

## Tribute to the memory of March 1 victims



Armenians pay tribute on March 1 to the ten people killed as a result of clashes between police and protesters on March 1, 2008.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, accompanied by his family, Cabinet members and other government officials, paid tribute to the memory of the 2008 March 1 unrest victims, on the 12th anniversary of the events. The PM laid a wreath near the Myasnikyan statue in central Yerevan.

A rally was scheduled to take place, but the mass gathering was cancelled after authorities confirmed the first novel coronavirus case in the country.

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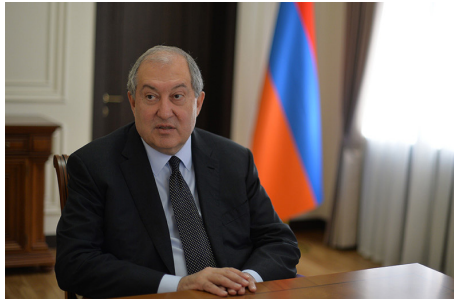


## Violence in Sumgait was reminiscent of the Armenian Genocide – President

Violence and savageries against Armenians in Sumgait, and later in Baku, Kirovabad, and Maragha in their nature were reminiscent of the horrendous days of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, President Armen Sarkissian said in a statement on the 32nd anniversary of Sumgait Pogroms.

“In those days in February, 1988, supported by the criminal acquiescence of the authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan, local armed gangs in Sumgait executed mass violence against the Armenian population, which mounted to massacres, accompanied by torture, rape, looting, and torching of the Armenian property. As a result of the crime instigated and carried out at the state level multiple citizens of the Armenian origin were killed, many were injured, subjected to violence, and deported,” the President said.

“Violence and savageries against Armenians in Sumgait, and later in Baku, Kirov-



abad, and Maragha in their nature were reminiscent of the horrendous days of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. They also resulted in xenophobia and especially Armenophobia enthused in Azerbaijan for decades which today has become even more pronounced and have acquired state-sponsored and state-coordinated features,” President Sarkissian continued.

The President said that by recalling the tragic events, which happened more than 32 years ago we also send a message to the

humankind that civilization cannot develop guided by fascism, national discrimination, and xenophobia.

“Each case that goes unpunished, each distorted fact, each life taken based on hatred means a new opening and possibility for tragedy, it means complicity with those who perpetrate xenophobia, instigators and those who use it as a weapon. It also means incessant waves of hatred in the region, unhindered path to ethnic cleansing, and ultimately to the gravest crime against humanity – genocide,” the President stated.

“The tragedy in Sumgait and Armenians affected by it were the immediate victims of homophobia and Armenophobia. Keeping the road open for the “Brown plague” today too, manifests disrespect to the memory of all those who fell victims of fascism and xenophobia,” President Sarkissian concluded.

## Armenian FM receives Georgian defense minister



Armenian foreign minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan received on February 28 minister

of defense of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili and his delegation, the Armenian MFA told Noyan Tapan.

The two sides praised the high level of the historical friendship and friendly relations and reaffirmed the bilateral readiness to take steps to expand and enrich the Armenian-Georgian comprehensive agenda.

FM Mnatsakanyan praised the current dialogue between Armenia and Georgia at various levels, as well as the comprehen-

sive cooperation agenda which is conditioned by the strategic cooperation of the two countries.

The ministers and meeting participants touched upon a number of regional issues. The foreign minister introduced Armenia's principled position and approaches on the peaceful settlement process of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict to the Georgian side. Both sides noted that there is no alternative to the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

## Armenia, Greece keen to come up with new joint initiatives

On February 25, Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan met with his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias in Geneva.

The partners touched upon a wide range of issues related to the Armenian-Greek friendly relations. Minister Mnatsakanyan noted that Armenia highly appreciates the warm relations established with brotherly Greece based on centuries-old historical ties and mutual respect and trust.

The Foreign Ministers reaffirmed their readiness to come up with joint initiatives aimed at deepening cooperation in areas of bilateral interest, stressing that the Ar-

menia-Greece-Cyprus trilateral format adopted last year is coming to complement the bilateral agenda.

The interlocutors exchanged views on the preparations for the first trilateral summit in Yerevan in April.

Positively assessing the current level of political dialogue between Armenia and Greece, the Foreign Ministers emphasized the importance of giving impetus to high-level mutual visits and political consultations between foreign ministries.

Foreign Ministers Mnatsakanyan and Dendias exchanged views on urgent is-

ssues on the regional and international agenda, developments in the Middle East.



## Opportunities to develop the biofuel market in Armenia discussed in Government



The chief of Armenia's military police and another army general were dismissed on February 19 following a spate of non-combat deaths of soldiers.

President Armen Sarkissian fired Major-General Artur Baghdasaryan and Major-General Aleksan Aleksanyan in separate decrees requested by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Baghdasaryan has headed the military police since May 2017. He was promoted to the rank of army general as recently as on January 24.

For his part, Aleksanyan was the chief of an Armenian army department tasked

with monitoring and maintaining military morale. He had been appointed to that post last November.

Pashinyan promised major "personnel-related decisions" after meeting with Armenia's top military and law-enforcement officials on Monday to discuss recent weeks' increase in the number of soldiers dying in non-combat circumstances.

The Armenian military has reported 13 such deaths since the beginning of this year. Eight of these soldiers have died in accidents and other circumstances not related to their military service.

The five other victims are believed to

have committed suicide or been shot dead by other servicemen in separate incidents investigated by law-enforcement authorities. The shootings have caused outrage in Armenia and cast a renewed spotlight on the chronic problem of hazing and other abuses in the army ranks.

The chief of the army's General Staff, Lieutenant-General Artak Davtyan, on February 18 briefed lawmakers on ongoing efforts to root out the "criminal subculture" and strengthen discipline in the army ranks. Speaking after that meeting, he confirmed that "personnel changes" within the top army brass are imminent.

Davtyan also said that a number of other officers have already been demoted or discharged from the armed forces this month because of the non-combat fatalities. He expressed confidence that military investigators will identify those directly responsible for them.

Pashinyan stressed on Tuesday that the number of non-combat deaths among Armenian military personnel fell to a "historical low" last year. "Our objective is to maintain this dynamic," he wrote on Facebook.

