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PM Pashinyan Sees Opportunities for an "Era of Peaceful Development in the Region"



YEREVAN-- The Armenian government will do its best to move towards opening an era of peaceful development of the region, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Monday.

"I would like to note that after meetings in Sochi and Brussels, I see an opportunity to move forward step by step to open an era of peaceful development for our country and the region," he said at a meeting with National Security Service (NSS) officials.

At the same time, Pashinyan

stressed that the problems facing Armenia are not resolved and measures should be taken with the direct involvement of the NSS to best protect the Armenian statehood, sovereignty, independence, constitution, legislation and territorial integrity.

In a related development, during a government meeting, Pashinyan confirmed that Armenia and Azerbaijan to reopen Yeraskh-Julfa-Meghri-Horadiz Railway.

Continued on page 3

Armenia's Security Council Secretary Meets With US National Security Adviser at the White House



WASHINGTON, DC-- US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met with National Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan of Armenia at the White House on December 15.

In a statement the White House said that Mr. Sullivan conveyed the commitment of the United States to peace, security, and prosperity in Armenia and the South Caucasus region.

"He expressed concern over ongoing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and emphasized that military movements near un-demarcated borders are irresponsible and provocative. He welcomed the ongoing com-

munication between the two sides and emphasized the U.S. commitment to continue supporting confidence-building measures and regional reconciliation both bilaterally and as a Minsk Group Co-Chair.

Mr. Sullivan welcomed the announcement yesterday that Turkey and Armenia will appoint special envoys to discuss the normalization process.

Mr. Sullivan appreciated Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's participation in The Summit for Democracy and underscored our strong cooperation on reform, democratic institution-building, and economic development in Armenia", the statement says.

Ruben Rubinyan Appointed Armenia's Representative for Dialogue with Turkey

YEREVAN-- Deputy Speaker of the RA National Assembly Ruben Rubinyan will be the Special Representative of Armenia for the dialogue process between Armenia and Turkey. Press Secretary of the Armenian Foreign Ministry Vahan Hunanyan announced this on his Facebook page.

On December 13, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced that Turkey and Armenia may appoint special representatives to normalize relations between the countries and their intention to open charter flights to Yerevan. Later, Cavusoglu announced the appointment of the former Turkish ambassador to the United States, Serdar Kilic, as a special representative.

On December 24, 1991, Turkey officially recognized the Republic of Armenia, but still refuses to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia.

In 1993, Turkey unilaterally closed its air and land borders with Armenia. The air border was opened in 1995 under pressure from the international community. For the opening of



the land border and the establishment of diplomatic relations, Turkey puts forward a number of unacceptable conditions, in particular, the refusal of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced that the Armenian and Turkish negotiators will hold their first meeting soon. But he gave no concrete dates.

Armenia's Maléna Wins Junior Eurovision Song Contest



PARIS-- 14-year-old Maléna representing Armenia has won the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2021, giving her country its second win and first since 2010. Maléna stunned the millions watching around the world on TV and online with an incredible performance of "Qami Qami", finishing with an impressive 224 points.

19 countries participated under the slogan "Imagine" in the two hours show broadcast live from La Seine Musicale in Paris and hosted by Carla, Élodie Gossuin and Olivier Minne.

Armenia first took part in the Junior Eurovision Song Contest in 2007 and has finished in the Top 3 seven times in total.

Maléna from Yerevan is a talented cellist, and has dreamed about representing Armenia for many years; she participated in her nation's selection competition back in 2018.

Sara James from Poland, received

218 points to finish in 2nd place with "Somebody". Frabce's Enzo singing "Tic Tac" was 3rd with 187 points.

Viewers in the 19 participating countries and a further 180 nations helped decide the winner by voting online. Juries made up of three industry experts and two children from each participating country provided 50% of the scores.

4.3 million valid votes were received in the online poll which was split into two rounds; one before the show based on preview clips and a second that opened after the last live performance, allowing viewers to cast their votes based on what they saw on stage.

Martin Österdahl, the Contest's Executive Supervisor, said "Congratulations to our super-talented winner Maléna who gave a fantastic performance of "Qami Qami" and to all the great young artists who illuminated the stage here in the City of Light.

