT discharge for import and sale of gold and precious stones, no VAT for sale of unfinished gold jewelry as well as the existence of a free economic zone for the companies operating in jewelry, watch-making and diamond cutting industries.

The package is addressed to foreign investors and is presented under "Select Armenia" brand with "Make your move, Select Armenia" slogan.

Postage dedicated to 30th anniversary of Spitak earthquake cancelled



A postage stamp dedicated to the theme "Earthquake of Spitak" was cancelled and put into circulation by "HayPost" CJSC in the premises of Gyumri Municipality on December 7.

The postage stamp with a nominal value of 230 AMD is printed in "Cartor" printing house in France with the print-run of 30 000 pcs. The author of the stamp's design is the chief designer of "HayPost" CJSC Vahagn Mkrtchyan.

The postage stamp depicts the collage of the scenes from the devastating earthquake of December 7, 1988. The scenes include demolished buildings, rescue works and the clock of the Independence Square of Gyumri that shows the time of the earthquake.

The official cancellation ceremony was held in the presence of the Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan.

The postage stamp was cancelled by the Acting Minister of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies of the Republic of Armenia Hakob Arshakyan, the Acting Minister of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia Feliks Tsovakyan, the Mayor of Gyumri Samvel Balasanyan, the Chairman of the Board of "HayPost" company Juan Pablo Gechidjian.

The 1988 devastating earthquake in the northern regions Armenia claimed the lives of almost 25 thousand people and left thousands without shelter.

PRESS OFFICE OF THE
GOVERNMENT OF ARMENIA
www.gov.am

Fitch affirms Armenia at 'B+', outlook positive

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Armenia's Long-Term Foreign- and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) at 'B+' with a Positive Outlook.

According to Fitch, Armenia's ratings balance a credible monetary policy framework and stronger income per capita and governance indicators relative to peers against high public and external debt and tense relations with some neighbouring countries.

The Positive Outlook reflects Armenia's stronger growth outlook relative to peers, the start of a fiscal consolidation process that Fitch expects will deliver a gradual decline in government debt over the medium term, and institutions that have underpinned macroeconomic and financial stability through a period of significant political change.

The fiscal deficit in 2018 is on track to be better than budgeted, and well below the current peer median, due to an under-execution of spending. Fitch projects the state budget deficit to decline to 2.2% of GDP (4.3% current peer median) from 4.8% in 2017, and a target of 2.7%.

The new government is reviewing spending across all areas to understand its structure and pinpoint inefficiencies, which has slowed execution. Fitch expects a widening of the deficit to 2.6% of GDP in 2019 and 2020, slightly above the 2.2% and 2.3% government projections, reflecting our expectation of slower revenue growth and faster execution of expenditure.

Fitch projects a small primary surplus in 2018 and a broadly balanced position in 2019 and 2020, supporting a gradual decline in public debt. General government debt/GDP is forecast to fall to 56.2% at end-2020 from 58.9% at end-2017, compared with a current 'B' me-



dian of 60.5%. Debt is exposed to exchange rate risks; at end-October 2018 80.8% of government debt was foreign-currency denominated.

"The political transition that began with large-scale public protests and forced the resignation of the prime minister earlier in the year looks set for completion, following the scheduling of snap legislative elections for 9 December," Fitch said.

According to the report, "The coalition headed by Nikol Pashinyan, the figurehead of the protest movement, appears on course for a parliamentary majority, which will smooth the implementation of an agenda that is focussed on fighting corruption and tackling the monopolies and vested interests associated with the previous administration."

Fitch notes that the transition process has been peaceful and in line with constitutional mechanisms. Governance indicators, as measured by the World Bank, are slightly better than the current peer median.

S&P Global Ratings assigns Ameriabank 'B+/B' with stable outlook

The reputable US-based S&P Global Ratings has assigned Ameriabank 'B+/B' long- and short-term issuer credit ratings with stable outlook. Ameriabank is the first Armenian company rated by S&P Global Ratings. So far, S&P Global Ratings has not assigned a sovereign rating to the Republic of Armenia.

According to S&P Global Ratings, the Armenian sovereign's creditworthiness reflects a constraint on the ratings on Ameriabank. Meaning that Ameriabank's stand-alone credit profile (SACP) rated 'bb-' is one notch higher than its final 'B+' long-term rating.

Ameriabank's creditworthiness reflects the bank's position as the largest bank in Armenia, and S&P Global Ratings' expectation that it will maintain its leading position in the market and its capitalization will strengthen over the next 24 months, supported by stable profits.

The stable outlook over rating horizon of the next 12 months reflects S&P Global Rat-



ings' prediction that the bank's business and financial profiles will remain stable, supported by its solid market position and improving economic prospects in Armenia.

S&P Global Ratings expects the banking system in Armenia to be stable, with no apparent market distortions. The trend for industry risk is also considered to be stable.

In the rating, the agency sees credit risk as a weakness for the Armenian banking sector, taking into consideration much higher than peers' average level of loans in foreign currency, in particular to unhedged retail borrowers and companies, and still-developing judicial and legal systems. S&P Global Ratings consider the economic risk trend for the banking sector in Armenia as stable.

S&P Global Ratings also says that Ameriabank has reported good profitability over the past six years, with an average return on assets of 1.4%. The bank's cost-to-income ratio was 40% at year-end 2017, comparing well with that of local and international peers.

In S&P Global Ratings' view Ameriabank is well positioned to retain its leading market positions in Armenia, in light of the favorable and improving macroeconomic environment, and supported by its professional management team and a wealthy controlling shareholder with significant experience in banking and the financial sector.

Thomas Mazejian, PMI Armenia Chapter founder and president: “Our Mission is to Promote Project Management as a Profession in Armenia by Helping to Increase the Awareness of Organizations and the Academia”

-Mr Mazejian, can you describe what the mission of PMI Armenia Chapter is?

PMI Armenia Chapter was founded in 2016 and is the local Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI). The Project Management Institute is the world's leading not-for-profit professional membership association for the project, program and portfolio management profession. Founded in 1969, PMI delivers value for more than 2.9 million professionals working in nearly every country in the world through global advocacy, collaboration, education and research. The mission of PMI Armenia Chapter is “To support the growth and development of project management practitioners; as well as build awareness of the project management

a daytime job and it is extra work for you with no financial gains?

I have been asked this question many times over. My answer will be that if you are passionate about anything in life, then you will always find the time and the motivation for it. For me project management is my passion, among other things, and I consider my contribution to improving the project management profession in Armenia.

