



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

POLITICS

1. 500-600 PRE-ELECTION HEADQUARTERS OF VAHAN HOVHANNISIAN TO FUNCTION THROUGHOUT ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Real elections are the clue to Armenia's strengthening. Armen Rustamian - the head of the pre-election headquarters of Vahan Hovhannisian, representative of the ARF Armenia Supreme Body, the ARF's candidate for RA presidency - stated at the January 17 press conference that this formula will form the basis of the ARF's pre-election campaign strategy.

He said that 500-600 pre-election headquarters of V. Hovhannisian will function throughout Armenia, with 1,923 propaganda groups being involved in their work. The electronic version of the ARF candidate has already been made available, while the printed version (5 thousand copies) is at the publication stage. The main slogan of the ARF at the elections will be "Our Old Friend - New President of Country".

A. Rustamian announced that the ARF has commission members in all polling stations and also has some resources to replace them in case of necessity. The party's candidate will also have a person empowered to act for him at each polling station.

According to A. Rustamian, social groups of supporters adjunct to the central pre-election headquarters will operate. These groups will also participate in propaganda campaign. The party intends to use the so-called method of agreements. Until now 117 thousand papers, which state the obligations assumed by V. Hovhannisian (bearing his signature) and provide data on the voter who has agreed to give his/her vote for V. Hovhannisian, have been printed.

A. Rustamian said that at present the pre-election headquarters are examining the lists of voters. Information on dead persons, citizens absent from the country and non-existing persons will be classified by an office that was set up at the central headquarters for this purpose.

2. ARMEN RUSTAMIAN: BAD LANGUAGE IS NOT CRITERION OF DETERMINATION [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Vahan Hovhannisian, who has been nominated by the ARF as presidential candidate, is ready for political debates with all the other candidates. Armen Rustamian - the head of V. Hovhannisian's pre-election headquarters, member of the ARF Armenia Supreme Body - stated at the January 17 press conference that the purpose of the party's propaganda tactics is to be able to show the merits of its candidate and present the goals and tasks of the party in a convincing way.

In his words, the essence of counter campaign against the ARF is to accuse the party of lack of determination. The reason is that the Dashnaksutyun tries to refrain from black PR against other candidates. As A. Rustamian put it, bad language is not a criterion of determination: an attempt to create an illusion of determination is made when abuses are used.

A. Rustamian announced that the ARF will not listen to the Yerevan municipality's calls not to organize processions in central streets and main avenues of Yerevan due to heavy traffic and cold weather. He pointed out that the political forces have few means of conducting propaganda campaign so the ARF intends to use all the opportunities given to it by the Constitution. Moreover, the ARF calls on all the political forces - election participants to carry out efficient work aimed at making voters most active because it is an important guarantee of fair elections.

According to A. Rustamian, the major precondition for holding "clean" elections is establishing proper control over elections. In this issue the ARF is ready to cooperate with all the political forces participating in the elections. The ARF proposes that united headquarters to control the process of elections should be created where the candidates may make joint statements if information about electoral violations from various polling stations and headquarters is confirmed. A. Rustamian considered it important that candidates's complaints about violations must be substantiated by facts. He said that there is already information that some officials attempt to abuse their position by taking certain actions in favor of the authorities' candidate. He stated that in case of being confirmed, this information will be made public.



3. ARMEN RUSTAMIAN: I MISTRUST STATEMENTS ABOUT DEFINITE DEADLINES FOR SETTLEMENT OF CONFLICTS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Definite deadlines for solution of the Karabakh problem have been indicated repeatedly in recent years, however, "the cart has not yet moved", member of the ARF Armenia Supreme Body Armen Rustamian said during a talk with NT correspondent when commenting on the U.S. co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Matthew Bryza's statement about the possibility to make progress in negotiation process in 2008. "I mistrust statements about definite deadlines for settlement of conflicts," he remarked.

He expressed his disagreement with the idea that the upcoming presidential elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan will not close "the window of opportunities" for settlement. He attached importance to the fact that the current president of Azerbaijan may run in the elections and continue his presidency, while Robert Kocharian may not. A. Rustamian reminded that the son Aliev, who continues the political course of his father in the Karabakh problem, stated after coming to power that negotiations must start from the beginning which caused considerable difficulties in ensuring the continuity of negotiations. The election of the new president of Armenia may essentially change the process of negotiations, and, according to A. Rustamian, the current visit of co-chairs to the region has the purpose of examining such opportunities. A. Rustamian agreed with the critical remark of the former Russian co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Vladimir Kazimirov that the Armenian side is not active enough in negotiation process. According to him, the nonparticipation of Nagorno Karabakh - a conflict party in negotiations is "nonsense" and there are no such examples in the resolution of other conflicts.