Putin, Macron Discuss Nagorno Karabakh Settlement



MOSCOW -- Russian and French Presidents Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement by telephone on Tuesday, the Kremlin website reported.

It said during an exchange of views on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, satisfaction was expressed over the stabilization of the situation in the conflict zone and the efforts being made to establish peace-

ful life and restore economic and transport links in the region," the press release said.

It said also that regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue Russia and France are acting and will continue to act synchronously.

During the phone conversation, Putin congratulated Emmanuel Macron on his birthday; the leaders also exchanged good wishes on the eve of the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Ten Armenian Detainees Returned Home From Azerbaijan



YEREVAN -- The Armenian Foreign Ministry announced the return of 10 Armenian POWs from Azerbaijan.

"With the mediation of the President of the European Council Charles Michel, 10 prisoners of war returned to their homeland," the press secretary of the RA Foreign Ministry said on Facebook.

The detainees were repatriated with the mediation of the President of EU Council Charles Michel.

"Happy to have been able to repatriate 10 Armenian servicemen," EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia Tovio Klaar said in a Twitter post.

Tovio Klaar called it "an important gesture by Azerbaijan in the process of addressing humanitarian issues."

"The European Union will continue to work with both countries to build on the successful meetings of the President of the EU Council with Ar-

menian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev".

For his part President of the EU Council Charles Michel has welcomed the release of the Armenian detainees.

"Warmly welcome Baku's release of 10 Armenian detainees in follow up to discussions with the President of Azerbaijan Ilham ALiyev and the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan," describing it as "an important humanitarian gesture demonstrating the mutual will to strengthen confidence as discussed in Brussels."

The Armenian Foreign Ministry has published the names and years of birth of the returned prisoners:

Galstyan Hrachik (1990), Dilanyan Mkrtich (1982), Harutyunyan Gagik (1982), Poghosyan Radik (1990), Ghevondyan Andranik (1973), Nazaryan Artur (1978), Shahinyan Marat (1977), Petrosyan Sevek (1984), Stepanyan Karlen (1974) and Vasilyan Hayk (1984).

Iranian MPs Visit Armenian Genocide Memorial



YEREVAN -- On a working visit to Armenia, Members of the delegation led by the head of the Iran-Armenia Friendship Group of Iran's Majlis Seyed Mahdi Farshadan visited the Armenian Genocide Memorial on December 21 accompanied by Gevorg Papoyan, head of the Armenia-Iran Friendship Group at the Armenian National Assembly.

The guests were greeted by Lusine Abrahamyan, Deputy Director for Museum Works of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, who presented the history of the memorial. She briefed the guests on the story of three khachkars placed in the area of Tsitsernakaberd, which are dedicated

to the memory of the Armenians who died during the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population in Azerbaijan at the end of the 20th century.

The Iranian MPs including two Armenian deputies of the Iranian Parliament Ara Shaverdyan and Robert Beglaryan, laid flowers at the eternal flame and observed a minute of silence in memory of the consecrated martyrs of the Armenian Genocide.

They also toured the Armenian Genocide Museum and got acquainted with permanent and temporary exhibitions.

At the end of the visit, the members of the delegation made notes in the Book of Honorary Guests.

EBRD and EU to Fund SMEs in Armenia



The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is providing a •5 million financial support package to Armeconombank in Armenia to facilitate the private sector's transition to more sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient practices. The project is supported by the European Union (EU), with grant incentives allocated through Armeconombank.

The package is provided under the EU4Business-EBRD credit line, with incentives for on-lending to local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with export potential for investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation. It will also help SMEs to upgrade technologies and services to EU standards while promoting the use of green technologies. This is the fourth project to be signed in Armenia under the programme.

The EU4Business-EBRD credit line is a flagship initiative, helping local companies increase their competitiveness at home and abroad by upgrading

their production facilities and processes to EU standards. The companies will be able to improve the working conditions of their employees and foster environmental sustainability. At least 70 per cent of the loan proceeds will be used to finance investments in green technologies in accordance with the EBRD's Green Economy Transition (GET) approach. Borrowers are eligible to receive incentive grants and technical advice, both funded by the EU under its EU4Business initiative. The programme is also available in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Dimitri Gvindadze, EBRD Head of Armenia, said: "We are pleased to step up our support for SMEs in Armenia together with our long-standing partner Armeconombank. The funding aims to facilitate the competitiveness of local firms in Armenia by helping to invest in modern technology that will allow companies to strengthen

Continued on page 3

Representatives Speier and Eshoo Urge Continued Funding for Artsakh Demining



WASHINGTON, DC -- Representatives Jackie Speier (CA-14) and Anna G. Eshoo (CA-18) led a letter with 33 colleagues in support of including demining assistance for Artsakh in final Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations legislation.