-What were the main activities that the chapter has done over this year?

We organize a monthly seminar which our community members present different topics related to project management and share their experiences. This monthly seminar is very useful for learning

untee can expect to face? How can these challenges be overcome?

The biggest challenge for a new volunteer can be to find a suitable role within PMI. The first few months for a new PMI volunteer are a honeymoon period — he or she is well taken care of by chapters and his or her role is usually well-defined. After the assignment is complete however, the volunteer may face a period of uncertainty during which they may not be able to identify a more permanent role within PMI. My advice is, as a new volunteer you have to be more aggressive in looking out for volunteer opportunities beyond your current role. It also helps if you reach out to more people and expand your network within PMI. Finally, stay connected with PMI and be



discipline and its critical role in business and organization success.” Thus our mission is to promote project management as a profession in Armenia by helping to increase the awareness of organizations and the academia. This is done 100% by volunteers who are contributing back by building a strong community of project managers. In Armenia the chapter is registered as an NGO with no office as there are no staff.

-You mentioned about academia, how do you intend to promote project management to the academia?

Currently we have worked with several universities with the aim of introducing Master's in Project Management and engaging the master's students with the community. This will allow university students to network and interact with the community, thus helping them to gain experience. Moreover PMI has a foundation known as PMI Educational Foundation (PMIEF). There are tons of free non-commercial use resources which can be used to teach project management to children from the age of 8 to 16. PMI believes that project management knowledge is a mandatory for everybody.

-What was your motivation to form a chapter in Armenia, taking into consideration that you have

from the experience of others and network with professionals coming from different domains. We also organized a cheese and wine by the poolside, which was for networking. Moreover we have organized our biggest event on 02-Nov-2018 the Project Management Annual Conference. This was a full day event and more than 300 participants. The opening ceremony kicked off with Mr. Emil Tarasyan who delivered the speech on behalf of the Republic of Armenia President His Excellency Armen Sarkissian. Then it was followed by Her Majesty's Ambassador H.E. Mrs. Judith Farnworth. We also had 4 keynote speakers from the Central Bank of Armenia, HSBC, Microsoft, and American University of Armenia. It was a truly a unique event with lots of enthusiasm.

-How much from the learnings from the chapter can be transferred to NGOs and companies from the private industry?

Well, working with volunteers requires a strong set of soft skills, learning to lead without relying on formal authority. For sure this can be useful in NGO environments, where much of the workforce may be volunteer-based. Soft skills are anyway becoming more and more valuable in the workplace, and chapter engagement definitely lets a person develop these.

-What are some of the key challenges a new vol-

unteer can expect to face? How can these challenges be overcome?

-What skills have you gained by volunteering with PMI and do you plan to continue volunteering?

By volunteering with PMI, I've learned how to motivate other volunteers. That is not as easy as it seems. All volunteers are highly respected individuals in their own profession and there is no monetary reward in doing volunteer work for PMI. I guess the key is to help fulfill their needs for self-esteem and always respect their differences — in work patterns, communication styles and cultures. As for me, I definitely will continue volunteering with PMI. This has been a highly satisfying experience for me and I see it as another track of my career.

-Anything else you'd like to add/we should have asked?

Anyone can join the PMI Armenia Chapter. You do not need to have any particular educational background or professional accreditation. If you are working on projects, or just have an interest in project management, then you could certainly benefit from joining. For details, visit www.pmiarmeria.org or www.facebook.com/PmiArmeniaChapter

Get involved. Make a difference. Be a volunteer.

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator: Housewarming as an Outcome of Partnership

A housewarming was celebrated in Zarinja village of Aragatsotn region. The **Atoyan** family was one of the first to be included in the housing program of the current year. As a result of VivaCell-MTS and Fuller Center for Housing Armenia partnership, the second week of winter has become the most awaited for them. This accomplishment is important for everyone - for those implementing the housing program, for volunteers united to complete the construction works and for those who have become homeowners after many years of hardships.



The Atoyans acquired a half-constructed building four years ago. Their efforts to make the building suitable for living were futile: they were able to live in the building with dilapidated flooring, leaking roof, deteriorated doors and windows only two months. Aram had to go back with his family to his paternal home and live with his brother's family - 11 people under the same roof.

"We were very happy when we purchased this house. We were hopeful that not only my family, but also my brother's family will become homeowners, and my parents will live a quiet life, just the two of them. After two months of trying to settle in the half-built house, we had to move back to the paternal home; it was impossible to live there in such conditions. This program has become a reason for happiness not for one, but for two families. What else can a human being dream if not of having his own corner and roof? Thank you," said the father of the



family, Aram.

Volunteers from partnering organizations have also participated in the construction works of the half-built house. With their support, the construction of the Atoyan family's half-built house was completed in a short time. The family shared the joy of housewarming with the supporters.

"Through this program, we extend a supporting

hand to families, so that they can get over the hardships with dignity. It is very important for us. This attitude lies at the heart of our partnership with Fuller Center for Housing Armenia. People, that are given an opportunity to overcome the hopeless situation, will not give up when facing hardships in future. We challenge indifference and are hopeful that families that have become homeowners forget the feelings of despair," said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian**.

"We are celebrating another housewarming filled



with warm feelings. The family that earns their daily bread with hard work, had already lost the hope of having their own house after so many years of waiting. Today, both the hope and the optimism for future are rekindled. I can record that supporting one family became a great opportunity to solve two families' housing problem," said Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President **Ashot Yeghiazaryan**.

I, Laura Zakaryan, express my deep gratitude towards the entire team of the "Armenia" Medical Center cardiology clinic, where I entered in an extremely bad health condition and where I received high quality medical care. One expects a physician not only being highly professional, but also having a commitment to humanity. The physicians of this clinic treat their patients with a truly humanistic approach. Their

attitude is like this towards all of their patients, without an exception.

I want to express my special gratitude to Tamba Aru, the cardio reanimatologist who treated me. He is a specialist from India who lives in Armenia, speaks our language, for which we, his patients, are so grateful. Thank you, dear Aru!

During my long life I have seen quite a few clinics and physicians, and I can

say that there is a brilliant team of professional physicians in the "Armenia" Medical Center cardiology clinic, and this is the merit of the head of the cardiology clinic, Drampyan Mayranush.

Dear Mayranush! Many thanks to you and to all of your team. I wish you a healthy and happy life. Be healthy as long as it is possible, so that you can provide people with the necessary help for having a healthy life.