A. Rustamian said that the Kosovo problem is in the center of attention of the international community, and the Karabakh problem will hardly be put on the agenda in the near future. At the same time he pointed out that the Kosovo process cannot suspend the active course of other processes, especially as, despite the stated deadlines, it is still unclear when the Kosovo problem will be solved. In the opinion of A. Rustamian, although it is said that the possibility of using the formula of Kosovo problem's settlement in other similar conflicts is excluded, the solution of this problem, whatever it be, will undoubtedly have an impact on settlement of the other problems.

4. 7 LOCAL NGOs AND ONE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION ALREADY ACCREDITED AS OBSERVERS AT CEC [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Another two NGOs: "Kantegh" and A. Sakharov Armenian Center of Human Rights Protection with their 50 and 56 observers respectively were accredited at the RA Central Electoral Commission (CEC) on January 17 with the aim of implementing observer mission at the RA presidential elections, NT correspondent was informed by spokeswoman for CEC Tatev Ohanian.

Thus, until now 6,180 observers of 7 local NGOs and 40 long-term and 250 short-term observers of the OSCE/ODIHR have been accredited at the CEC. The deadling for accrediting observers is February 9.

5. ACCORDING TO MATTHEW BRYZA, IT IS POSSIBLE TO SOLVE KARABAKH PROBLEM THIS YEAR [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The Armenian minister of defence Mikael Harutyunian on January 17 received the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Matthew Bryza who is on a regional visit to Armenia. At the beginning of the meeting, the sides spoke about the document of proposals on the noncoordinated issues of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, which was presented by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group in Madrid. M. Bryza stated that in case of manifestation of good will by the sides, it is possible to come to a final agreement and solve this problem in 2008.

NT was informed by the RA ministry of defence that the sides also discussed the current state of Armenian-U.S. military cooperation, expressing confidence that it will develop and deepen this year. Speaking about Armenian peacekeepers implementing their mission, M. Bryza appreciated Armenia's participation in international peacekeeping operations and pointed out the efficiency of Armenian peacekeepers.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

6. LEVON TER-PETROSIAN: I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR ROBERT KOCHARIAN'S AND SERGE SARGSIAN'S COMING TO POWER [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The return of the first Armenian president is dictated by a sense of duty, Levon Ter-Petrosian said in an interview to Izvestia newspaper (Russia). "I am responsible for Robert Kocharian's and Serge Sargsian's coming to power, and I must apologize to the whole nation," he stated.

He said that the authorities did not respond to his accusations about big financial machinations which proves that these accusations are true. In his words, two budgets form in Armenia: one is official, while the other goes into pockets of the authorities. Calculations show that the latter considerably exceeds the former.

In order to fight corruption and organized crime, Levon Ter-Petrosian first of all intends to disclose the crimes and abuses committed under the current regime. He considers it necessary to eliminate monopolies in the economic sphere, as a result of which, according to him, half of the country's wealth is today owned by 40 families. L. Ter-Petrosian said that he guarantees complete lawfulness in disclosure of economic crimes and excludes the possibility of any "witch hunt" and property redistribution.

In response to Izvestia's question about his actions in case of election rigging, Levon Ter-Petrosian said that his supporters will not destroy fences, attack government buildings and organize clashes and massacres. "I think that this regime, which is discredited and corrupted to the marrow of its bones, will not be able to resist the force of the national movement," he said.

7. 5 OUT OF 9 NOMINATED CANDIDATES TO RUN FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS FOR FIRST TIME [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The RA CEC on January 18 will discuss the issue of registration of all nine candidates nominated for the February 19 presidential elections. The candidates for presidency are the RA Prime Minister, the RPA Chairman, Serge Sargsian, the NA Vice-Speaker, an ARFD Bureau member, Vahan Hovhannisian, the first RA President, an ANM member, Levon Ter-Petrosian, the first RA Prime Minister, the NDU Chairman Vazgen Manukian, the former NA Speaker, the OYP party Chairman and the current leader of the party's parliamentary faction, Artur Baghdasarian, the leader of the National Unity party, Artashes Geghamian, the Chairman of the People's Party, the head of the ALM holding, Tigran Karapetian, the Chairman of the National Consent party, Aram Haroutiunian, the former NKR Foreign Minister, non-partisan Arman Melikian. With the exception of L. Ter-Petrosian, who is a candidate for presidency by the principle of self-nomination, the other candidates have been offered by their parties.