The letter to Chairwoman Barbara Lee and Ranking Member Hal Rogers of the House's Appropriations subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPs), thanked them for the inclusion of the \$2 million demining assistance for the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in the committee report that accompanied the House-passed FY22 SFOPs appropriations bill, and advocated everything be done to ensure that the funding is not eliminated through the conference process.

The full text of the letter is below:

Dear Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Member Rogers,

We write to thank the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPs) for including \$2 million in demining assistance for the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in the committee report that accompanied the House-passed FY22 SFOPs appropriations bill. These funds are critically needed to protect the people of Artsakh from deadly explosives, and we urge you to do everything you can to ensure that this funding is not eliminated through the conference process.

As you know, in September 2020, Azerbaijan and Turkey launched an unprovoked offensive against Artsakh and Armenia, and the subsequent six weeks of hostilities took more than 6,000 lives and displaced at least 90,000 ethnic Armenians. During the war,

population centers in Artsakh were subjected to regular aerial bombardments of artillery shelling and cluster munitions which left thousands of unexploded ordnances scattered throughout the territory. These explosives pose a lethal threat to thousands of displaced families who wish to return to their homes and rebuild their lives in Artsakh.

Fortunately, non-governmental organizations are working to clear the territory of unexploded ordnances. In fact, more than 3 million square meters have been cleared since last year's ceasefire, and more than 2,200 explosives have been safely destroyed. These extraordinary efforts have saved lives and enabled communities to rebuild after the war, but there is more work to do. While Stepanakert, Artsakh's most populous city, has been almost entirely cleared of explosives, Martuni and Martakert, the second and third most populous towns are still highly contaminated, as are many villages and surrounding farmlands.

The U.S. government has traditionally funded demining efforts in Artsakh, but this funding expired in March 2020. We're pleased that the State Department restarted funding for this critical effort this month by awarding \$250,000 in grant funding, but more funds are needed to complete the important work of clearing Artsakh of deadly explosives.

Thank you again for your support for lifesaving demining efforts in Artsakh. As the FY22 appropriations process is finalized, we urge you to ensure that \$2 million for demining assistance in Artsakh remains in the explanatory statement which accompanies the final SFOPs appropriations legislation.

PM Pashinyan Sees Opportunities

Continued from page 1

Yeraskh is a settlement on the outskirts of Ararat region of Armenia, bordering Azerbaijan's exclave Nakhichevan, Meghri is a town in Syunik (south of Armenia, bordering with Iran and Azerbaijan). Julfa and Ordubad are in Nakhichevan, while Horadiz is in Azerbaijan proper.

Pashinyan recalled that the agreement was reached by the trilateral working group, chaired by the deputy prime ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan and Russia.

"This agreement was reconfirmed on November 26 in Sochi during a meeting (between Pashinyan and Aliyev) mediated by Russian President Vladimir Putin and at a meeting in Brussels mediated by European Council President Charles Michel," he said.

The Prime Minister stressed that the railroad will operate in accordance with accepted international border and customs rules on the principle of reciprocity under the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the countries.

He noted that Armenia will gain access to Iran and Russia through this

Winesofarmenia.store: Online Sales Platform for Armenian Wines in EU Launched



To ensure the availability of Armenian wines in EU countries, the Vine and Wine Foundation of Armenia and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), in cooperation with the ACBA Federation, have set up an online sales platform for Armenian wines at www.winesofarmenia.store, the Ministry of Economy informs.

The website is available in three languages: English, French, German, the Russian version will also be available in the first half of 2022.

It includes Armenian wines in accordance with 56 quality standards of 21 companies, which were selected as a result of blind tasting, as a result of a very objective sensory evaluation of wine samples.