Armenia Marks 30th Anniversary of Tragic Earthquake

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan chaired a special meeting of his cabinet in Gyumri on December 7 as Armenia marked the 30th anniversary of a catastrophic earthquake that killed more than 25,000 people and left hundreds of thousands of others homeless.

Pashinyan also led an official commemoration ceremony in Armenia's second largest city,

apartment blocks and houses in what many Armenians still refer to as a "disaster zone" were built in violation of seismic safety standards.

International aid poured into Soviet Armenia immediately after the earthquake. The Soviet government also allowed Western rescue teams and other relief workers into the earthquake zone. Sovi-

the 1990s in metal or wooden shacks, commonly known as "domiks," lacking basic amenities.

The protracted reconstruction of the economically depressed area was the main focus of Friday's cabinet meeting dedicated to the earthquake anniversary. Avetik Eloyan, head of the government's Urban Development Committee, told

cost of around 3.5 billion drams (\$7.2 million), he said.

The official cautioned, though, that the figure needs to be reevaluated. "There are people who are really homeless but there are also those who received apartments but retained their shacks," he explained. "So there are many issues that need to be ascertained."

Gyumri Mayor Samvel Bala-



laying a wreath at a local memorial to the victims of the earthquake.

"The greatest damage caused by the disaster was probably the devastations that occurred in people's souls," he said at the ceremony. The recent regime change in the country and reforms promised by its new government should help to "restore the people's hopes, confidence and optimism," he added.

The magnitude 6.8 quake struck northwestern parts of what was then a Soviet republic of 3.5 million residents on the morning of December 7, 1988. Its epicenter was near Spitak, a small town razed to the ground. Gyumri was also hit hard.

The huge death toll was widely blamed on substandard construction exposed by the calamity. It turned out that many



et leader Mikhail Gorbachev cut short a visit to New York to tour devastated towns and villages.

Moscow launched a large-scale housing reconstruction program in the area in the following months. The rebuilding efforts stalled, however, with the collapse of the Soviet Union followed by a sharp decline of the Armenian economy. Tens of thousands of families continued to huddle in

ministers that more than 4,800 families that lost their homes in 1988 received new houses or apartments from the state from 2008 through 2017.

Eloyan said that almost 500 other families other in Gyumri and other affected communities remain on a government waiting list of persons eligible for free housing. The government is committed to providing them with new homes by the end of 2020 at a combined

sanyan, who also attended the cabinet meeting, said in this regard that there are currently 2,856 "domiks" in the city and that many of their residents migrated to Gyumri after the earthquake. And 456 of these supposedly temporary shelters are now empty, added Bala-

sanyan. Pashinyan responded by telling the government to form a task force that will look into the housing situation and submit a detailed report to him within two months.

"We know that the consequences of the December 1988 earthquake have still not been eliminated but we don't know the scale of work that is needed for [completing the reconstruction,]" said the prime minister. "Therefore, the task force should try to find the answer to this question as soon as possible."

Sen. Menendez Delays Senate Confirmation Of US Ambassador to Azerbaijan



*By
Harut
Sassounian*

President Donald Trump nominated on Sept. 4, 2018 career Foreign Service Officer Earle Litzenberger to serve as US Ambassador to Azerbaijan replacing Amb. Robert Cekuta who left Baku nine months ago.

A month before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's October 4, 2018 hearing on Litzenberger's confirmation, the Armenian National Committee of America issued a press release urging the Armenian American community, friends of Armenia, and human rights activists to call on their Senators to scrutinize Litzenberger's nomination.

Aram Hamparian, Executive Director of ANCA, explained that "there's never been a more urgent need for clarity regarding the nature and scope of American relations with the Aliyev regime. This confirmation process provides a much-needed opportunity for substantive Congressional oversight of an increasingly troubled U.S.-Azerbaijan bilateral relationship, characterized by escalating aggression against Armenians, a worsening crackdown on dissent, and a well-funded campaign to manipulate the American political process."

Litzenberger has served as Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund; Deputy Chief of Mission to the United States Mission to NATO; NATO Deputy Senior Civilian Representative to Afghanistan; Deputy Chief of Mission at the United States Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia; and Deputy Chief of Mission at the United States Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Litzenberger earned a B.A. from Middlebury College and M.S. from the United States Army War College. He speaks French, Russian, Serbian, and Bulgarian.

During the October 4, 2018 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, Litzenberger came under intense scrutiny. The ANCA reported that Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) referred to Azeri President Ilham Aliyev's

"bellicose rhetoric and sporadic outbursts of violence," when pressing Litzenberger about Azerbaijan's violent strategies. Litzenberger responded that he would urge the Azerbaijani government to step back from behaviors that would disrupt the line of contact in the Artsakh conflict. He also stated that the U.S. is working along three lines — the non-use of force, respect for territorial integrity, and the right to self-determination.

In addition, Litzenberger referred to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which condemns "any violence and any threat of the use of violence along the line of contact" without specifically citing Azerbaijan's attacks.

During the hearing, Sen. Menendez inquired whether providing weapons to Azerbaijan should be curtailed based on its human rights violations. Litzenberger responded that the State Department will be careful to ensure its decisions do not undermine efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the Artsakh conflict. He also mentioned an increased focus on Azerbaijani training in human rights.

Following the hearing, both Sen. Menendez and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) submitted written questions to Litzenberger. At the request of Sen. Menendez, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee postponed consideration of Litzenberger's nomination to an unspecified date. Both Senators may have additional written questions to the nominee as a result of their concerns at National Security Advisor John Bolton's offer to sell weapons to Armenia and Azerbaijan during his late October trip to the Caucasus.

Litzenberger was the only one of 19 ambassadorial nominations to be postponed, very likely until next year, when the Committee will hold its next business meeting.

ANCA's Hamparian welcomed Litzenberger's delay giving the Senators the "opportunity for more careful Congressional oversight of our country's increasingly challenging bilateral ties with Azerbaijan's aggressive and abusive Aliyev regime, particularly in light of National Security Advisor John Bolton's controversial suggestion that the U.S. start selling arms to Baku."

Hamparian went on to assert: "We join

with our Senate friends in seeking greater clarity on this point, and, more generally, regarding the Administration's policy on Aliyev's worsening pattern of aggression against Artsakh and Armenia, incitement of hatred against all Armenians, unapologetic blacklisting of U.S. legislators, obstruction of the Royce-Engel peace proposals, threats to shoot down civilian aircraft, the destruction of the Djulfa cemetery and other Christian heritage sites, and — of course — his severe crackdown against domestic dissidents and ethnic-religious minorities."

