

Nikol Pashinyan, Cyril Muller discuss ways of expanding cooperation between the Government of Armenia and the World Bank



Nikol Pashinyan meets with World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia Cyril Muller, Yerevan, 14 March, 2019

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia Cyril Muller. As Noyan Tapan was informed from the office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, highlighting the financial and technical assistance of the WB to Armenia, the PM noted that the Government is interested in deepening future cooperation and to raise the effectiveness of

the projects implemented. Nikol Pashinyan noted that the goal of the Government is to transform the political revolution into an economic revolution and the active cooperation with the WB can foster economic activities in the country.

Speaking about improving business environment, Nikol Pashinyan emphasized that the Government confidently moves forward

creating maximally transparent and competitive field for business.

Cyril Muller assessed the partnership with Armenian partners as effective and expressed the readiness of the World Bank to closely cooperate for the implementation of the reforms and priorities of the Government.

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Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan received on March 14 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) co-rapporteurs for the monitoring of obligations and commitments by Armenia Yuliya Lovochkina and

Andrej Šircelj.

As the press service of the MFA Armenia informed, greeting the guests, Minister Mnatsakanyan noted that Armenia greatly highlights the effective cooperation with the Council of Europe as an additional plat-

form for fostering Armenia's development.

In terms of the challenges facing the organization, the Armenian FM reaffirmed Armenia's full support to the efforts aimed at overcoming them.

Referring to the recent domestic political developments in Armenia at the request of the guests, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan emphasized that the Armenian Government has proved its political will by clear steps to implement the reforms based on the broad mandate of the people.

FM Mnatsakanyan presented the foreign policy priorities of Armenia, the approaches and position of the Armenian side on the peaceful settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict. In this context the sides emphasized the importance of the establishment of peace atmosphere and application of mechanisms for risk reduction

Artsakh's security and status remain a top priority

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Artsakh President Bako Sahakyan chaired a joint sitting of the Security Councils of the two councils on March 12.

Discussions focused on the joint assessment of the current state of affairs in the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict and elaboration of a coordinated action plan.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said "Armenia remains committed to the negotiation process and as the guarantor of the security of Artsakh will pursue exerting efforts in this direction."

"At the same time, the decisive voice of Artsakh and its involvement remains pertinent for ensuring a full-fledged and effective peace process," he added.

He made it clear, however, that Artsakh's involvement in the negotiation process is not a "caprice." He stressed that none of the parties involved in the negotiations has the authority and the legitimacy to represent the people of Artsakh, because there is no elected representative of Artsakh at the negotiating table.



"I have said on many occasions that the Armenian Prime Minister cannot take up the role for the simple reason that the people of Artsakh do not participate in Armenia's elections and do not vote. Therefore, Armenia's Prime Minister is not among the persons authorized to represent the people of Artsakh," Nikol Pashinyan stressed.

Bako Sahakyan underscored that the uncon-

ditional implementation of the 1994-1995 trilateral cease-fire agreements constituted the basis of a conducive to peace atmosphere, making an important input to the advancement of the peace process.

"Artsakh is ready to continue its constructive contribution to the process of establishing lasting and durable peace in the region," Bako Sahakyan noted.

Georgian, Armenian Leaders Discuss Regional Cooperation



(Yerevan – RFE/RL) Georgian President Salome Zourabishvili on March 13 began her two-day visit to Armenia to meet with the neighboring country's political leadership, including her counterpart Armen Sarkissian.

The two presidents met for talks in the Presidential Palace in Yerevan in the afternoon following a reception ceremony.

President Sarkissian told his Georgian counterpart that “the Armenian and Georgian peoples have a centuries-old history of friendship, which will surely continue in future generations.”

In his words, Armenian-Georgian cooperation in all spheres – from culture to science and modern technologies – has a huge potential for development and “everything needs to be done to make this cooperation deeper and more profitable.”

The official website of the Armenian president quoted the newly elected Georgian leader as noting that Sarkissian was the only president who attended her inauguration in December.

“It was a great honor for me. It was a sign of friendship between our two countries, which our society and I personally highly appreciate,” said Zourabishvili.

The president of Georgia said that the two nations “have a long way to go together, and it depends on them how they use the great potential in the region.”

Zourabishvili said that the two countries are united not only by geography, but also by the ethnic Armenian population of Georgia.

Armenia and Georgia are unanimous in their opinion that conflicts in the region have different natures and the grounds for their settlement are not identical, Sarkisian said following his talks.

“In my personal opinion, solutions [to conflicts] should be sought solely by peace-



ful means, on the basis of international law and norms and in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh [it should be] on the basis of respect for the right of self-determination,” Sarkissian stressed during the two presidents’ statements for the press.

Last month the Georgian president was on an official visit to Baku where during her meeting with President Ilham Aliyev she said that Azerbaijan and Georgia had gone through the same problems.

“Today, we know what occupation means for a country and what it is when your territorial integrity is not restored yet. Lines of contact with occupied lands are open wounds that hinder our development. Nevertheless, despite these tragedies, we have managed to strengthen and develop our economies,” Zourabishvili said in Baku, implying the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

While in Yerevan, Zourabishvili said that for Georgia, a country that hosts sizable Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, it is important that the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh should not be shifted onto its territory.

“It is very important for us that Georgian citizens of Armenian and Azerbaijani descents live in peace and be integrated into the political, economic and cultural life of Georgia,” she said.

According to Zourabishvili, as president of Georgia she is obliged to do more to make it easier for Georgia’s ethnic Armenian citizens to learn the Georgian language.