The platform presents 56 Armenian wines made by 21 companies, all of which correspond to certain standards and have been selected as a result of blind tasting.

Director General of the Vine and Wine Foundation says that the website "is unique in that it contains comprehensive information on Armenia's winemaking heritage, Armenian grape varieties and wine regions."

She said that in the news section the EU consumers will be constantly informed of the developments and

railroad, and Azerbaijan will have a railway connection to Nakhichevan.

"I want to draw attention to the following aspect: if we manage to start a certain effective dialogue with Turkey and if it opens its border with Armenia, this project may get a much larger scale. That is, the railroad we are talking about will stretch further from Yeraskh to Gyumri and from Gyumri to Turkish Kars," he said.

According to Pashinyan, "we need to start building the railroad after completing some preliminary work, including the design, tenders and other things."

"Part of this work has already been done, but now we must get down to practical implementation of the

EBRD and EU to Fund SMEs in Armenia

Continued from page 2

their operations locally and take advantage of international trade opportunities."

Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin, Head of Delegation of the EU to Armenia, said: "The EU is committed to

achievement of Armenia's wine sector.

"Through the Private Sector Development and Technical Vocational Education and Training South Caucasus Programme GIZ has been supporting Armenia's wine sector for about 10 years. We are delighted to announce the launch of another successful project, the online platform. Now Armenian companies producing quality wine, regardless of production volumes, will be able to make direct sales in Europe at more affordable and competitive prices," said Sirvard Amatuni, an expert at the programme.

With the launch of the online store www.winesofarmenia.store, a joint storage and logistics center for Armenian wines was recently opened in Berlin, Germany. From here, Armenian wines will reach European consumers without any obstacles within days at the most affordable price. At the same time, the existence of a warehouse will facilitate the participation of Armenian wines in wine exhibitions and tastings organized in the EU.

A service center will also operate in Europe within the framework of the project. Customers will have the opportunity to ask questions through inquiries and to place orders.

project. We will have a smaller consultation in the near future to flesh out our vision, schedule and roadmap. Our wish and intention is to have the railroad built as soon as possible," he said.

Pashinyan noted that the agreement is important because it will essentially change the economic, investment and political atmosphere of security in the region. He stressed that in the near future the authorities must also concentrate on solving this problem.

"An agreement was also reached with the president of Azerbaijan that contacts will continue with an attempt to form and formulate common views and approaches around our agenda: that is, to coordinate and overcome the differences that exist," he said.

Supporting Armenia's Small Businesses

supporting small businesses' growth and sustainability. To this end, the EU4Business-EBRD facility supports SMEs with impact financing for green technologies. The overall contribution of the EU to the EU4Business-EBRD facility covering different Armenian banks is •6 million."

“Support Our Heroes” NGO and AMAA – for the Reconstruction of Artsakh



YEREVAN — Support Our Heroes Charitable NGO and the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, according to which AMAA generously sponsors the construction of 6 out of the 16 homes of Project Nakhijevanik, in Askeran.

Participation in this program is part of the AMAA's mission to rebuild and resettle Artsakh. Immediately after the war, the AMAA resumed its Artsakh support campaign, not only to provide emergency aid, but also to help rebuild what was destroyed. To date, AMAA has renovated 17 houses in Artsakh, in the cities of Stepanakert and Martuni.

Support Our Heroes NGO launched Project Nakhijevanik in January 2021. The NGO has since received a 3 hectare land in the village of Nakhijevanik, Askeran from the Artsakh government as a grant, has performed all required soil engineering work, and developed the required detailed plans and budget for the construction of a new community of 16 homes, along with district infrastructure and a community park. The NGO has also secured the project, charitable status from the Armenian Government.

Ground has been broken at this time and bulldozers are working at Nakhijevanik, performing site grading and excavation work.

125,000 Euros Allocated to Armenian Schools in Lebanon by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation



LISBON -- The Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has allocated 125,000 Euros to the 16 Armenian schools in Lebanon. This follows the donation of 650 tablets and 50 laptops to the schools at the beginning of 2021.

Since its establishment, the Armenian Communities Department has paid special attention to the Armenian schools in the Middle East. In recent years, the Foundation has developed a comprehensive strategy for Lebanon, with a particular focus on the Armenian community schools.