Azerbaijan's Turan news Agency reported the news about the delay of the confirmation of the US Ambassador to Baku. Surprisingly, Turan speculated that Pres. Trump may make a recess appointment taking advantage of the absence of Senate sessions in December, which would mean that the President could appoint Litzenberger as Ambassador to Azerbaijan without Senate confirmation.

Readers may recall that Pres. Obama made such a recess appointment in the case of Matt Bryza dispatching him as Ambassador to Azerbaijan, after Sen. Menendez twice blocked his confirmation. Bryza could only serve in Baku for 12 months before being forced to return to Washington, after the Senate Foreign Relations Committee refused to confirm his nomination.

In the case of Matt Bryza, the Armenian-American community had a good reason to object to his nominations as he had a serious bias against Armenia and favored Azerbaijan and Turkey. However, Litzenberger does not seem to have such biases and there is nothing personal against him. Delaying his nomination is simply a means to ensure that he would defend human rights in Azerbaijan and would urge the Aliyev regime to be less bellicose in the Artsakh conflict. Litzenberger's delay would also send a message to John Bolton that the Senate does not welcome his offer to sell weapons to Azerbaijan.

The delay of the Ambassador's Senate confirmation would serve the additional aim of upsetting the Aliyev regime by prolonging the lengthy absence of a US Ambassador to Baku, causing an irritation in Azerbaijan-United States relations.

An interview with third-time Grammy nominee Constantine Orbelian

Sona Hamalian

Maestro Constantine Orbelian has received a Grammy nomination for his recording of Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto." The nomination, in the Best Opera Recording category, was announced by the Recording Academy on December 5. The 61st annual Grammy Awards ceremony will be held on February 10, 2019, at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. The show will air on CBS at 8 pm EST.

Released by Delos Music in November 2017, the nominated recording, Verdi: Rigoletto, was conducted by Maestro Orbelian and features the late Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky in the title role, American soprano Nadine Sierra, Italian tenor Francesco Demuro, the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra, and the Men of the Kaunas State Choir. The recording was produced by Vilius Keras and Aleksandra Keriene.

This is Orbelian's third Grammy nomination. In 2014, he was nominated for conducting a recording of Rossini's virtuoso arias, performed by American tenor Lawrence Brownlee with the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra. Orbelian received his second Grammy nomination in 2017, for his recording of composer Georgy Sviridov's "Russia Cast Adrift," featuring Dmitri Hvorostovsky and the State Symphony Orchestra of St. Petersburg.

This interview was conducted in Yerevan, where Maestro Constantine Orbelian leads the Yerevan Opera House as its Artistic and General Director.

Q – Out of the literally thousands of recordings released in 2018, your recording of

"Rigoletto" was among those outstanding works that were selected to receive a Grammy nomination. This must be an extraordinary honor, especially considering that you are now the recipient of no less than three Grammy nominations. You are also the only Armenian musician and conductor nominated for the prestigious award this year, and the only one to have been nominated three times. "Rigoletto" is widely regarded as a revolutionary opera – par for the course, it should be said, since you've always been known for taking on trailblazing works. What are some of "Rigoletto"'s distinct qualities that appeal to you most?



A – First of all, I love opera and love Verdi. What appealed to me most is Dmitri Hvorostovsky's incredible interpretation of the title role. I had heard him perform "Rigoletto" in London and at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and I was at his very first "Rigoletto" in Moscow, at the Novaya Opera Theater, in 2000. Dmitri was one of the GREAT voices and GREAT interpreters of the music of Verdi. He infused the role with so much pain and heartache that

one immediately bonded with the poor hunchbacked court jester. His performances became legend and brought a new dimension to his "usual" onstage presence of either a prince or a duke or a king. During my 20 years of collaboration with Dmitri Hvorostovsky, I had heard him perform most of the great Verdi roles, whether at the Metropolitan Opera House, Royal Opera House in London, Paris Opera, or Vienna State Opera, not to mention the San Francisco, Chicago, and Los Angeles operas. One of his signature roles was Simon Boccanegra, and after five or six years of him performing that opera around the world, we decided to record it, in 2012. We had a stellar cast including the great Italian soprano Barbara Fritoli, and superstar Russian Bass

corded the "Rigoletto" in Kaunas, and then flew to St. Petersburg to record the Sviridov CD.

Dmitri was a true musical and vocal genius. He respected his art and expected total dedication to the work at hand. Having said that, he was extremely easy to work with and was the ideal colleague. He respected his colleagues and helped shape their interpretations to make a "whole" and total vision of the opera. Since there can never be "too many ears" at a recording session, we had our great friend and musical colleague John Fisher from the Metropolitan Opera with us at the recording sessions, preparing us before each session. He had worked with Dmitri for many years, and has the most invaluable experience in being the musical consultant and coordinator in some of the most important opera recordings of the 20th century – including ours!

Q – The recording of Verdi: Rigoletto also stands apart with an extremely high level of artistry manifested by soloists including Nadine Sierra and Francesco Demuro, as well as Lithuania's Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra and the Men of the Kaunas State Choir. How would you characterize your experience collaborating with such musicians?

A – Nadine Sierra is a true rising star and has one of the most beautiful, glorious, and lovely voices in the world today. Besides being a true and dedicated artist, she is a lovely person and has a great sense of humor, which makes these grueling (long and difficult) recording sessions fly by with ease. Dmitri had performed "Rigoletto" with Nadine in Naples a couple of years before we

made our recording. Francesco Demuro is a true Duke... He has a beautiful voice, a great personality, and was very charismatic in the role. Francesco is a well-known folk singer (and of course a great opera singer) in Sardinia, so the famous aria "La Donna mobile" came out with a particular youthful buoyancy and mood. He's a star at the Met and other opera houses.

Q – Two thousand eighteen was one of the most prolific years in the history of the Yerevan Opera House. Under your direction, the iconic institution presented performances of several landmark operatic productions, both in Armenia and abroad, garnering critical and popular acclaim. Do you believe that the Yerevan Opera House has what it takes to be in the vanguard of world opera?

A – You're right. 2018 was an incredible year for the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater.