## Armenia closes schools and universities as a precaution against coronavirus spread

Shortly after the first novel coronavirus case was confirmed in Armenia, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has announced that all educational institutions, including schools, universities and kindergartens, will be shut down for 1 week in an effort to prevent a possible outbreak.

"We need to take some time to deeper understand what is happening", he said in a live Facebook broadcast.

Pashinyan said this decision technically means that the spring break will start one week earlier than expected.

The PM said that the government's anti-coronavirus task force is working round-the-clock. He called on the general public

to trust only official information. "We will overcome this situation with honor and come out stronger", he said.

The Armenian PM emphasized that public health is the government's top priority and that the public will be provided with all necessary information.

He said will personally tour the pharmacies in Yerevan to get to know the situation on the shortage of some items, namely masks.

He said Armenia will not impose a total shutdown of the border with Iran. Currently a partial shutdown is in force since February 24.

Speaking about the quarantine of the di-

rect contacts of the first confirmed case, he called on the public not to make panic over the fact that the contacts have been taken to the resort town of Tsakhkadzor.

31 people have been quarantined at the defunct Golden Palace hotel in the resort town. Pashinyan said that some people started cancelling hotel reservations in other hotels in the city after the news, and emphasized that this is completely unnecessary and unsubstantiated. Pashinyan emphasized that Tsakhkadzor must resume its normal life and it shouldn't be considered as a "risk zone" by visitors.



## Serzh Sargsyan's Trial Starts



(RFE/RL – Yerevan)- Nearly two years after resigning amid mass protests against his continued rule, Armenia's former President Serzh Sargsyan went on trial on February 25 on corruption charges which he rejects as politically motivated.

Sargsyan stands accused of giving privileged treatment in 2013 to his longtime friend and businessman Barsegh Beglaryan which cost the state 489 million drams (just over \$1 million) in losses. According to law-enforcement authorities, he made sure that a government tender for supplies of subsidized diesel fuel to farmers is won by Beglaryan's Flash company, rather than another fuel importer that offered a lower price.

Sargsyan is standing trial together with Beglaryan, former Agriculture Minister Sergo Karapetyan and two other former Agriculture Ministry officials also indicted as part of the criminal case. All five suspects deny any wrongdoing.

Sarkisian's lawyers again dismissed the embezzlement charges leveled against him when they spoke during the first session of

the high-profile trial at a district court in Yerevan. One of them insisted that they are based on "contradictory, incredible and illogical" testimony given by a single person.

The trial prosecutor, Arsen Martirosyan, denied that, saying that investigators collected enough evidence to press the charges against the man who ruled Armenia from 2008-2018.

The incriminating pre-trial testimony was reportedly given by Karapetyan. The former minister was jeered by the ex-president's supporters when he entered the courtroom moments before the start of the trial. He refused to talk to reporters afterwards.

The defense lawyers also alleged numerous procedural violations committed by investigators. They accused Martirosyan of being biased against their client and demanded his replacement by another prosecutor. The presiding judge, Vahe Misakyan, adjourned the court hearing to consider the demand.

Sarkisian, 65, was greeted by more than 100 supporters rallying outside the district court building when he arrived for the hearing. Addressing the small crowd, he seemed to link the case against him to his position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

"From the highest podiums of the world I have periodically stated and will repeat now that Nagorno-Karabakh will never be part of Azerbaijan. This has been the su-

preme goal of my life and it will accompany me to the end," the Karabakh-born ex-president said in a short speech greeted with applause and "President!" chants.

The crowd included senior members of the former ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) still headed by Sarkisian. In a statement issued earlier in the day, the HHK leadership similarly alleged a connection between the trial and the current state of the Karabakh negotiating process.

"With such steps the authorities aim to deflect the Armenian people's attention from numerous internal and external problems that are becoming more acute by the day," said the statement.

HHK representatives claimed earlier that their leader was indicted in early December in retaliation for his public criticism of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Law-enforcement officials and Pashinyan's political allies brushed aside those statements.

Sarkisian accused Pashinyan's government of jeopardizing democracy and stifling dissent in a November 20 speech at a congress of the European People's Party held in Croatia. He had kept a low profile since resigning in April 2018.

Pashinyan repeatedly implicated Sargsyan, his family and political entourage in corruption both before and after coming to power in the "Velvet Revolution" led by him.

## PM Pashinyan receives CSTO Gen.-Sec. Stanislav Zas

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received Secretary General of the CSTO Stanislav Zas, who is in Armenia on a working visit.

As Noyan Tapan was informed from the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, the PM welcomed his visit to Yerevan and once again congratulated on the appointment to the responsible position. Nikol Pashinyan highlighted the role of the CSTO for regional security and added, "We have to continue making consistent efforts for raising and strengthening the



effectiveness of the organization". Nikol Pashinyan emphasized the importance of close cooperation for withstanding global

challenges and hoped that during the tenure of Stanislav Zas it will be possible to achieve the solutions to various problems.

The CSTO Secretary-General presented to PM Pashinyan the programs and priorities of the organization for the near future.

During the meeting the sides also referred to the organization of events dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the victory of the Great Patriotic War, as well

as to other international and regional issues.



## Honorary Consulate of Armenia opens in Vilnius

A concert by Khachaturian Trio at Grand Dukes Palace in Vilnius marked the opening of the Honorary Consulate of Armenia.

The event, organized and supported by the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia, was attended by Chancellor of the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laimonas Talat-Kelpša, Heads of diplomatic missions accredited in Lithuania, high-ranking officials of the Lithuanian legislative and executive bodies, representatives of the Seimas, politicians, culture figures, journalists and representatives of the Armenian community.

In his opening remarks, Armenia's Ambassador to Lithuania Tigran Mkrtchyan congratulated Dr. Karapet Babayan on his appointment as Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia and highlighted the recent growth of Armenian-Lithuanian relations based on strong historical ties and common values.



Introducing Karapet Babayan, Tigran Mkrtchyan voiced confidence that with his work Honorary Consul Babayan would promote bilateral economic and business ties, trade and tourism, as well as cultural and educational connections.

Concluding his speech, Ambassador Mkrtchyan presented the internationally acclaimed Khachaturian Trio.