She emphasized that Armenia and Georgia are not only neighbors, but also friendly nations. “We live in a region for which stability and peace are crucial. These are mandatory preconditions for the economic development of our two countries,” Zour-

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ment of Armenia and development of the economy, including the development of SMEs. The WB Vice President expressed confidence that fight against corruption and strengthening of democracy will ensure conducive environment for economic development and progress.

In the context of bilateral cooperation, the interlocutors discussed issues referring to the expansion of cooperation particularly in the spheres of infrastructures, high technologies, education, and healthcare.

Nikol Pashinyan and Cyril Muller also referred to the strategic document of cooperation between Armenia and the WB for 2019-2023 and the priorities provided by it.

bishvili said.

Speaking about regional conflicts, the Georgian president said that they should be settled peacefully and on the basis of norms of international law.

For his part, President Sarkissian underscored the atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust that he said is characteristic of Armenian-Georgian relations. He said he was pleased to accept Zourabishvili’s invitation to visit Georgia.

Before her meeting with President Sarkissian, at whose invitation she is visiting Armenia, the Georgian president visited the hilltop memorial to 1915 Armenian Genocide victims at Tsitsernakaberd, accompanied by Armenia’s Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan and Yerevan Mayor Hayk Marutyan.

Zourabishvili also met with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on March 13.

During the meeting Pashinyan stressed that at present there is a “historic opportunity” for raising Armenian-Georgian relations at a new level. Pashinyan reminded that as prime minister he paid his first international visit to Georgia, which, he said, shows how great importance Armenia attaches to developing relations with its neighbor.

For her part, Zourabishvili stressed that Armenia and Georgia have a lot in common geographically and historically, share a common vision for the future and have a lot to do together

Armenian FM, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office highlight installation of mechanisms preventing incidents in conflict zone



The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sees all grounds for a ‘positive impetus’ to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, the organization’s visiting top official said in Yerevan after talks with his Armenian counterpart on March 13.

At a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak describes his meeting with Armenia’s top diplomat as “very constructive.”

“I am here to reaffirm our ongoing support, in particular, to finding a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and at the same time I express my absolute support to the actions and involvement of the Minsk Group co-chairs in the process,” said Lajcak.

The OSCE chairman-in-office, in particular, hailed the reduction of casualties along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh.

“I am convinced that all this will promote the implementation of a multi-sided process of finding a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Challenges are a lot, but I think that we have all the grounds to give a positive impetus to the process, considering the developments of the past months,” Lajcak said.

The OSCE chairman-in-office also stressed the importance of preparing the peoples for peace. “We understand that the conflict has not been settled yet, but we are convinced that the stage-by-stage, step-by-step approach and the developing dialogue, as such, will result in at least small improvements in peoples’ lives,” Lajcak said.

For his part, Armenian Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan said that during his meeting with the visiting OSCE official he reiterated

that “the security and status of Nagorno-Karabakh are absolute priorities for Armenia.”

“I have also reiterated the approach on ensuring Nagorno-Karabakh’s involvement and its resolute voice in the process,” the Armenian minister said.

Mnatsakanyan also stressed the need for introducing mechanisms for the prevention of border incidents, reducing risks of such incidents and enhancing confidence-building measures that were agreed at several meetings held through the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs’ mediation in the past.

During the press conference the visiting top OSCE official was also asked to comment on Armenia’s stated position that Nagorno-Karabakh should become a full party to the negotiations that are currently conducted between Yerevan and Baku.

Lajcak stressed that any possible change of the format of negotiations needs to be acceptable to all parties and expressed confidence that the Armenian government has the “right formula” for continuing negotiations in the existing format.

During his visit to Yerevan the OSCE chairman-in-office also met with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

According to the press office of the Armenian prime minister, during the meeting Pashinyan reaffirmed Armenia’s support for an exclusively peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship and presented “Yerevan’s principle-based position” on settlement process.

While in Armenia OSCE Chairman-in-Office Lajcak was also due to meet with Armenian President Armen Sarkissian and Parliament Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan.

Cafe Owners, Employees Protest Dismantling Order



Owners and employees of several cafes in Yerevan are protesting the decision of the city authorities to dismantle the property located in the vicinity of the Opera House that the municipality believes should be free from commercial facilities.

The dismantling began on March 13 – four weeks after the Yerevan Mayor's Office formally notified the cafe owners that they should vacate the premises and leave the area.

The demolition work with the use of heavy equipment continued in the area adjacent to Freedom (Theater) Square on Thursday.

A number of employees of the cafes briefly blocked traffic in one of Yerevan's central streets today as a sign of protest against the actions of the city authorities. "It is inhumane to deprive people of their daily earnings," said one angry woman who participated in the picket.

Police put a cordon to keep the protesters off the road. Meanwhile, some of the disgruntled cafe workers demanded a meeting with Mayor Hayk Marutyan.

Marutyan, who became mayor after his political team backed by popular Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan polled over 80 percent in municipal elections last fall, insists that the green zone around the Opera House, one of the landmark buildings in central Yerevan, should not be overburdened with commercial property.



Still late last year the mayor made public a plan to gradually free the area from cafes. City authorities believe that the cafes can be located elsewhere in the city and thus their business will not be affected.

"Today we fulfill our dream of many years as we free the area surrounding the Opera House [from commercial property] and bring back the atmosphere of the cultural hearth," Marutyan said in a Facebook



post on Thursday.

The mayor vowed continuous efforts in "recovering Yerevan's cultural features" and thanked the city's residents for "being next to the authorities in this matter." "We feel your support," Marutyan wrote.

Still, the cafe owners believe that the decision to dismantle their property is wrong and unlawful.