Since my becoming the General Director in August 2017, I've been working very hard on bringing something which would be very meaningful to the Yerevan Opera. Doing something in the short term is of course very difficult, so when I heard that our star tenor Liparit Avetisyan had won the prestigious Golden Mask Award (Russia's highest theatrical honor) for his portrayal of Le Chevalier des Grieux in Massenet's opera "Manon," I spoke with Andrejs Zagars, the director of that particular production. It was produced by the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater in Moscow. Subsequently I brought the entire production to Yerevan to honor and highlight the success of our wonderful tenor, and also to show Yerevan audiences a completely new type of opera production. It was a huge undertaking, and, I must say, a huge success. I won't go into the details of transporting four 13-meter truckloads of sets and costumes from Moscow to Armenia and bringing 15 people from the Stanislavsky Theater to help and teach our stage crew exactly how to work the sets and scenery and the lighting. The Moscow team

also had the arduous job of making sure the 300 costumes all fit, and all of the details (including wigs, shoes, costume, and jewelry) of the production were taken into account. I do believe that it's important for our performers to have the opportunity to work with internationally-famous, world-class directors, lighting designers, and coaches. I had the great fortune of being able to bring the excellent coach Axel Everaert from Belgium, the superb French-language coach Serine Lyuba Tatevosyan, and director Irina Lychagina from Moscow to work along Andrejs Zagars in putting this "Manon" together. It happened that our opening night, on October 10, coincided with the opening of the Francophone summit in



Yerevan, and the entire delegation came to the gala performance. I invited American conductor Christopher Ocasek to conduct the opera, as he had been working on "Manon" during a production at the San Francisco Opera the previous fall and was highly recommended and did a superb job.

Earlier in the season, in July 2018, we took Khachaturian's trademark ballet "Gayane" to the Bolshoi, along with our incredible sets, designed by the incredible Minas Avetisyan, and costumes, designed by Rubina Hovhannisyan. This was the first time in history that the Yerevan Ballet performed on the historic stage of the Bolshoi Theater. The sold-out event was something that all of us who were there will remember for a very long time. Our star dancers Ruben Muradyan, Syuzi Pirumyan, and Meri Hovhannisyan, as well as our young star Razmik Marukyan "brought the house down," so to speak, and were met

with screaming stomping ovations. They were even forced to do "Sabre Dance" as an encore!

Then we received an invitation to open the season at the glorious new Dubai Opera House at the beginning of September, with three performances of our new production of "Carmen," directed by our very talented Naire Stepanyan and with costumes by Kristina Avetisyan; and also 3 performances of our new production of "The Magic Flute," produced by the extraordinary Italian opera director Paolo Micciche and costumes by the renowned Alberto Spiazzi. All of the performances were sold out and our singers and both productions were met with great enthusiasm by the audience.

Then, all 200 of us performed the first staged opera productions in the history of Kuwait, at the brand-new Kuwait Opera House, located within the compound of the Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad Cultural Center, in Kuwait City – another unforgettable experience.

Our season of "firsts" culminated with our glorious production of Karen Khachaturian's "Cippolino" Ballet. I purchased the sets and costumes that were produced by the great artist Valery Leventhal from



the Bolshoi Theater, had everything transported to Yerevan, and invited the famous choreographer Genrikh Mayorov to come to Armenia and stage the ballet.

So, yes, it has been a very important and ambitious season for us in Yerevan, and, of course, I absolutely believe that our beloved Yerevan Opera House does have what it takes to be at the forefront of world opera.

Q – What will be some of the highlights of the Yerevan Opera House's 2019 program?

A – 2019 will also bring some surprises. So we'll wait and see what the New Year brings. Hopefully we will be able to have a new production of Tigranian's "Anush," in honor of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the illustrious author Hovhannes Tumanyan, as well as many other projects which are coming up.

'Gloves come off after Velvet Revolution' – BBC on upcoming Armenia general election

The BBC has weighed in on the upcoming general election in Armenia, stressing that Nikol Pashinyan, the leader of the Velvet Revolution, “faces a key test with an early parliamentary election on Sunday”.

BBC's Rayhan Demytrie writes that “the man behind the extraordinary “Velvet Revolution” that convulsed Armenia in April faces a key test with an early parliamentary election on Sunday.

Former journalist-turned-politician Nikol Pashinyan, 43, engineered a peaceful transfer of power and raised hopes for an economic transformation.”

“One of Mr Pashinyan's key promises to the tens of thousands of Armenians who took part in street protests was to hold the country's first democratic parliamentary elections.

He is still very popular and few doubts that his My Step Alliance will come top among the 11 parties and political blocs in the vote.”

According to the author, what makes Pashinyan so popular is the fact that that “ [he] uses regular Facebook live broadcasts to come across as an accessible politician.”

The article also features the opinion of Republican Party (HHK) Vice President Armen Ashotyan, who expressed dissatisfaction over organizing the election so early.

Ashotyan argues that political parties have been deprived of time to prepare for the elections.

The vice president of the former ruling party also said that ‘there's still a so-called post-revolutionary euphoria in Armenia’, which according to him will be reflected in the vote.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan tendered a tactical resignation on October 16 in a maneuver to trigger the process of dissolving the parliament.

In accordance to the Constitution, when a Prime Minister resigns



the parliament must elect a new PM within two weeks. Lawmakers deliberately failed to elect a new PM as a formality in order to pave the way for dissolution.

Pashinyan took office after massive protests in April forced president-turned PM Serzh Sargsyan to resign. But Sargsyan's Republican Party (HHK) still held most seats in the 105-seat parliament. Since taking office, Nikol Pashinyan has numerous said that the incumbent parliament doesn't represent the people and that early elections should take place as soon as possible.

The parliament was dissolved by virtue of law on November 1. On the same day, President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian signed an order on calling early general election on December 9.

The incumbent parliament functions until the new parliament is elected.

The government is formally a caretaker government until a new Cabinet is formed after the election.

The campaigning period kicked off November 26 with 11 political parties and blocs running for parliament.

UNESCO grants Monastery of Geghard status of Enhanced protection

During the 13th session of the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict at the headquarters of the UNESCO on December 7 the members of the committee unanimously made a decision to grant Monastery of Geghard and the Upper Azat Valley with Enhanced protection.

As the press service of the MFA Armenia informed, by this decision Monastery of Geghard and the Upper Azat Valley became the first cultural heritage of Armenia to be granted with Enhanced protection.

The monastery of Geghard and the Upper Azat Valley contains a number of churches and tombs, most of them cut into the living rock, which illustrate Armenian medieval architecture at its highest point. The complex of medieval buildings is set into a landscape of great natural beauty, at the entrance to the Azat Valley. High cliffs from the northern side surround the complex while the defensive wall encircles the rest.