Chancellor Laimonas Talat-Kelpša, in turn, congratulated Karapet Babayan on

his appointment and wished him success in his endeavors. The Lithuanian hailed the establishment of direct air communication between Armenia and Lithuania and noted that it would definitely have a positive impact on deepening mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas. He also referred to the progressive development of warm relations between Lithuania and Armenia.

The newly appointed Honorary Consul Karapet Babayan noted that he would work closely with the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia Lithuania and Armenia to make the two countries closer and more accessible.

Musicians of the Khachaturian Trio – pianist Armine Grigoryan, violinist Karen Shahgaldyan and cellist Karen Kocharyan – performed works by Alexander Spendiarian, Arno Babajanyan, Aram Khachaturian and others.

## Thirty-two people quarantined in Armenia after the first coronavirus case confirmed



Thirty-two people that could have contacted the first Armenian patient diagnosed with coronavirus have been quarantined at Golden Palace hotel in the resort city of Tsakhkadzor, Health Minister Arsen Torosyan told reporters on March 1.

In line with international recommendations, people seated close to the man in the plane that carried 82 Armenian nationals to Yerevan, people who drove the patient and

his wife home from the airport have been isolated, the Minister said, adding that others are not at risk.

He said, that the fact that the man's wife has tested negative for the virus, could mean that

the risk is too low for the rest. All patients of the two Tehran-Yerevan flights are under control, he added.

"The anti-epidemic measures Armenia is taking to prevent the outbreak of the disease are in line with international recommendations. We are even doing more than better developed and wealthier countries," the Health Minister stated.

He reminded that Armenia began taking countermeasures on January 22, and all actions have proven effective, with only this single imported case being recorded so far. A total of 117 tests have been carried out.

Arsen Torosyan noted that people above 50 are more exposed to the disease, while children are not in the risk group.

Early on Sunday Armenia reported the first case of coronavirus. The patient is a 29-year-old man, who arrived in Yerevan from Tehran on February 28. His wife has tested negative for the virus.

Armenia has sealed the land border with Iran and is not planning more flights to capital Tehran after two planes carried 134 Armenian national home from Iran.

The country has also suspended the visa-free regime with People's Republic of China.

## Armenia to join NATO drills in Georgia



Armenia has agreed to take part in fresh NATO-led military exercises that will be held in Georgia later this year, Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Gharibashvili said during a visit to Yerevan on February 27.

"I am glad to note that Armenian soldiers will take part in the 'Noble Partner' multinational exercise that will be held by NATO member and partner states in Georgia," Gharibashvili said after talks with his Armenian counterpart Davit Tonoyan.

"I hope that in the future the Armenian side will continue to be actively involved in such exercises," he added at a joint news briefing.

According to the Georgian Defense Ministry, the drills will be held near Tbilisi in September. They are aimed at "strengthening Georgia's defense capability and interoperability with NATO member and partner forces" and "improving regional partnership," the ministry said in a recent

statement.

The Armenian military last participated in NATO-led exercises in Georgia, also code-named "Noble Partner," in August 2018. It declined invitations to join similar war games that were held in Georgia in September 2018 and in March 2019. Russia, Armenia's main military ally, has denounced such drills.

Tonoyan made no mention of Armenian participation in the upcoming exercises in his statement to the press. He stressed instead the importance of a plan of Armenian-Georgian military cooperation for this year signed by the two defense ministers.

"Also, agreements were reached on expanding cooperation in a number of other spheres without including that in our bilateral program," Tonoyan said without elaborating.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reaffirmed his government's commitment to deepening Armenia's "strategic" relationship with Georgia when he met with Gharibashvili later in the day. He said defense and security is one of the important components of bilateral ties.

## EU envoy hopeful about visa liberalization talks with Armenia

A senior European Union diplomat has expressed hope that the EU will start "soon" formal negotiations with Armenia on lifting its visa requirements for Armenian citizens.

EU leaders pledged to launch a "visa liberalization dialogue" with Yerevan at their Eastern Partnership summit with Armenia and five other former Soviet republics held in Brussels more than two years ago. The pledge followed the signing of a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Armenia.

Both the current and former Armenian governments have since pressed the 27-nation bloc to set a date for the start of the dialogue.

Andrea Wiktoria, the head of the EU

Delegation in Armenia, said late on Thursday that the European Commission acknowledges the Armenian authorities' implementation of a 2013 agreement on "readmission" of Armenian illegal migrants seeking asylum in Europe.

"The Commission sees a possibility of starting such a dialogue," she told RFE/RL's Armenian service. "But this is a decision that has to be made by all EU member states. We hope that we will soon reach the point where the member states agree to start the dialogue."

Wiktoria cautioned at the same time that "several" European countries still have concerns about the large number of Armenian asylum seekers on their soil. "The challenge is to convince these EU member states," she said.

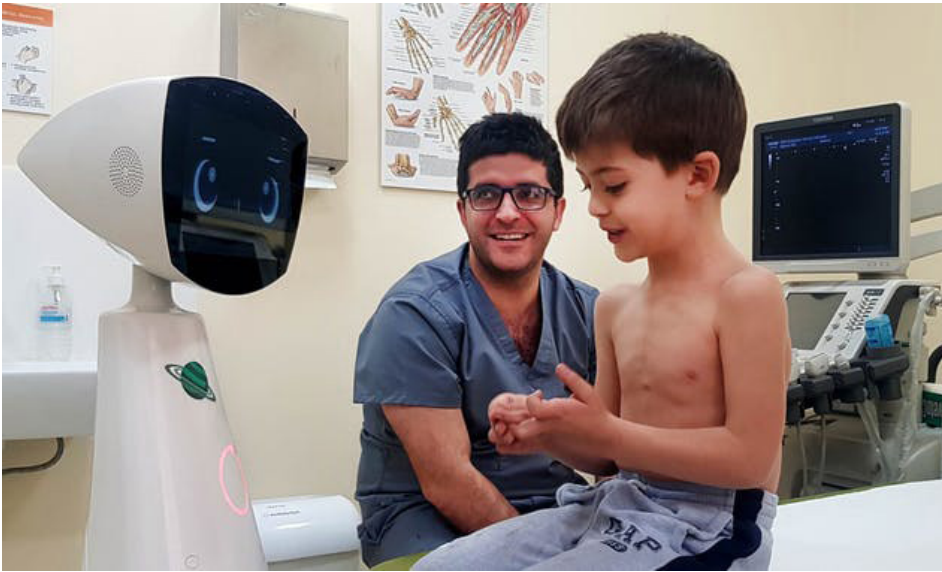
Citing the "example of other countries," the diplomat also said that visa liberalization dialogue could take "years" of preparation.