"We have a lease contract with the state until 2026... How can we run a business in this country from now on? How can we trust them?" a manager of the Shokoladnitsa cafe told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "Perhaps when the next authorities come

some new people will build cafes here again. Who will guarantee that no one will do something else here?" he added.

The cafe owners also said that currently they employ dozens of workers and their continued operation also has social importance.

Prefect of Yerevan's Kentron administrative district Viktor Mnatsakanyan, who met with the cafe owners and employees on Wednesday, later said that there are locations in the city like the Opera House that "must be kept sacred."

"For many years cafes have become part of Yerevan's identity. We do understand all this. But this area, which is directly adjacent to the Opera House, must be kept free from cafes. We even want to improve entire Theater Square," said Mnatsakanyan.

The official stressed that the cafes that are being dismantled now were built without proper documentation and are therefore illegal structures.

Opposition Prosperous Armenia Party lawmakers Naira Zohrabyan and Arman Abovyan arrived at the scene of the dismantling work in the afternoon after what they described as alerts about violence being used against the protesters.

The two lawmakers urged the authorities to exclude violence and engage in dialogue with the cafe owners.

Meanwhile, the police reported that 16 protesters had been detained for "not complying with police officers' lawful demands." They were released later on.

At least one protester and one police officer were hurt in the standoff and were briefly hospitalized to be treated for their injuries.

The standoff between protesters and police officers continued in the afternoon, with the dismantling activities halted.

PM Pashinyan, representatives of “Index Ventures” discuss opportunities to operate in Armenia



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received the representatives of Index Ventures venture capital fund - founder Nina Achadjian, Mike Volpi and Dominique Vidal, who used to work for Cisco,

Amazon, Yahoo and other famous companies before. Minister of Transport, Communications and IT of Armenia Hakob Arshakyan was present at the meeting.

As Noyan Tapan was in-

formed from the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, the guests presented to the PM the activities of Index Ventures and their plans to make investments in Armenian start-ups. They noted that they highly assess the positive developments in Armenia's IT sector and are interested in the development and expansion of cooperation. In addition to the implementation of various technological and engineering projects, the team of Index Ventures plans to present to Armenian start-ups the options to get investments at Silicon Valley and the tendencies of the technological sphere.

Nikol Pashinyan welcomed

the visit of the delegation led by Nina Achadjian to Armenia and their initiatives to cooperate with local companies and make investments. Pashinyan underlined that the IT sector is among the priorities of the Armenian Government and the Government strives for achieving a technology-based economy in the future. PM Pashinyan added that the Government is interested in the cooperation with Index Ventures and to discuss the proposals of implementing investment projects. The PM noted that the Government also makes consistent steps aimed at the continuous improvement of business environment.

Armenia, Bulgaria discuss cooperation opportunities in field of high technologies

Deputy prime minister of Armenia Tigran Avinyan on March 13 received the Bulgarian delegation led by minister of transport, information technology and communications Rossen Jeliakov, the deputy PM's Office informs.

The meeting was also attended by Armenia's minister of transport, communication and information technologies Hakob Arshakyan.

Welcoming the guests deputy PM Avinyan said holding the 8th session of the Ar-



menian-Bulgarian inter-governmental commission is a good opportunity to give

new impetus to the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.

In his turn the Bulgarian minister thanked for the reception and stated that he has arrived together with the representatives of more than 30 Bulgarian companies which shows the great interest of Bulgaria towards Armenia.

The officials also discussed the cooperation opportunities in the field of high technologies, in particular in digitization, cybersecurity and etc.

Armenian economy minister attends EEU industrial meeting

Ministers of the industrial sector of Eurasian Economic Union member states have held a session on March 13 in Moscow, with delegations of the Eurasian Economic Commission and governments from all member states in attendance.

Armenia's delegation was led by Minister of Economic Development and Investments Tigran Khachatryan, the ministry reported.

Issues related to import substitution in priority economic sectors were discussed.

In this context, Russia's Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov expressed his country's readiness to study concrete proposals of EEU countries.

The possible participation of member states in Russia's state information system in the processed industry sector was discussed, and prospects of creating a single industrial policy in the EEU were also addressed.

The participants exchange ideas over the possibilities for creating a single Eurasian

trademark for certain goods for more efficient exports to non-EEU countries.



Government set to implement reforms in pension system



A Cabinet meeting was held on March 14, chaired by Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan.

The meeting amended the government decision of May 5, 2011 On Enforcing the RA Law on State Pensions. In particular, as of January 1, 2018, income tax shall be substituted with profit tax in the provisions of the law relating to the pension rights of self-employed persons and notaries. A procedure has been established for granting a pension or paying the unpaid pension to persons disabled due to injuries while performing a military duty or in the exercise of special assignments during defense operations.

The amendment stipulates that a written application for the appointment of his or her pension and other documents may be submitted through a proxy if a disabled person is treated at a hospital located in a foreign country. It has been established that the period during which the citizen of the Republic of Armenia was in labor relations with an international organization shall be included in the record of service, if pension payments have been made to the State bud-

get in cases stipulated by law.

It has also been established that when filing a request for pension recalculation, the pensioner only submits an application for recording the period of employment in his / her working experience; the requirement to submit a certificate of employment has been abolished. The right to receiving a pension when it has not been paid for five consecutive years will not be suspended. Those persons who have adopted a child living in an orphanage shall get the total amount of pension arrears accumulated during the child's stay in the orphanage.

Highlighting the importance to the new regulations envisaged in this sphere, Nikol Pashinyan told those responsible to provide proper media coverage of the proposed amendments so that citizens could be aware of the opportunities created.