The monuments included in the property are dated from the

4th to the 13th century. At the early period, the Monastery was called Ayrivank (Monastery in the Cave) because of its rock-cut construction. The monastery was founded, according to tradition by St. Gregory the Illuminator, and was built following the adoption of Christianity as a state religion in Armenia (beginning of the 4th century AD). The main architectural complex was completed in the 13th century AD and consists of the cathedral, the adjacent narthex, eastern and western rock-cut churches, the family tomb of Proshyan princes, Papak's and Ruzukan's tomb-chapel, as well as various cells and numerous rock-cut cross-stones (khachkars). The Kathoghikè (main church) is in the classic Armenian form, an equal-armed cross inscribed in a square in plan and covered with a dome on a square base, linked with the base by vaulting. The east arm of the cross terminates in an apse, the remainder being square. In the corners are small barrel-vaulted two-storey chapels. On the internal walls there are many inscriptions recording donations. The masonry of the external walls is particularly finely finished and fitted. A gavit

(entrance hall) links it with the first rock-cut church.

The first rock-cut church was built before 1250, entirely dug into the rock and on an equal-armed cruciform plan. To the east, a roughly square chamber cut into the rock was one of the princely tombs (zhamatoun) of the Proshyan Dynasty. This gives access to the second rock-cut church built in 1283. The second zhamatoun, reached by an external staircase, contains the tombs of the princes Merik and Grigor. A defensive wall encircled the monastery complex in the 12th to 13th centuries. Most of the monks lived in cells excavated into the rock-face outside the main defensive wall, which have been preserved, along with some simple oratories.

St. Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) chapel is the most ancient preserved monument outside the ramparts and is located on the western side. It is partially hewed in the rock. There are engraved inscriptions on the walls, the earliest of which date back to 1177 and 1181 AD. Residential and economic constructions were built later, in the 17th century.

The monastery of Geghard is a renowned ecclesiastical and cultural centre of medieval Armenia, where a school, scriptorium, library and many rock-cut dwelling cells for clergymen could be found in addition to the religious constructions. Historians Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi, Sime-

on Ayrivanetsi, who lived and worked there in the 13th century, contributed to the development of the Armenian manuscript art. It was also renowned for the relics housed there. The most celebrated of these was the spear, which had wounded Christ on the Cross and was allegedly brought there by the Apostle Thaddeus, from which comes its present name, Geghardavank (the Monastery of the Spear). The spear was kept in the Monastery for 500 years. Relics of the Apostles Andrew and John were donated in the 12th century and pious visitors made numerous grants of land, money, and manuscripts over the succeeding centuries.

The Monastery of Geghard, with its remarkable rock-cut churches and tombs, is an exceptionally well preserved and complete example of medieval Armenian monastic architecture and decorative art, with many innovative features which had a profound influence on subsequent developments in the region.

The Geghard complex is an exceptionally complete and well-preserved example of a medieval monastic foundation in a remote area of great natural beauty. There have been no changes on the components of the inscribed property since the time of inscription. In addition, the property is surrounded by a substantial buffer zone, established in 1986, within which there are strict controls over any form of development and change.

However, its location in an active seismic zone, the pollution of the surrounding environment, the risk of rockslides, as well as the active tourism route are the main threats to the integrity of the site.

The Monastery of Geghard, with its remarkable rock-cut churches and tombs, is still preserved in its natural setting. The authenticity of the group is high, not least because the property has been in continuous use as a monastery for many centuries. All constructions included in the property, as well as the landscape, are not threatened in spite of restorations carried out during course of time. To meet conservation challenges, scientific research, renovation, fortification, design and preventive measures have been undertaken in order to ensure that authenticity is retained. Due to the passage of time, a part of the wall adjacent to the auxiliary construction collapsed and was renovated in 2006-2007, keeping the original materials. The designs for water isolation of the rock-hewn part and comprehensive interventions for Geghard Monastery were drafted in order to strengthen the complex.

The property is under the ownership of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church. Notwithstanding the ownership, the monuments are protected by the Law "On protection and usage of the historical and cultural immovable monuments and historical environment" of the Republic of Armenia, and by the regulation "On State registration, study, protection, fortification, restoration, reconstruction and usage of the historical and cultural immovable monuments". Additional articles exist also in Civil, Administrative, Land, and Criminal Codes of the Republic of Armenia for the protection of monuments.

The Ministry of Culture of Armenia, with its specialized units acting as authorized republican bodies, and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church with its specialized units and the diocese as owner, as well as non-governmental, nature protection units and people interested in Armenian heritage conservation are engaged in the protection of the monastery complex.



From Kilimanjaro to Everest, all-in-one adventure Ara Khatchadourian plans to conquer new heights in monumental undertaking

Armenian mountaineer and climber Ara Khatchadourian is originally from Lebanon. He and his family re-located to France when the civil war began.

Khatchadourian says they settled in Marseille, where he began to work in the jewelry field, which soon became his main activity.

“When I was 40 years old, my friends from Lebanon invited me to participate in a marathon run,” he told ARMENPRESS.

“I liked the offer, and I began training actively. Excited from the training and the marathon, I decided to keep on actively training. After some time, when I was back in France, I got another offer to participate in another competition. In order to maintain good shape, I decided to climb Mont Blanc, which is 4810 meters high. When I reached the summit at 6:30 in the morning to enjoy the sunrise, I got very impressed, it was very exciting. This made me continue mountaineering,” he said.

He later conquered the summits of Kilimanjaro and Ararat, something he described as “very emotional”.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union, the AGBU, requested Ara’s audi-

ence to tell about his 2013 Ararat climb. During the event, Ara brought forward a proposal – he said he will climb the highest mountain of the world – Mount Everest – in case of support.

“I was planning to dedicate this climb to the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide”, he says.

“I wanted to draw the public attention to the Armenian Genocide issue with this,” he said. Ara began rigorous training for the ascend. He visited Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador to climb mountains ranging from 6000 to 6700 meters to prepare for the mighty Everest.

But, according to him, this wasn’t enough, so he traveled to Kyrgyzstan to climb the Lenin Peak, the 7134 meter mountain.

In 2015, Ara traveled to Nepal for his mission.

His rigorous training routine included cycling, jogging, swimming, climbing stairs by carrying a heavy backpack, restricting oxygen inflow and other methods to improve breathing. He says there were days that he would walk for 16 hours.

Ara says the ascend was difficult, and many of his team members even refused

to continue and returned to base.

The mountaineer says he was very impressed by especially the last day. “We were on an elevation of 8300 meters, on this day at 20:30 we decided to continue the ascend. We reached the summit at 8:30 in the morning – the 8848 meter altitude was conquered. It was very emotional, I experiences very strange feelings,” he said.