Tens of thousands of Armenians have emigrated to Europe for mainly economic reasons since the early 1990s. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated in September that the number of such migrants has fallen considerably since the 2018 "Velvet Revolution" that brought him to power.

Pashinyan cited official EU statistics showing that there were 1,815 first-time Armenian asylum applicants in the EU in the first half of 2019, down from 2,475 in the same period of 2018. The number of Armenia asylum seekers stood at 3,250 in the first half of 2017.



## Armenian company develops the first “emotionally intelligent” companion robot



Armenian developers have created Robin the Robot – the first “emotionally intelligent” companion for children.

Developed by the Expper Technolo-

gies Robin is a friendly robot that expresses emotions and builds interactive dialogues with children.

By engaging them in play and peer-to-

peer conversations, Robin reduces their feeling of loneliness and mitigates their stress during their hospital stay.

The purpose is to support children during medical treatment and alleviate their pain by creating positive experiences.

“Hospitalized children have certain emotional needs and I’m here to address them in a new, personalized way,” a post on the company’s website says on behalf of Robin.

Children miss their home and friends during their stay in the hospital. Games help them shake off the negative emotions and take their minds away from illness.

Robin engages them in various activities, tells them stories and plays interactive games. These activities positively distract them from pain and stress. They no longer feel lonely or sad.

## Armenia to be represented at AI & Big Data EXPO International Exhibition in London

Armenia will participate in the AI & Big Data EXPO International Exhibition in London with a single pavilion.

The Armenian Ministry of High-Tech Industry invites companies to participate in the exhibition to be held March 17-18.

Armenian companies are given the opportunity to present their products and innovative solutions, gain new partners, expand sales and partnership markets.

The application and selection criteria for participating companies are set out in the AI-EXPO Application Form.

AI & Big Data EXPO is a showcase of next generation technologies and strategies from the world of Artificial Intelligence & Big Data, an opportunity to explore and discover the practical and successful implementation of AI & Big Data in driving forward your business in 2020 and beyond.

9,000 attendees are expected to congregate for the event including IT decision makers, developers & designers, heads of innovation, chief data officers, chief data scientists, brand managers, data



analysts, start-ups and innovators, tech providers, c-level executives, venture capitalists, and many more.

The AI & Big Data Expo will showcase the most cutting-edge technologies from more than 300 exhibitors and provide insight from over 500 speakers sharing their unparalleled industry knowledge and real-life experiences.

## Turks Attack Each Other: Cypriot Turkish Leader Criticizes Turkey



By Harut Sassounian

Turkish columnist Orhan Kemal Cengiz wrote an article in the Turkish website “al-Monitor” on February 18 titled “Why is Turkish Cypriot leader declared ‘enemy’ in Turkey?” The article provided the details of the antagonism between the government of Turkey and the leader of Turkish Cyprus.

Ever since the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus in 1974, the Republic of Turkey has spent billions of dollars and stationed thousands of Turkish troops to preserve its foothold on the island.

In recent months, the Turkish media has publicized the hostility between the government of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leader. “Turkish officials and politicians visiting the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized as a state only by Ankara, have refused to meet with its president, Mustafa Akinci, since October,” wrote Cengiz.

The conflict started with the Turkish invasion of Northern Syria last October, when Akinci dared to criticize the “Sultan” of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan: “Now, even if we call it [the Turkish invasion of Syria] Operation Peace Spring, what is being spilled is not water but blood. For this reason, it is my greatest wish that dialogue and diplomacy come into play as soon as possible.” Hundreds of Turks in Turkey have been imprisoned for criticizing the Turkish military campaign in Syria. Going beyond Syria, Akinci expressed his disagreement with Turkey regarding its invasion of Northern Cyprus: “Even though we called it Operation Peace, it was a war and blood was spilled in 1974.” According to Cengiz, “by drawing a comparison between the two interventions, Akinci was obviously trying to say that military oper-

ations in foreign lands create lasting problems and, therefore, he was inviting Turkey to consider other options in Syria.”

Even though Akinci’s criticisms of the Turkish military invasions were well-meaning, Erdogan, who does not tolerate dissent, was furious, stating that Akinci had “exceeded his limits” and adding that the electorate will soon teach him a “lesson.” Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay also condemned the Turkish Cypriot leader. Cengiz reported that “in Northern Cyprus, meanwhile, Akinci received death threats, for which he requested a judicial investigation.”

Columnist Cengiz further reported that “Akinci’s remarks made him a scapegoat in Turkey and fueled an unprecedented wave of reactions, the harshest that any Northern Cyprus representative has ever seen. [Turkish] MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli called on Akinci to immediately resign. ‘Akinci and his supporters should not forget that Cyprus is Turkish and will remain Turkish,’ Bahçeli said. He also suggested that Akinci move to the Greek Cypriot south. AKP spokesman Omer Celik urged Akinci to apologize, while Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the Northern Cyprus leader was being ‘hostile to Turkey’ and that he had never seen ‘such a dishonest politician’ in his life. With the tone set like that by top politicians, pro-government newspapers were even harsher. ‘The Crusaders’ Akinci should resign immediately,’ one paper said, while another declared that Akinci was ‘like an enemy.’”

Cengiz explained in his article that “it is Turkey that pays the bills in Northern Cyprus through direct and indirect financial aid. Therefore, Cypriot Turks should always be grateful to Ankara. Turkey is ‘the mother’ and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is her ‘baby.’ Anything that goes beyond this notion of subordination would threaten the status quo.”

In an interview with The Guardian on February 6, Akinci warned the “permanent partition of its [Cyprus’s] Greek and Turkish communities unless an agreement is swiftly reached involving an ‘equitable’ federal

solution.” Akinci said he disagreed with Erdogan’s vision of the relationship between Ankara and Nicosia as one of “mother and baby.... I want independent, brotherly relations,” he explained. He acknowledged the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus had to do more to make its economy less reliant on Turkey, which pays the government’s bills. To do this he needed support from the [Greek] south, Akinci told The Guardian.