The Government adopted a decision on granting property, proceeding from the need to ensure further use of veterinary equipment, farm machinery, agricultural inputs and built-in irrigation systems as purchased under the Community Agricultural Resources Management and Competitiveness Program and the Second Program's loan agreements.

By this decision, the veterinary equipment and tools so purchased shall be donated to the Agribusiness and Rural Development Center. The latter will hand over the property for free use to selected veterinary surgeons in communities in accordance with the requirements of the agreement. The ir-

rigation systems will be donated to the selected communities, while the farm machinery will be provided to the relevant pasture user's cooperatives.

As a result, at least 20 veterinarians will have modern veterinary equipment and tools, 12 communities will be provided with irrigation systems, 19 consumer cooperatives will get free agricultural equipment.

With reference to the provision of veterinary services, the Head of Government noted that it is necessary to outsource them to private entities.

"We need to set up veterinary centers in the regions in order to provide adequate technical and professional assistance. We need to implement state programs through these centers, because now we have two methods to work together. Excuse me for this formulation but I should state that we have one functional veterinary medicine and state-administered veterinary services with all its adverse consequences. We need to strengthen these two structures as a strategic goal. State services should be outsourced. This is a kind of financial support, and I believe that even if we do not manage to raise the cost of such services, we will at least have the opportunity to improve their quality by this method," the Premier said.

Under relevant decisions, a number of companies will benefit from the VAT deferment facility and an exemption of customs duties for a period of three years.

Georgia, Gazprom complete talks on terms of gas transit to Armenia



Georgia and Gazprom have completed negotiations on the terms of gas transit to Armenia, Georgia's Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze told a press conference on

March 12, Sputnik Georgia reports.

Under the latest two-year contract that expired on December 31, 2018, Georgia was to be partially paid with gas during the first year. The payments were to be fully monetized in the second year. Before that Georgia had been receiving only gas in compensation for the transit.

"The negotiations are actually over," the Prime Minister said. At the same time, he noted that during the talks the Ministry of Economy had been guided by the principles

of ensuring the country's energy independence and improving Georgia's positions in the contract.

According to him, details will become known after the cabinet meeting, where the Ministry of Economy is expected to make a statement.

In 2018, 1.93 billion cubic meters of gas was transported to Armenia via Georgia. In 2017, the volume of gas transit amounted to about 2 billion cubic meters.

U.S. report sees improvements in Armenia



The United States has praised Armenia for reforms in a number of areas, including the holding of elections “with respect for fundamental freedoms” and fighting “systemic government corruption.”

A U.S. Department of State report on human rights practices for 2018 also referred to other developments in Armenia over last year, including a renewed investigation of the 2008 post-election crackdown.

“[Prime Minister Nikol] Pashinyan’s government gave new impetus to accountability for the events surrounding the aftermath of the 2008 presidential election, in which eight civilians and two police officers were killed,” the report says, noting that former president Robert Kocharyan is among high profile suspects in the criminal cases launched by the Special Investigation Service.

The U.S. Department of State cites Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic as noting the steps taken by the Armenian government “to finally establish responsibility for the 10 deaths”, but stressing that “this should be done carefully and in strict adherence to the principles of rule of law, judicial independence, transparency and guarantees of fair trial, in order to dispel any accusations of alleged revenge politics or selective justice.”

In previous years’ reports the U.S. Department of State usually criticized the Armenian government for systemic corruption, violence against journalists and the opposition, violations of the freedoms of speech and assembly, arbitrariness of law-enforcement bodies and electoral fraud. This time the report says: “The new government launched a series of investigations to prosecute systemic government corruption, and the country held its first truly competitive elections on December 9.”

As an example of combating corruption, the report cites “the first criminal case of illicit enrichment” in which Vachagan Ghazaryan, the longtime chief bodyguard of former president Serzh Sargsyan, was arrested “after law enforcement personnel found more than one million dollars in cash in a nightclub owned by his wife.”

It is mentioned in the report that according to the prime minister’s anticorruption adviser, between May 7 and August 10, law enforcement bodies and tax services uncovered violations in the amount of 41.7 billion drams (almost \$87 million), constituting damages to the state, embezzlement, abuse of official duty, and bribes. “Headline cases included tax underpayments and unexplained wealth on the part of parliamentarians, well-connected political figures, or their respective business holdings. In one illustrative case, according to the government, the Yerevan City supermarket chain, affiliated with member of parliament Samvel Alexanian, was found to have underpaid tens of millions of dollars

in taxes.”

After the change of government in Armenia the U.S. Department of State also observes positive changes in terms of political freedoms and rights in the South Caucasus country.

“Before the May change in government, there were numerous reports of authorities tapping telephone communications, email, and other digital communications of individuals the government wanted to keep under scrutiny, including human rights defenders, activists, and political figures. According to some human rights observers, authorities maintained “dossiers” of activists, political figures, and others that were used to exert pressure on a person. Following the “velvet revolution,” many activists and human rights defenders expressed their belief that they were no longer under surveillance,” the report reads.

The report notes that “following the “velvet revolution,” many judges released from pretrial detention many suspects in politically sensitive cases.” “According to human rights groups, since no other circumstances had changed in their cases, this was an indication that, before the April/May events, judicial decisions to hold those suspects in detention, instead of on bail were politically motivated.”

In the section on “Political Parties and Political Participation” it is said: “The law does not restrict the registration or activity of political parties. Prior to the “velvet revolution,” however, authorities suppressed political pluralism in other ways.”

“While political pluralism expanded after the May change in government, observers noted increased radicalization in society, reflected most acutely in social media, that shrank the space for criticism of the new government, since any dissent was labeled as “counterrevolutionary” by Civil Contract supporters. Some opposition political actors alleged that the new government directed public pressure against them.”