On his way to the summit, Khatchadourian writes a letter to Turkey’s President – calling for facing the history and recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

He began a new tour later to deliver the letter – Run For Peace – a marathon from Marseille to Yerevan. He ran through eight countries, 150 cities and overcame nearly 5000 kilometers from April to July this year.

At the time when he was passing through Turkey, the country was holding presidential elections, and he says he didn’t give the letter since he didn’t know who will be the president, so he continued running to Yerevan – where the revolution was underway.

“I began the Run For Peace in the beginning of April, and Nikol Pashinyan carried out the peaceful revolution. I was very happy that the developments were calm. People were full of powerful energy, everyone was happy and smiling,” he said, calling for joint and daily work to reach goals.

But since the letter to the President of Turkey is still not delivered – Ara has a new idea. He will row across the Mediterranean to reach Lebanon from France.

He will pass Italy, then from Greece to Turkey, where he plans to give the letter. He will then continue the journey towards Syria, and finally Lebanon.

He estimates the journey will last 50 days if he will be able to row 100 kilometers every day.

He will soon embark on a rigorous training to prepare for the trip.



Belarus leader reveals apology To Pashinyan

(Yerevan –RFE/RL)Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on December 14 that he has apologized to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for questioning Armenia's role in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Still, Lukashenko continued to demand that a representative of Belarus, not Armenia, be appointed as the CSTO's new secretary general. He said Pashinyan himself "created this mess" by recalling the previous, Armenian head of the defense alliance, Yuri Khachaturov.

Khachaturov was sacked last month after being charged by Armenian authorities over a 2008 crackdown on opposition protesters in Yerevan. His three-year tour of duty was due to end in 2020. Pashinyan wants another Armenian official to run the organization until that time.



Lukashenko again rejected that option at a November 12 meeting with a senior diplomat from Azerbaijan, Armenia's arch-foe which is not a CSTO member.

Pashinyan condemned the move, saying that he will demand "explanations" from the Belarusian leader at the next CSTO summit slated for December 6. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry scoffed at the criticism, saying that

Pashinyan "has not yet realized that the rules of street politics are not acceptable in international politics."

The summit in Saint Petersburg was cancelled due to the CSTO member states' continuing failure to reach consensus on the issue. Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted instead a meeting of the leaders of another Russian-led bloc, the Eurasian Economic

Union (EEU).

Speaking to Russian journalists in Minsk, Lukashenko said he apologized to Pashinyan at Saint Petersburg for his public statements on the issue. But he insisted that Yerevan should agree to the appointment of a Belarusian secretary general.

"The problem was created by [Pashinyan,] not us," Lukashenko said, adding that the Armenian prime minister should have consulted with fellow CSTO leaders before bringing criminal charges against Khachaturov for "political reasons."

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, another CSTO member, has openly sided with Lukashenko on the matter. Both strongmen maintain warm relations with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Belarus has been a major supplier of weapons to Azerbaijan.

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences scholars discuss future of Armenia-China relations with Armenian counterparts

Leading scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences were invited by the "China-Eurasia" Council for Political and Strategic Research foundation to visit Armenia.

Within the framework of the visit with their Armenian colleagues Dr. Xiao Bin, Dr. Bao Yi and Dr. Wu Hongwei participated in an academic seminar "China, Eurasia and Armenia: Views from Yerevan and Beijing." It is worth mentioning that Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road" provides a lot of opportunities to other states to get Chinese investments, but they are not any big Chinese investments in Armenia, even if we compare with other South Caucasian countries. Professor Wu Hongwei emphasized that the Chinese-Georgian relations have developed dynamically, and the Chinese side is making huge investments there.

He expressed hopes that through the information and contacts with

Armenian specialists obtained during the visit, it will be possible to draw new recommendations through which it will be possible to develop economic relations with Armenia. In turn, Dr. Bao Yi presented her research on China's humanitarian cooperation with Central Asian countries and noted that this successful experience can also be used in the South Caucasus. Dr. Xiao Bing introduced his paper on promotion of the cooperation of international capacity under One Belt, One Road initiative in the era of technological transformation. The head of the ARMACAD, Dr. Khachik Gevorgyan told about the prospects of the ARMACAD in the development of Sino-Armenian academic relations in the framework of the One Belt, One Road. The organizer of this academic event, Dr. Mher Sahakyan, head of the "China-Eurasia" Council for Political and Strategic Research, foundation, spoke about the prospects for the devel-

opment of the Armenian-Chinese relations in the framework of the Chinese initiative. As he noted, if a branch of one of the leading Chinese banks opened or if Armenia and China establish a joint bank, the result will be significant financial investments in Armenia.

The financial field of the country will be diversified, and if Dram-Renminbi conversion is implemented, bilateral trade between Armenia and China will be realized in their own currencies. He recommended, that Armenia can try to stand a Regional member of the Asian Infrastructure bank and after get sovereign backed or non-sovereign backed loans for its state-owned noncommercial organizations, private organizations, and international organizations which works in the territory of Armenia, that they invest this money in Armenian North-South Road Corridor, which will significantly enhance Armenia's capabilities to be involved in the Silk Road

Economic Belt's China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Belt. Armenia and China can also start cooperation in UN peacekeeping missions, as both states are interested in it. Dr. Mher Sahakyan, also talked about the possibility of creating an Armenian-Chinese joint military-industrial center in Armenia, which will produce military robots, drones and so forth. He also noted that Armenia can negotiate with China for its participation in the "Digital Silk Road," Armenia and China can also cooperate on the research of the development of the 5G. After the academic seminar Chinese and Armenian scholars agreed to strengthen cooperation between the Armenian Foundation "China-Eurasia" Council for Political and Strategic Research and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, to conduct joint research and make recommendations for the development of Armenian-Chinese relations.

Karabakh Army Chief Sacked



(Yerevan – RFE/RL) The commander of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian-backed army, Lieutenant General Levon Mnatsakanyan, was dismissed on December 14 two weeks after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reacted angrily to Karabakh officials' strong criticism of one of his close associates.

Mnatsakanyan was replaced by the chief of the Karabakh Defense Army staff, Major General Karen Abrahamian. Colonel Jalal Harutiunyan, who commanded an army division, took up the post held by Abrahamian until now.

Bako Sahakyan, the Karabakh president who formalized these personnel changes, presented the newly appointed officials to the army top brass at a meeting in Stepanakert. Lieutenant General Artak Davtyan, the chief of the Armenian army's General Staff, also attended the meeting.