“Akinci – who on Wednesday evening [Feb. 5] launched his re-election campaign – said the only viable solution to Cyprus’s nearly half century of division was reunification under a federal ‘roof’.... ‘If this failed to happen,’ Akinci told The Guardian, ‘the north would grow increasingly dependent on Ankara and could end up being swallowed up, as a de facto Turkish province.’”

“Akinci’s vision, which is shared by many Turkish Cypriots, calls for a bi-communal, bi-zonal Cyprus with political equality and a single ‘personality,’ he told The Guardian. It is based on a shared identity of being islanders of Cyprus, rather than being Turkish or Greek,” Cengiz wrote.

“Akinci’s likely election run-off rival is Ersin Tatar, an outspoken pro-Ankara populist who opposes reconciliation with the south. Tatar, the current prime minister, favors a two-state solution. He enjoys strong support from Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and from settlers who have arrived in unquantified numbers from the mainland, changing the island’s religious and cultural makeup,” The Guardian wrote.

“I’m not going to be a second Tayfur Sökmen,” Akinci told The Guardian, referring to the president of Hatay, who in the 1930s merged his republic – formerly part of French-mandated Syria – with Turkey after a referendum.

The dispute between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leader is deviating the Turkish government’s attention away from a slew of other serious conflicts Turkey has with Armenia, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Greece and Cyprus.



## People of Artsakh have the right to freely determine their political status without limitations – Armenian FM



The people of Nagorno-Karabakh have the right to freely determine their political status without limitations, and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development by virtue of the right to self-determination, Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said in an address to the 43rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The Foreign Minister said “this is at the core of the peaceful resolution.”

“Armenia also underlines the importance of denouncing hatred and intolerance and investing serious effort in promoting human contacts. Equally, the threat of force is firmly ruled out. Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are committed to building further on the modest results achieved in 2019,” Minister Mnatsakanyan stated.

He noted that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh continue to face a threat of force and coercion from Azerbaijan, whose persistent obstruction of human rights, intolerance, hatred, discrimination and outright aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are the root causes of the conflict.

“Massacres, ethnic cleansing and forced

expulsion of the Armenian minority population from Baku, Sumgait, Kirovabad and other towns and villages of Azerbaijan, the war and aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh in 1990s, glorification of murderers of Armenians represent such consistent aggressive policies of Azerbaijan. They constitute an existential physical security threat to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. We were reminded about this threat in an attempted renewed aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016,” Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said.

He emphasized that Armenia remains fully committed to the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the internationally mandated format of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship and underlines the priority of security and status for Nagorno-Karabakh.

“Promotion and support to full enjoyment of human rights for people residing in conflict areas must represent a collective objective for the international community. Human rights and those who exercise them cannot be defined as a problem,” the Foreign Minister underlined.

He reminded that on 31 March the people of Nagorno-Karabakh will cast their votes at presidential and parliamentary elections in fulfilling their legitimate right of organizing their lives in a democratic manner.

“The commitment of Nagorno-Karabakh and its people who endured war, siege and aggression, who continue to face the threat of war, to sustain a strong democratic society and institutions for the protection of human rights deserve full international support. Human rights and fundamental freedoms should be respected, protected and promoted without distinction of any kind, including “the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs,” minister Mnatsakanyan stated.

In conclusion, he reiterated Armenia’s unwavering commitment and support to the United Nations human rights machinery.



## Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks in Australian call for genocide recognition

The peak advocacy bodies of the Armenian-Australian, Assyrian-Australian and Greek-Australian communities have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to launch the “Joint Justice Initiative” at a Cultural Cocktail event at the Australian Parliament House’s Mural Hall on Tuesday 25th February 2020, the Armenian National Committee of Australia reports.

Around 100 Federal Australian parliamentarians, diplomats, departmental officials, political staffers, academics, media and community leaders were treated to cultural performances, food, wine and brandy, as well as the historic signing which affirmed that the public affairs representatives of the three communities were jointly committed to seeing Australia recognize the Turkish-committed Genocide against the Armenian, Greek and Assyrian citizens of the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

The Joint Justice Initiative’s Memorandum of Understanding stipulates that the Armenian National Committee of Australia, the Assyrian Universal Alliance – Australia Chapter and the Australian Hellenic Council “shall continue and expand their co-operation and joint advocacy for the international affirmation and justice for the Genocides of the indigenous Armenian, Assyrian and Greek, and Assyrian populations of the Ottoman Empire perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish government”.

Further, the document confirms the communities participating in the Joint Justice Initiative “shall jointly advocate against any attempt by the Turkish Government to use the sacred ANZAC graves in Gallipoli (and access by Australians to those graves and memorials) as ‘hostages’ or bargaining chips in coercing or persuading the Australia



lian Government in being complicit in the Turkish State’s denial campaign with respect to the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocides.”

Mr. Haig Kayserian of the Armenian National Committee of Australia spoke on behalf of the Joint Justice Initiative, stating that the three communities – who are made up of descendants of survivors of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks during WWI – consider this a significant step towards the realization of their collective goals.

“The launch of the Joint Justice Initiative and our signing of this Memorandum of Understanding signals our commitment to redouble our joint efforts to ensure Australia is a party of truth and justice when it comes to the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocide,” he said.

“In recent years, Australia’s Parliament has seen dozens of speakers declare support for Federal recognition of the Genocide committed against our ancestors, and we believe it is past time that Canberra gives up the word games it plays on this issue in the name of a false diplomacy against a bullying foreign dictatorship.”

The Assyrian Universal Alliance – Australia Chapter’s Deputy Secretary General,

Mr. Hermiz Shahen declared: “Denial is the continuation of genocide, and Australia’s inaction in recognizing and condemning means we are failing the very values our country was built on.”

“It was Australians who came to the aid of Armenian, Assyrian and Greek victims of the genocide over 100 years ago, while our ANZACs witnessed the barbarity suffered by the Christian minorities deliberately targeted by the Ottoman government, and it should be in the spirit of those Australians that our political leaders stand up for what is right,” Mr. Shahen added.

The Australian Hellenic Council’s Mr. George Vellis declared: “It is time Australia stands up for human rights, truth and justice, and the Armenian-Australian, Assyrian-Australian and Greek-Australian communities have today declared that this is an absolute priority for the country’s lawmakers and government.”