In terms of freedom of expression, the U.S. Department of State’s report says that “before the “velvet revolution,” the government exerted economic pressure on media outlets for favorable and uncritical coverage.”

“After the May change in government, the media environment became more free as some outlets began to step away from self-censorship; however, some still refrained from critical comments of the new government not to appear “counterrevolutionary” ... According to some media watchdogs, public television continued to present news from a pro-government standpoint.”

In the past the U.S. Department of State cited serious concerns of human rights activists about deaths in the army and dubious investigations with alleged use of torture to extract evidence. This time, according to the report, the Special Investigation Service has instituted criminal proceedings over one such case.

“According to Peace Dialogue [human rights organization] his was the first case in recent years when, parallel to the investigation of a death in the armed forces, a criminal investigation was opened to assess possible violations of the law by the investigative body,” the report says.

The U.S. Department of State report says that the Armenian authorities are now more open in terms of holding accountable police officials and other representatives of the law-enforcement system. “Lieutenant-general Levon Yerososyan, the former chief of the internal police troops, faced charges of exceeding official authority

Rabbi Schneier Takes Evangelical Pastors On a Propaganda Tour of Azerbaijan

By Harut Sassounian

For several years, the government of Azerbaijan and its diplomats overseas have gone to great lengths to win over Jews worldwide, American Jewish organizations, and Israel.

Azerbaijan is simply copying Turkey's sinister behavior that until recently wooed Jewish organizations in the United States and Israel's government to block the passage of a congressional resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Many Jewish groups ended their immoral cooperation with Turkey, after Turkish President Rejep Tayyip Erdogan began making anti-Semitic statements and threatening Israel.

Just like Turkey, Azerbaijan's outreach to Jewish organizations and Israel is based on the typical anti-Semitic belief that Jews control American politicians and it is therefore in Azerbaijan's interest to be on the good side of 'powerful' Jews. According to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, "many countries nurture their relationship to Israel in hopes of finding favor with influential American Jewish organizations who will in turn speak well of them to the U.S. government."

Furthermore, Azerbaijan's pro-Jewish efforts are based on the fact that it purchases billions of dollars of modern weapons from Israel. In return, Azerbaijan sells a large amount of oil to Israel. There have been also intelligence reports that Azerbaijan has provided Israel with several bases on its border with Iran, should Israel decide to attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

The latest example of the collaboration between American Jewish leaders and Azerbaijan is the visit to Baku on March 3-8 by a group of U.S. evangelical pastors led by New York-based Orthodox Rabbi Marc Schneier "to promote inter-faith dialogue and highlight cooperation with Israel," according to the Associated Press. This was the first ever evangelical delegation to visit the Muslim Shiite nation. The Rabbi described Azerbaijan as "the most beloved and respected Muslim country in the eyes of the Jewish American community," reported Trend, an Azeri news agency. Schneier spoke at an event in the U.S. Congress last year celebrating the close friendship between Azerbaijan and Israel.

The group of 12 U.S. evangelical pastors

met Pres. Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, the foreign minister, Muslim Sheikhs, local church leaders, and Israel's ambassador. Rabbi Schneier told the Associated Press that Pres. Aliyev "announced during the delegation's visit that the country's first-ever Jewish cultural center would-be built-in Baku with Kosher dining options and a hotel to accommodate Jewish guests." Schneier heads the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding based in New York and founded the Hampton Synagogue in Westhampton Beach, New York. As a sign of their cozy relationship, Azerbaijan's national airline flies directly to Tel Aviv and Pres. Aliyev hosted Israel's prime minister in 2016.

Not surprisingly, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov took advantage of his meeting with the evangelical leaders to disparage Armenia and distort the facts of the Artsakh conflict. He said, "the recent statements of the Armenian leadership highlighted that such statements undermine the peace process."

Pastor Adam Mesa, who leads the Abundant Living Family Church in Rancho Cucamonga, California, told the Associated Press that it was his first time in a Muslim majority country. The pastor said he was encouraged to take part in the trip because of Azerbaijan's supportive Israeli stance and interreligious efforts. "It's incredible that a Muslim majority country is the one that has to actually lead the charge on religious dialogue and community and solidarity."

Rabbi Schneier confirmed to the Associated Press the political agenda behind the religious group's visit: "from a political point of view, listen there is no question you know that Azerbaijan is looking to strengthen its relationship with the U.S. administration, with the United States Congress. Israel is very much a conduit to that."

As in the case of Cong. Alcee Hastings, Azerbaijan seems to have picked another disgraced individual to disseminate its propaganda. The 60-year-old Rabbi Schneier has been married six times, the last on March 2017. In February 2018, the State of Florida ordered Schneier to pay \$5,000 a month for \$64,594 in unpaid child support he owed to his third wife for the care of their 19-year-old son. Rabbi Schneier was expelled in June 2015 by the Rabbinical Council of America for breaching the code of ethics by carrying on an extramar-

ital relationship. In June 2010, the Rabbi announced to his congregation that he was suffering from "bipolar disorder."

According to Wikipedia, "under pressure from his congregation for his multiple divorces and philandering, Schneier resigned in 2016 from his pulpit position at the Hampton Synagogue, which he had founded in 1990. Congregants had threatened to withhold pledges and payments until he left the synagogue."