Currently, Lebanon is facing one of the worst economic crises in its

history. In response, the Foundation has temporarily suspended The School Grant Program it launched in 2020. Instead of supporting three schools to develop comprehensive educational projects, it is supporting all schools to meet immediate needs.

The current support provided to Lebanon is in addition to the Foundation's other initiatives in the country: scholarships, special education, teacher training, publications and funding for cultural initiatives by youth.

For further information visit the Armenian Communities Department's webpage at: <https://gulbenkian.pt/armenian-communities/>

Service Armenia 2021 Young Professionals Successfully Connects with Armenia



Following the successful restart of the SERVICE Armenia program this summer, The Paros Foundation hosted their first SERVICE Armenia trip for young working professionals this October. For seven years Paros has taken young people ages 17 to 22 to Armenia for a month-long service and tour program. While Paros had to sadly cancel their 2020 trip, they couldn't keep their young and eager future participants away for long. Following the difficult year due to the war, Paros had an influx of interest from young professionals who also wanted to visit Armenia, tour and participate in service work and give back professionally.

“We decided to expand our SERVICE Armenia program to those ages 24 and older, who are interested in making a difference in Armenia. Our goal with the Young Professionals trip was not only to be able to make a difference in their lives by connecting them with Armenia, but to also facilitate this group giving back to their homeland with their various professional experiences,” said Peter Abajian, Executive Director of The Paros Foundation. “I am so happy this trip was so successful.”

During an unforgettable two-week period, the SERVICE Armenia Young Professionals group accomplished several service projects. The

group worked on hard work flooring and painting the Ghoghanj Children’s Center, an organization The Paros Foundation supports in the Nor Nork neighborhood of Yerevan. The group implemented an orphan excursion for children from the Yerevan Children’s Home. They assembled food packets and distributed them to impoverished families, as a part of our Groceries for Gyumri project. The group also spent the day in Gyumri where they visited the Debi Arach Children’s Center and attended the opening of the much-anticipated Hianali Beauty Center, a Project of the Assarian Vocational Training Program. Among the highlights of the visit to Gyumri included a visit and tour of Digital Pomegranate, a high-tech company based in Gyumri, and the site of another vocational training program sponsored through Paros.

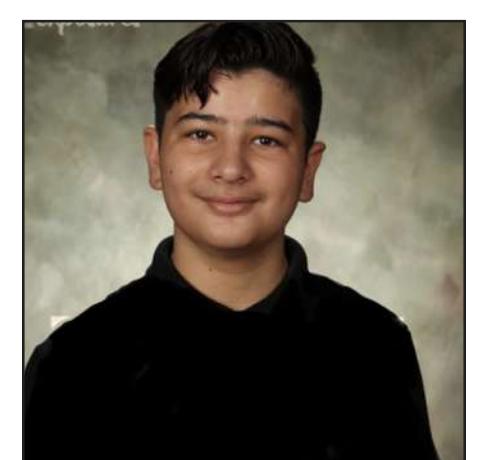
The SERVICE Armenia Young Professionals group also toured historic, religious, and cultural sites in Armenia alongside their service. The program had English speaking staff and guides, safe and well-located accommodations and transportation combined with interesting cultural and educational activities. Dates for the 2022 SERVICE Armenia Young Professional’s trip are set for October 14 to 30, 2022. The program is open to participants ages 24 to 45.

Armenian Academy at Blair Student Finalist in the 2022 Congressional App Challenge

PASADENA -- Ruben Ghazarian, a 9th grader at the Armenian Academy at Blair High School in Pasadena, California, has been named a 2022 Finalist in the Congressional App Challenge. This competition is the most prestigious prize in student computer science. The Challenge seeks to inspire and innovate efforts around STEM, coding and computer science.

Congresswoman Judy Chu announced the 5 finalists and winner on December 16th. There were 27 students who entered the competition from Congresswoman Chu’s district.

Ruben has been coding for over 2 years and was excited for the opportunity to compete in this Challenge. His app entitled “Resto-Math”, took over 2 months to develop which he did in between his studies at school. He designed it to help students learn math in



an entertaining way without being repetitive. Ruben hopes to have a career in business, computer science, engineering or robotics.

Ruben is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Garabed and Lucine Ghazarian of Pasadena.