The Joint Justice Initiative invited Members of Parliament and Senators to sign a pledge that declares their support for Australia’s recognition of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocides, and event hosts Mr. Trent Zimmerman MP and The Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP addressed the audience as co-convenors of the Armenia-Australia Interparliamentary Union stressing their backing.

Professor Peter Stanley, who is the former Director of the Australian War Memorial and co-author of *Australia, Armenia & the Great War*, spoke to press the importance of Australia’s recognition of the Genocide committed against the Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks of the Ottoman Empire.

## Company co-founded by Noubar Afeyan develops COVID-19 vaccine

Moderna Therapeutics, a biotech company co-founded by Noubar Afeyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, has shipped the first batches of its COVID-19 vaccine, Time reports.

The vaccine was created just 42 days after the genetic sequence of the COVID-19 virus, called SARS-CoV-2, was released by Chinese researchers in mid-January.

The first vials were sent to the National



Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of

Health (NIH) in Bethesda, MD, which will ready the vaccine for human testing as early as April.

Moderna’s vaccine against COVID-19 was developed in record time because it’s based on a relatively new genetic method that does not require growing huge amounts of virus.

Instead, the vaccine is packed with mRNA, the genetic material that comes from DNA and makes proteins.



## CEPA can strengthen of Armenia's independence and sovereignty

**Speech delivered by Hovsep Khurshudyan, "Free Citizen" Civic Initiatives Support Center NGO President, at the Parliamentary Hearings on the RA-EU Comprehensive and Extended Partnership Agreement on the 26th of February, 2020**

Dear Mr. Chairman, Dear Participants

If we try to sum up in a word, what Armenia benefits first and foremost from the full implementation of the Comprehensive and Enlarged Partnership Agreement with the EU, that will be sovereignty.

The signing of this Agreement comes after the failure to sign the preceding more comprehensive Association Agreement including the launching of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreement back in 2013, which was torpedoed by Kremlin. It is disturbing and intolerable that the establishment of closer relations with the third party had to be agreed and approved by the Russian authorities in the case of the former authorities of Armenia, which is indicative of the very limited sovereignty and of vertical, not equal nature of relations between Armenia and Russia. It is hard to recall a single case when Russia would not only agree, but simply reckon with the Armenia's vital interests when building relations and dealing with our adversaries, such as arming them with modern weapons.

On the other hand, giving Armenia its consent to conclude a Comprehensive and Enlarged Partnership Agreement with the EU, the Kremlin has essentially marked the red lines within which there is no longer any reason for Armenia to be cramped in deepening of cooperation with the EU. Particularly now, when the Republic of Armenia belongs to its citizens and its authorities do not need to make any concessions of state interests to gain Moscow's support in return for protection of their own seats and rulership.

We can confidently assert that even in a shorter form this Agreement with the EU is a great opportunity to enter into a new and important phase of rapprochement between the Republic of Armenia and the European Union, which may create key preconditions for Armenia's much wider integration to the European family in the future.

So, I would like to draw your attention to the three cornerstone directions of the Agreement.

The first cornerstone relates to the articles which aim at the establishment of security, peace and stability, cybercrime preven-

tion, personal data protection, prevention of money laundering, terrorism, drug trade and trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, export control of the small arms and light weapons, as well as conventional weapons, cooperation in the fields of migration, granting of asylum, border management and civil protection. Beneficiaries of this direction are the RA Police, Armed Forces, Territorial Administration System, Central Bank, National Security Service, Ministry of Emergency Situations.

The deepening of cooperation in this direction will create prerequisites to not only bring the security environment of the Republic of Armenia closer to the European one. It will also shape platforms for cooperation and information exchange between the relevant agencies of the Republic of Armenia and the EU, promote the formation of culture and traditions of cooperation between them, enhance the qualification of the above-mentioned Armenian agencies and their staff. Most importantly, it will provide an alternative networking opportunity; will expand the scope of Armenia's ability for complementary foreign policy, thereby strengthening the country's sovereignty.

The other direction pertains to the rule of law, protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms, full administration of justice, and fight against corruption. As stated in Article 12, paragraph 3, "Respect for human rights, non-discrimination and fundamental freedoms shall guide all cooperation on freedom, security and justice".

European experience, financial and technical assistance can play key role in reforming our country's judicial system. The close cooperation of the Armenian courts, prosecutor's office and investigative bodies with European partner structures will contribute to the qualitative enhancement of these bodies, which will lead to an even more effective protection of the rights and freedoms of RA citizens being one of the priorities of our state. At the same time, we must declare that the protection of human rights and the exclusion of discrimination irrespective of sex, age, national or religious affiliation, sexual identity, social and other characteristics are not so much for European structures as for us, our state and society, because it is about the citizens of the Republic of Armenia. In this respect, I would like to express my hope that the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia will comply the extremely flawed Draft Law of the Republic of Armenia "On

Ensuring Equality" with the requirements pertaining to respecting the rights of all RA citizens.

The propaganda of hatred and discrimination against any citizen of the Republic of Armenia should not be simply rejected, but should be punishable by law. By doing so, we will nip the discourses designed by the foreign political centers to form dividing lines within our society with the aim of inciting and fueling artificial anti-European and anti-Western sentiments in one part of our society. Adoption of a full-fledged law "On Ensuring Equality" is also one of the key preconditions for establishing visa-free regime between the EU countries and Armenia.

The third key area concerns the economy, including energy, and, by this, we mean ensuring Armenia's economic as well as energy independence, which is one of the most important components of the sovereignty of the modern states. The European Union will assist Armenian businesses to increase the quality of their products to enable them to export to EU markets. EU also help Armenia to develop alternative energy.

In conclusion, I would particularly like to bring up the issue of Armenia's full membership in the "Creative Europe" programme. As you know, in June 2018 Armenia joined the "Culture" component of this programme, but has not yet joined the "Media" component, which is much more extensive. This requires some additional legislative regulations (approximation), as well as an annual membership fee of 80,000 euros in addition to the 40,000 euros required to join the "Culture" component. As a result, Armenian cultural and media organizations will be able to apply for and receive grants of millions of euros. The other global European project that Armenia has joined is "Horizon 2020", but where proper efforts and investments has yet to be made for the implementation. Finally, effective and full implementation of SEPA would not be possible without the involvement of the Civil Society through a structured dialogue with it.