The New York Post reported that after cheating on his third wife, Rabbi Schneier in 2006 married Tobi Rubinstein, "a sexy worshipper," who became wife No. 4. "In 2010, Tobi hired a private investigator who turned up explicit photos of her husband and Gitty Leiner, a then-30-something worshipper, getting hot and heavy in the Holy Land on what Schneier had told his wife was a routine business trip. Marriage No. 4 ended in divorce soon after." The Rabbi ended up marrying Gitty Leiner in 2013 — wife No. 5. The couple had a child in 2014, "but then in 2015, Schneier was caught dining out in Queens with sexy young Simi Teitelbaum" who became his sixth wife in 2017! Interestingly, The Post reported that "Schneier explained away his unholy extramarital hookups by saying he was mentally ill and seeking treatment."

Rabbi's ex-wife Toby Gotesman told the Post: "When I left him, he was making \$800,000 ... that included a \$500,000 salary, plus hundreds of thousands in additional compensation, including mortgage payments on his 5,000-square-foot Westhampton Beach home, said to be valued at around \$3 million."

Rabbi Schneier's visit to Azerbaijan last week was not his first. He has been there several times in recent years on propaganda tours. One wonders if the Rabbi has received any compensation from Pres. Aliyev for his 'valuable' services. His multiple trips to Azerbaijan make the Rabbi look more like a lobbyist for Azerbaijan than a religious figure!

I would urge Armenian evangelical church leaders to contact the 12 pastors who visited Baku last week in order to counter the propaganda they were fed against Armenia and Artsakh. I would also like to know if these pastors and Rabbi Schneier came back from Baku with suitcases full of the usual Azeri "gifts" of caviar, rugs, and other valuable items!

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committed with violence and leading to grave consequences for his role in the violence against protesters,” the report says, reminding also that “on May 13, the Special Investigation Service charged the commander of the Yerevan Police Department Escort Battalion, Armen Ghazaryan, with torture for his role in the June 2017 police beatings of four members of the armed group Sasna Tsrer during an altercation.”

The most controversial area in which the U.S. Department of State observed no changes is the judicial system. The report notes: “Although the law provides for an independent judiciary, the judiciary did not generally exhibit independence and impartiality. After the May change in government, distrust in the impartiality of judges continued, and some human rights lawyers stated there were no legal safeguards for judicial independence.”

“Attorneys reported that in the past, the Court of Cassation dictated the outcome of all significant cases to lower-court judges... Many observers blamed the High Judicial Council [headed by former Constitutional Court chair Gagik Harutiunyan] for abuse of power and for appointing only judges who were connected to the previous ruling party. Attorneys also stated the HJC’s control of the appointments, promotions, and relocation of judges weakened judicial independence,” the report reads.

Armenian PM Offers Condolences Over New Zealand Attacks



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has sent a telegram of condolences to Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Arden over the terror attacks in two mosques in the city of Christchurch in which dozens of people were killed.

According to the prime minister’s official website, in his message Pashinyan said that he was “deeply saddened” by the terrorist attacks that “claimed the lives of many innocent people.”

“Strongly condemning terrorism in all its forms, I express my sincere condolences and support to you, the families of the victims and the friendly people of New Zealand,” Pashinyan said.

The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also twitted words of condolences over the Christchurch attacks, saying that “on this

dark day, we stand with the people of New Zealand in condemning violence and terrorism.”

Forty-nine people were killed and 20 wounded in an attack on two mosques in Christchurch on Friday. Police in New Zealand have arrested the suspected shooter, bringing murder charges against him.

Meanwhile, the Armenian National Committee of New Zealand also offered its deepest condolences over the terror attacks and unequivocally condemned them.

“Further, we condemn the accused gunman’s attempt to reference the Armenian language, along with the languages of other Christian nationalities – including Georgian, Serbian, Russian and Austrian – through markings on his weapons used in what was an unacceptable hate crime targeting the Islamic community,” the organization said in a statement, stressing that “such crusades have no place in our world, and definitely no place in peace-loving New Zealand.”

Court extends detention of Ex-President Kocharyan

A court in Yerevan on March 15 extended by two months the pretrial detention of Robert Kocharyan, a lawyer for the former Armenian president said after the court session.

Aram Orbelyan also said he would appeal the decision.

Kocharyan was again arrested in December more than four months after being charged with overthrowing the constitutional order during the final weeks of his decade-long rule that ended in April 2008. He denies the accusations as politically motivated.

Earlier this month the Special Investigative Service (SIS) asked the court to extend Kocharyan’s arrest for the second time since his re-arrest late last year. The court



granted the request.

Kocharyan’s lawyers have dismissed the SIS’s case against their client as groundless and politically motivated.

Kocharyan is specifically accused of illegally using Armenian army units against opposition supporters who protested against alleged fraud in a disputed presidential election held in February 2008.

Law-enforcement authorities say that amounted to an overthrow of the constitutional order.

Eight protesters and two policemen were killed when security forces quelled the protests on March 1-2, 2008. Kocharyan declared a three-week state of emergency on that night.

The 64-year-old ex-president says the accusations are part of incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s political “vendetta” waged against him.

Pashinyan played a key role in the 2008 protests and spent nearly two years in prison because of that. He has strongly defended the criminal case against Kocharyan and denied orchestrating it.

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator News: The Second Phase of the Energy-Saving System Completed in Karaglukh Village

In the frames of the project aimed at eco-village network development, VivaCell-MTS and the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) continue the installation of outdoor lighting systems in the remote villages of Armenia. The infrastructure development consists of a few phases.

The works within the second phase have been completed in Karaglukh community of Vayots Dzor region. This time, the secondary streets of Karaglukh village of Yeghegis community in Vayots Dzor region, covering 1900 m-long territory, were illuminated by the installation of 51 additional LED lights.

The community already notices the positive impact from energy-efficient technologies. Due to long-term cooperation of partners, the modern lighting system was introduced to the community in winter 2017. Back then, 1872 m-long territory was illuminated by the installation of 52 LED lights.