According to an official press release, Sahakyan praised Mnatsakanyan's "great contribution" to the Karabakh Armenian military. He also announced that the fired general will take over as head of Karabakh's emergency situations service.

Sahakyan's spokesman, Davit Babayan, claimed that Mnatsakanyan himself wanted to be relieved of his duties. The general told Tert.am on Thursday, however, that he has not tendered his resignation.

Mnatsakanyan gave no reason for his sacking in a written farewell address to local military personnel circulated by the Defense Army later on Friday. He said he will always be ready to rejoin the army "if need be."

Mnatsakanyan's impending dismissal was announced by several Armenian media outlets late on Wednesday. They linked it to Pashinyan's public spat with Karabakh Ar-

menian leaders which erupted during Armenia's recent parliamentary election campaign.

One of the Armenian premier's key political allies, Sasun Mikaelyan, caused uproar when he declared late last month that this spring's protest movement that brought Pashinyan to power was more important than the Armenian victory in the 1991-1994 war with Azerbaijan.

Mikaelyan's remark was condemned by Armenian opposition politicians as well as senior officials in Stepanakert, including Sahakyan's and Mnatsakanyan's spokesmen. Pashinyan portrayed it a slip of the tongue and accused the critics of misinterpreting what Mikaelyan meant to say.

Pashinyan specifically lambasted the Karabakh leadership, accusing it of "meddling" in the Armenian parliamentary race. "Sober up and mind your business," he said at a November 29 campaign rally. "I will certainly discuss this with you, but only after the elections."

Pashinyan and Sahakyan met in Yerevan on Thursday. The Armenian prime minister's office issued no statements on their meeting.

Babayan denied any connection between Pashinyan's reaction and the Karabakh army chief's sacking. "It's just not right to try to see disagreements between Mother Armenia and Artsakh (Karabakh) ... National unity is our supreme value," the Karabakh official told RFE/RL's Armenian service.

Born and raised in Karabakh, Mnatsakanyan, 53, commanded various Karabakh Armenian army units during the war. He studied at a Russian military academy for high-ranking officers several years before moving to Yerevan in 2012. He served as deputy chief of staff of Armenia's armed forces until being appointed as Karabakh army commander in 2015.

Number of tourist visits to Armenia increases by 8.8% during 2018

The number of tourists who visited Armenia in the first nine months of 2018 comprised 1 million 275 thousand, which is an increase of 8.8% compared to the figure of the same period of 2017, Mekhak Apresyan – chairman of the Armenian Tourism Federation, told reporters today, reports Armenpress.

"In the first nine months of this year the number of incoming tourist visits to Armenia comprised 1 million 275 thousand. This is an increase by 8.8% compared to the figure of last year. I hope the annual growth figure will be nearly 10%. However, we will see the results of increase of Armenia's recognition after the revolution next year. It [the revolution] could not have a major effect for this year", Apresyan said.



He noted that the growth rate of the visits is not so great. He explained that although the tourists saw that the country was safe during April-June, but maybe something prevented them to visit the country. Apresyan added that most of the tourists were also waiting for the results of the parliamentary elections to see what will happen.

The visits mainly from Russia and a number of European countries contributed to the increase of tourist visits. There has been a great tourist flow from China and India, the increase is almost double from these countries. "This year there has been a decline in tourist flow from Iran, and this is linked with the economic situation in that country. And the decline of visits from Iran also effected the decline of the growth rate of this year", he said.

The number of US tourists visiting Armenia also increased this year by 20%.



ZVARTNOTS

ARMENIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS



ՇՆՈՐՀԱԿՈՐ
ՆՈՐ ՏԱՐԻ ԵՎ
ՍՈՒՐԲ ԾՆՈՒՆԴ

MERRY CHRISTMAS
& HAPPY NEW YEAR



Especially
KARAS
CHAMPAGNE

cooltech®

The latest in non-invasive full body contouring.



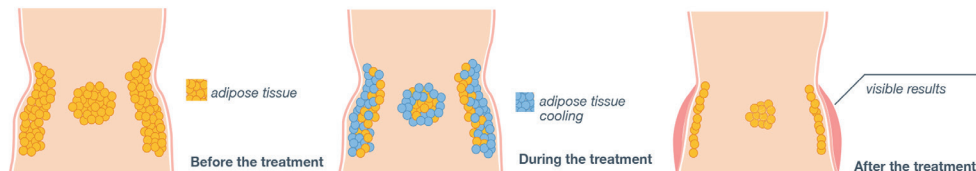
Full body contouring



Vacuum criolipolysis is the new technology for the non-surgical fat reduction:

Very effective!
Pain free!
Safe and easy!

Each procedure 70 min,
30-40 % reduction in treated area
in 2 month



The address: Baghramyan 1st DL, 2-nd building, 2-nd floor.
Call +374 60 536 536. www.cityspa.am



AZAD

AZAD Pharma AG AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Switzerland

AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

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

AZAD Pharma AG

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

Canada

AZAD Fine Chemicals Ltd.

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

Atlit Inc.

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

China

Hangzhou Representative Office of AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

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

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

Germany

AZAD Pharma GmbH

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

Armenia

AZAD Pharmaceuticals LLC

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

Noyan Tapan

The publisher: NT Holding LTD
Լրատվական գործունեություն իրականացնող՝
ՆՏ Հոլդինգ ՍՊԸ

Ծավալը՝ 2.25 մամուլ, տպաքանակը՝ 1500
Circulation: 1500 print copies and
15600 copies by e-mail list in PDF format

Weekly Newspaper, Since May 4, 1993

President of the NT Media Holding:
TIGRAN HARUTYUNYAN
Editor-in-Chief of the Media Holding:
GAYANEH ARAKELIAN
Director of the weekly:
MARINA HARUTYUNYAN
Chief Correspondent: **GOURGEN KHAZHAKIAN**
Proofreader: **SUSANNA MKRTCHIAN**
Layout: **DIANA GRIGORYAN**
Համարի թող. պատ.՝ Մ.Հարությունյան

ISSN 1829-0604

Գրանցման վկայականի համարը՝
03U898368, տրված՝ 11.01.2013թ.
Registration certificate and the date:
273.110.00512, 15.12.1995

E-mail: contact@nt.am
URL: www.nt.am

Address in Armenia:

28 Isahakian Str., Yerevan, 0009, RA
Tel.: (+374 60) 35-11-22 (+374 60) 35-11-24

Address in France:

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

Address in USA:

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

Հասցե՝ Խախակյան 28, Երևան, ՀՀ, 0009