Thus, if the incumbent authorities have the appropriate political will to fully realize all the possibilities of a Comprehensive and Extended Partnership Agreement with the EU, in just a few years we will have not only additional security, prosperity and social development for Armenia, but more importantly substantial strengthening of our country's independence and sovereignty.

# Miroslav Lajčák, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia: “...Opening of Slovak Embassy in Yerevan will Definitely Give a New Impetus to Bilateral Relations’ Strengthening...”

**By Gourgen James Khazhakian,**  
**Chief Correspondent**

Ceremony of the official opening of the Slovak Republic Embassy in Yerevan was held on 29 February at the Armenia Marriott Hotel.



After two countries’ anthems sounded, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia **Miroslav Lajčák** had a speech, essential extracts of which The Highlights readers can find below:

“...As a matter of fact, our both countries recently have been experiencing unusually intensive political dialog. Today I had a chance to discuss essential topics with the RA Foreign Minister **Zohrab Mnatsakanyan**, and will meet with the Prime Minister H.E. Mr **Nikol Pashinyan**.

Despite the fact that our countries are geographically distant, our ties in bilateral relations are close. However, wishing to boost them furthermore, we must have permanent diplomatic presence.

Therefore, today is a truly big day for our relations as after 27 years they are getting the house...And we are convinced that there is lot of opportunities for cooperation...

...Naturally, economic cooperation is essential...We support direct business-to-business contacts, and they form new economic platform. But also in terms of people-to-people ties, and people-related sectors such as education, youth exchange or tourism, because in the end it is our peoples, Slovaks and Armenians, are the core of our friendship.

But we also want Armenians recognize and appreciate so much European perspectives, as we see the European values are close to Armenians...

...And our team here will share the European values, visions and expertise...And our transformation experience and the best practise...giving a chance to Armenia to avoid our mistakes.

Dear colleagues, Excellencies !

I would thank the MFA of Armenia, all the relevant officials for their support in the opening of our Embassy.

...I have big expectations from this Mission, and its potential!

Thank you”.

Deputy FM of Armenia **Avet Adonts** said in particular:

“...I warmly welcomes Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Mr **Miroslav Lajčák** in his official visit in Armenia.

Dilomatic relations between Armenia and Slovakia have benn established yet in 1993, and despite the fact of diplomatic missions’ absense until today, our bilater relations have been permanently developing.

Today we mark an important event in our diplomatic relations – residence mission of the Slovak Republic in the Republic of Ar-



menia starts to work officially.

For this, I congratulate all of us and to thank the Government of Slovakia for this important, expected and greeted step.

Between our two countries friendly and partner ties have been formed based on mutual liking, sympathies, common values, wish to have peaceful, prospering and democratic society of the both peoples.

Slovakia is an important and reliable partner for Armenia in Europe.

We are interested to expand and develop our cooperation with Slovakia in political, trade-economic and cultural and all other areas of mutual interest.

From this point of view our interaction is important within the frames of broadening Armenia-EU agenda, which creates new preconditions for new directions of bilateral cooperation...”

Ambassador Adonts wished newly opened Slovak Embassy all the success, productive work in the name of strengthening and deepening of Armenian-Slovak cooperation.

Notably, some 16 years ago a prominent



Armenian businessman and public figure **Gagik Martirosyan** was appointed Honorary Consul of the Slovak Republic to the Republic of Armenia. Speaking on the role Mr Martirosyan played as official

rep of Slovakia within all those years, Political Director of the Foreign and European Affairs Ministry of the Slovak Republic Ambassador **Roman Buzek** said the following:

“...We highly appreciate huge job has been done by Gagik Martirosyan within 16 years, definitely he was supporting interests of Slovakia here in Armenia, and we do hope he’ll continue his job for supporting our country here even after opening of the Slovak Embassy in Yerevan.

Again, Mr Martirosyan did an excellent job, in very professional manner; he was very useful and informative for us, and he played an irreplaceable role in establishing of Slovakian Embassy...”

In a brief interview with your correspondent, Minister Miroslav Lajčák pointed out: “...Yes, you are absolutely right, we have very regular and frequent political dialog, I am meeting my Armenian counterpart for several times per year, and we recognize that Armenia has a lot of potential, our trade turnover has been increasing but is far to be a satisfactory one, that is why it is necessary to have embassy to work on the daily basis to identify particular areas where we can help each other, to cooperate (in the best way), and, of course, the economy is a priority,- IT, food processing, agriculture, education, bringing people has special importance as both Slovakia and Armenia has many beautiful sites to be seen...”

...So I believe our newly opened Embassy in Yerevan will spare no effort to turn all these plans into reality...”

Well, God gives!





## Next Amazing Concert of Aida Garifulina and Constantine Orbelian in Moscow

*By Gourgen James Khazhakian and Serine-Lyuba Tatevosyan (Moscow)*

On 29 February, at one of the most prestigious concert venues in Moscow, Barvikha Hall, a concert of the world opera diva **Aida Garifulina**, accompanied by the orchestra of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre under direction of Honored Artist of Russia, General and Artistic Director of the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Natl Academic Theatre Maestro **Constantine Orbelian** was held.

After winning the **Placido Domingo** Operalia Contest in 2013, Aida Garifulina became a highly demanded guest on the best stages of Europe and the USA. The singer has long performed with outstanding musicians of our time, and so a concert with Constantine Orbelian in Barvikha is not their first collaboration, not at all. They often delighted the audience with performances with a close friend and colleague **Dmitry Khvorostovsky** (of the blessed memory), and in August 2019 the singer held a large solo concert at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, and again under direction of Maestro Orbelian.

The program of the Moscow concert included world opera hits as well as orchestral solos from V.-A. Mozart, J. Puccini, P. Mascagni, J. Bizet, W. Giordano, C. Saint-Saens and P.I. Tchaikovsky ..., performed subtly and as authentically as possible. During vocal performances, the orchestra liter-



Aida Garifulina opened the evening with her “crown” aria of Juliet from the opera *Romeo and Juliet* by S. Gounod.

The singer with great accuracy and in-



spiration performed the arias of Mimi, Musette, Violet as well as duets from the opera *La Traviata* by G. Verdi with the lead singer of the Helikon Opera Ivan Gyngazov.

Aida and Ivan, just last week, successfully performed the main roles in the premiere performances of the *Sadko* opera by N. Rimsky-Korsakoy at the Bolshoi Theatre.