The community members appreciate the installation of the energy-efficient system in the village. LED lights are not only environmentally friendly and contribute to sustainable use of natural resources, but also help to reduce danger from predators entering the village at night hours. The introduction of energy-efficient technologies reduces financial expenses of the commu-



nity, makes the community life more vibrant, as well as contributes to a sustainable and clean environment.



VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian**, the project coordinator and general engineer of the FPWC Martin Maralchyan, Yeghegis community head Artur Stepanyan and the village residents attended the launching ceremony of the state-of-the-art energy-efficient lighting system.

"The number of villages with energy-efficient infrastructure grows year by year. It is an important achievement for all of us. As



organizations that implement the program we can state that the investments are justified. We not only contribute to the development of infrastructures, but also ensure financial savings and directly benefit to closing the gap between urban and rural development rates. Villagers already notice the efficiency of the energy-efficient lighting system. The implemented program is long-term and its outcomes will be measured over the coming years," said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph C. Yirikian.

Compared to regular bulbs, LED lights are more energy-efficient and durable, and can serve for a much longer period consuming

80% less electricity.

The streets of the village will be illuminated from 21:00 till 02:00 in summer, and from 18:00 till 01:00 in winter. During holidays, illumination will be provided all night long.

Karaglukh village of Vayots Dzor is included in the project aimed at eco-village network development in Armenia. The project allows the villages to integrate in the process, encompassing four components of

sustainability, namely, environmental, economic, cultural and social.

About "Eco villages network" project

Eco villages network includes selected intentional or traditional communities throughout Armenia, that are consciously designed through locally owned, participatory processes to regenerate their social, cultural, economic and natural environments.

The core idea behind the whole concept of the ecovillages is integrating the four di-



mensions of sustainability – ecological, economic, cultural and social – through integral, participatory design.

The project is a new format of the long-term cooperation between the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC), VivaCell-MTS and the Global Ecovillages Network (GEN) in the field of environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

Yerevan ahead of Tbilisi and Baku in 2019 Quality of Living Ranking Armenia



Armenia's capital Yerevan is ahead of Tbilisi (Georgia) and Baku (Azerbaijan) in 2019 Quality of Living Index issued by Mercer.

Yerevan is ranked 170th among 231 cities; Tbilisi and Baku are placed 187th and 195th respectfully. Russia's capital Moscow is slightly ahead at 167th.

Vienna tops the ranking for the 10th year

running, closely followed by Zurich, the runner-up.

This year the joint third place went to Vancouver (Canada), Auckland (Australia) and Munich (Germany).

The factors evaluated in Mercer's Quality of Living Report include recreation, housing, economic environment, consumer goods opportunity, public services and transport, political and social environment, natural environment, socio-cultural environment, school and education, medical and health considerations.

This year, Mercer provides a separate ranking on personal safety, which analyses cities' internal stability; crime levels; law enforcement; limitations on personal freedom; relationships with other countries and

freedom of the press.

Personal safety is the cornerstone of stability in any city, without which business and talent cannot thrive. This year, Western Europe dominates the rankings, with Luxembourg named as the safest city in the world, followed by Helsinki and the Swiss cities of Basel, Bern and Zurich in joint second.

According to Mercer's 2019 personal safety ranking, Damascus ranked bottom in 231st place and Bangui in the Central African Republic scored second lowest in 230th place. annually spearheads bipartisan efforts to secure support for Armenian-related aid appropriation, align with ANCA testimony presented to the House panel tasked with writing the FY2020 foreign aid bill.

Armenian Caucus Seeks \$70 Million Targeted Aid for Artsakh and Armenia



Circulates Congressional 'Dear Colleague' Letter Outlining FY2020 Aid Priorities

WASHINGTON—The Congressional Armenian Caucus is calling upon Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Ranking Member Hal Rogers (R-KY) of the Appropriations Subcommittee of Foreign Operations to back a \$70 million Fiscal Year 2020 aid package for Artsakh and Armenia, reported the Armenian National Committee of America).

"In the wake of the Republic of Armenia's remarkable and unprecedented Velvet Revolution, we invite you to sign a letter in support of strengthening the US-Armenian partnership and bolstering the country's civil society and democratic institutions,"

began the 'Dear Colleague' letter circulated yesterday by Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ), which included the following budgetary requests:

- 30 million for economic governance, and rule of law assistance to Armenia through State Department and USAID accounts.
- \$10 million for military aid for Armenia through Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military and Education Training (IMET) programs.
- \$20 million for Armenia to be a regional "safe haven" for refugees.
- \$6 million for Artsakh demining, rehabilitation programs, and water supply systems.
- \$4 million for implementation of the Royce-Engel peace proposals, including placement of OSCE-monitored, advanced gunfire locator systems.
- That the State Department and USAID lift any official or unofficial restrictions on U.S. travel, communication, or contacts with Artsakh government

officials.

- The suspension of U.S. military aid for Azerbaijan until it has been verified to have ceased all attacks against Armenia and Artsakh.

"We want to thank Congressman Pallone and his colleagues in the leadership of the Armenian Caucus for seeking the support of their U.S. House colleagues for a robust aid package for Artsakh and Armenia," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "Following Armenia's historic Velvet Revolution, U.S. assistance can play a critical role in the expansion of Armenia's economic, defense, and democracy development, and return long-term dividends for U.S. security and economic interests, while helping to advance American values across the region for decades to come."

The dollar amounts and policy priorities requested by the Armenian Caucus, which annually spearheads bipartisan efforts to secure support for Armenian-related aid appropriation, align with [ANCA testimony](#) presented to the House panel tasked with writing the FY2020 foreign aid bill.

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



The address:
Baghramyan
1st DL, 2-nd building,
2-nd floor.

Phone: +374 60 536 536

E-mail:
spa.city@yahoo.com

Website:
www.cityspa.am

Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

For the next four weeks, it will be your turn to shine! This is because once a year, the Sun is in your sign boosting your energy and giving you a chance to recharge your batteries for the rest of year. You might not know this but every planet function best in a certain sign, and the Sun (yes, I know the Sun is not a planet, but lazy astrologers refer to the Sun and Moon as “planets” in your chart); to continue -- of all the 12 signs, the Sun functions best in Aries! Factoid.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

In the next four weeks, you want to explore more of your world - ideally, through travel. You want to broaden your horizons through study, new and unfamiliar experiences, meeting people from different backgrounds and learning the answers to big questions! This is a great time to sign up for a course. In your everyday world, do something different from your normal routine. Take a different route to or from work. Visit ethnic restaurants.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Oh joy! Once a year, the Sun travels through the part of your chart that governs romance, love affairs, vacations, socializing, the arts, fun sports plus playful activities with kids. That time has arrived and it will last for four weeks! Mentally gear up to enjoy socializing with others. Get tickets for movies, plays, musical performances and sports events.



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

Because your birthday is just a month away, this means your personal year is coming to an end. As such, the Sun will be hiding in your chart for the next four weeks, which means that you likewise, will want to hide somewhat or be more private because you want to do some thinking so you can plan ahead. This is totally appropriate. Take some time to think about what you want for the new year in front of you. Do you want it to be different from last year?



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

You might find yourself involved in matters related to taxes, debt, insurance, wills and inheritances during the next four weeks. If so, you will have strong opinions! That's because your passions are aroused (even sexually), which is why you will have an intense reaction to everything that goes on, especially disputes in these areas, particularly disputes about shared property. If something like this comes to a head, quite likely, it will be resolved by the end of the week.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

After a month of travel and talking to everyone, this week everything will slow down and you will pull in your reins and choose to cocoon at home. You will welcome the thumb-sucking comfort of relaxing in familiar surroundings. You might be involved with a parent more than usual. But you won't sit around getting dusty because fiery Mars still wants you to play and engage in sports and playful activities with others; while retrograde Mercury will continue to play havoc to your daily transportation and communications.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

You will love the next four weeks because you will be popular! Expect increased interaction with friends, as well as more involvement with clubs, groups and associations. You might be elected to the board or to head a committee. This same window of time is one of the best times all year for you to share your hopes and dreams for the future with others because if you bounce your ideas off someone, you will get their feedback - and this feedback could be helpful and enlightening.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

You are now entering a four-week window when the Sun will be opposite your sign. This occurs only once a year and when it does, it draws your focus to your spouses, partners and close friends. Not only will it increase your interest in these relationships, it will give you the best chance all year to objectively see these relationships, especially your role in that relationship. This is because you will have more detachment and objectivity.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

Fasten your seatbelts because life is getting busy! In the next four weeks, expect short trips, visits, appointments, plus increased time with siblings and relatives. You will read, write and study more than usual. Your schedule will be demanding and your daily pace will accelerate. But it will feel fine! Admittedly, Mars is still stirring up tension, conflict and increased chaos on the home front. Be advised that this will be history by April.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Lucky you! You are favored in the next four weeks because this is the only time all year that the Sun is at high noon in your chart casting a flattering light on you. This means that others see you as attractive, competent, capable and interesting! Bosses, parents and VIPs will admire you. Obviously, this is your time to strike. Demand the advantage!



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Recently, your life has been playful; however, now your focus will switch to work for the next four weeks. You will give more thought to how you should run your life because you want things to flow smoothly. You also want to think that you're getting the best results for your efforts - the most bang for your buck. This is why you will make lists and scrutinize your work and your lifestyle.

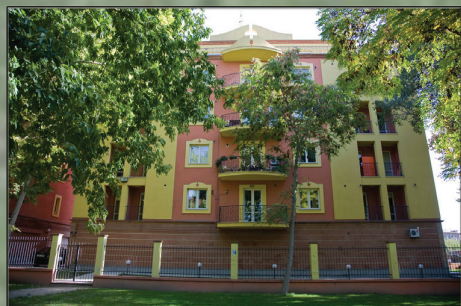


Pisces (February 18–March 19)

In the next four weeks, your mind turns to money, high finances, cash flow and earnings. This is because you will be thinking about what you own and what you owe. You will have a tendency to give yourself a report card based on your material wealth, which is really not at all accurate, is it? Who you are is not your bank account. However, you are your values and in this window of time.

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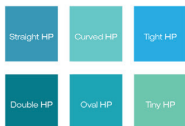
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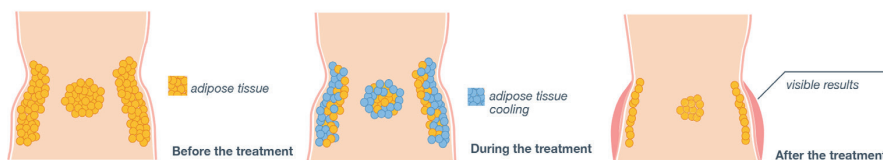
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AZAD

AZAD Pharma AG AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Switzerland

AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

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

AZAD Pharma AG

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

Canada

AZAD Fine Chemicals Ltd.

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

Atlit Inc.

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

China

Hangzhou Representative Office of AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

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

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

Germany

AZAD Pharma GmbH

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

Armenia

AZAD Pharmaceuticals LLC

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



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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՝

Իսահակյան 28, Երևան, ՀՀ, 0009