In Barvikha, Ivan Gyngazov, in addition to his rich timbre, demonstrated excellent French pronunciation in Jose's aria from the *Carmen* opera by J. Bizet.

At the end of the concert, after a long standing ovation, Aida Garifulina performed an encore of the audience's beloved Lauretta aria from the Gianni Schicchi opera by G. Puccini. The Orchestra conducted by Maestro Constantine Orbelian that evening very delicately accompanied the singers, and numerous orchestral solos became a real decoration of the concert in Barvikha.



ally “breathed” together with the singer, creating a real magic on the stage.

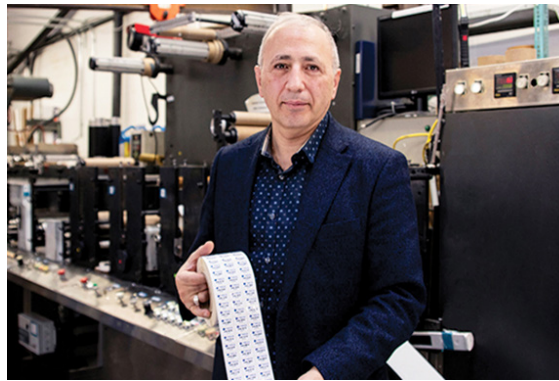


## How an Armenian scientist created an international company using a toy

Asbarez – In 1999, Dr. George Ambartsoumian founded GA International, a company that provides exceptional identification solutions for industries including biopharma, biotechnology, medical, biobanking, healthcare, construction, fashion retail, and more.

A scientist, Dr. Ambartsoumian graduated from Kazan State Academy of Veterinary Medicine in Russia, where he earned his Ph.D. He later earned a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Armenia's Yerevan Veterinary Institute, and performed post-doctoral research at Montreal's Concordia University, Notre-Dame Hospital, and the Shriner's Hospital. While working in a lab at Shriner's, Dr. Ambartsoumian realized that the labels used to mark the tubes in the lab were constantly falling off – even becoming wet – especially when stored in sub-zero temperatures.

Years later, Ambartsoumian decided to become an entrepreneur. At the time, an acquaintance of his was selling a small label-making toy called STIKA. Seeing this toy reminded Ambartsoumian of the barely adhesive labels at the Shriner's lab. After learning all he could about plastic film,



adhesives, and paper materials, Ambartsoumian went on to create a label that stuck to tubes even in sub-zero temperatures. He presented his idea to an organization in Laval, Quebec, and began promoting his labels to a number of labs.

In 2004, GA International comprised of George, his wife Armine, and one helper – all of whom worked out of a small office space. After years of dedication and hard work, the company steadily grew. Today, GA International has become the leading manufacturer and supplier of cryogenic and solvent-resistant labels worldwide. With more than 65 employees, the company sells over 6,000 individual products.

Dr. Ambartsoumian started the company using only a small toy to make labels in his basement. He would eventually build his company into one of the world's leading identification solutions companies, selling specialized labels and other products internationally to large companies and healthcare institutions. Ambartsoumian grew his company from a one-person enterprise to one of the worldwide leaders in laboratory identification solutions.

In 2019, exactly 20 years later, GA International won the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2019 Award in the Quebec region and two MercadOr 2019 Awards in the "Innovative Exporter of Goods" and "Foreign Expansion" categories.

GA International is celebrating 20 years as a leading manufacturer of specialty labels, supplying laboratory identification solutions to biomedical research labs, hospitals, and other healthcare institutions. Since its inception, GA International has become a worldwide leader in cryogenic and chemical-resistant labels, with a strong dedication to R&D and customer service.

## Pan-Armenian fundraising campaign for Etchmiadzin Mother Cathedral announced

The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin announces a global fundraising campaign in support of the restoration and preservation of the Mother Cathedral.

The urgent restoration and renovation work of the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin began in 2012 in order to preserve the sanctuary of all Armenians.

During the restoration, experts uncovered massive deterioration that needed to be addressed immediately to prevent the Cathedral from total collapse. As such, there was a delay in the restoration efforts to further study and find the best solution in restoring the Cathedral.

The last partial renovation of the Mother Cathedral was implemented in the 1950s-1960s.

This is the largest overhaul in recent centuries concerning the preservation and renovation of the Mother Cathedral, and requires significant financial support from



the worldwide community.

On this occasion, on June 23, 2019, during the Feast of the Universal Holy Church of Etchmiadzin, the Pontifical Encyclical of the Catholicos of All Armenians was read in all Armenian churches throughout the world.

Today, the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin is in great need of renovation, and of important work to reinforce its walls, in order to preserve it from the danger of ruin.

Necessary repair works have already

been undertaken in the Mother See in order to preserve and structurally strengthen the Cathedral. The required renovations, however, are extensive, and require great resources and the assistance of all Armenians. Now, we appeal to you, beloved, with St. Gregory the Illuminator's call, "let us build the Holy Altar of Light."

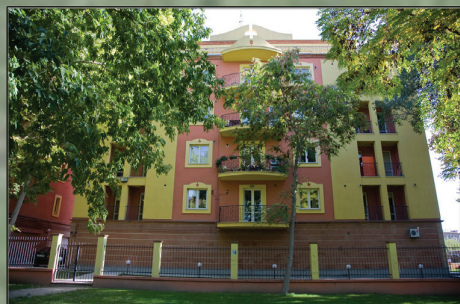
United, let us renovate the Holy Altar of our national ecclesiastical life: the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. Holy Etchmiadzin has always fed and strengthened in spirit all its faithful. Today Etchmiadzin needs your support, so that it may continue its eternal mission in the life of our people.

"The restoration of the Mother Cathedral is our duty and honor," said Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Fundraising Committee Chairman.



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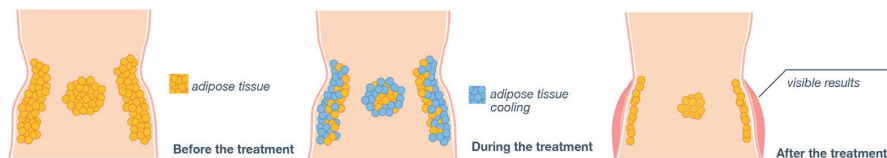
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