It should be mentioned that the forthcoming elections are the fifth presidential elections to be held since Armenia's independence, 1991. Five out of nine nominated candidates, S. Sargsian, V. Hovhannisian, A. Baghdasarian, T. Karapetian, and A. Melikian run for presidency for the first time. V. Manukian has the biggest experience of running for presidential elections among the candidates. He ran for presidency in three out of four presidential elections, in 1996, 1998, 2003, at that, in 1996 he competed with the President of that time, L. Ter-Petrosian as a united candidate of the opposition. L. Ter-Petrosian and A. Geghamian were candidates for two elections: the first in 1991 and in 1996, the second in 1998 and in 2003. A. Haroutiunian was a candidate for one presidential election, in 2003.

8. "FORWARD, ARMENIA!" SLOGAN MEANS THAT CITIZENS SHOULD NO LONGER LOOK BACK, EDUARD SHARMAZANOV EXPLAINS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The slogan "Forward, Armenia!" of Prime Minister Serge Sargsian, a candidate for presidency nominated by the Republican Party of Armenia, means that henceforth the country should go ahead and the citizens should no longer look back. Eduard Sharmazanov, the RPA Spokesperson, stated at the January 18 press conference. "If the political processes go on this way, S. Sargsian will win in the very first tour," E. Sharmazanov assured.

Touching upon the statement of Aram Manukian, a member of Board of the Armenian National Movement (ANM) party, that first Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian will win the elections, E. Sharmazanov said that he highly evaluates A. Manukian's sense of humor. This conviction, according to the RPA Spokesperson, is ridiculous, as the very first President said a few months ago that no candidate will succeed in the elections without the consolidation of all opposition forces. And the fact is that, as E. Sharmazanov added, the opposition is not united today.

"As an RA citizen I am disappointed that the first RA President names the country a "robber state." He has no moral right to make such a statement," the speaker said.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

9. ACCORDING TO EDUARD SHARMAZANOV'S OBSERVATION, HOLDING OF FAIR ELECTIONS IS FIRST OF ALL NECESSARY FOR ARMENIA'S CITIZENS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The first and foremost task of the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) is to hold legitimate, legal, fair elections. Eduard Sharmazanov, the RPA Spokesperson, stated at the January 18 press conference reminding to journalists the words of Prime Minister Serge Sargsian, a candidate for presidency from RPA: "democratic elections should become a tradition in Armenia." Fair and transparent elections, according to E. Sharmazanov's observation, are important for Armenia not in the respect of pleasing Europe, but they are first of all necessary for Armenia's citizens.

In response to the question of why voters should vote for S. Sargsian, E. Sharmazanov said that the Prime Minister has been in the focus of public-political events for already two decades, and progress was registered in all spheres, where he worked. E. Sharmazanov stated that late Sparapet Vagzen Sargsian had also expressed a positive opinion about the RPA candidate saying that no one can question S. Sargsian's honesty and patriotism.

E. Sharmazanov refuted the news presented in media that allegedly RPA is going to relieve RA Territorial Administration Minister Hovik Abrahamian of the post of the head of S. Sargsian's central headquarters appointing another member of RPA Board, Karen Karapetian in his place. The RPA Spokesperson named that rumor the result of anti-propaganda.

10. CEC REGISTERS ALL NINE CANDIDATES NOMINATED FOR RA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The RA CEC, at the January 18 sitting, discussed the issue of registration of all nine candidates nominated for the February 19 presidential elections. According to the Electoral Code, the candidates were considered registered without voting, as there was no objection to their registration.

The RA Prime Minister, the RPA Chairman, Serge Sargsian, the NA Vice-Speaker, an ARFD Bureau member, Vahan Hovhannisian, the first RA President, an ANM member, Levon Ter-Petrosian, the first RA Prime Minister, the NDU Chairman Vazgen Manukian, the former NA Speaker, the OYP party Chairman and the current leader of the party's parliamentary faction, Artur Baghdasarian, the leader of the National Unity party, Artashes Geghamian, the Chairman of the People's Party, the head of the ALM holding, Tigran Karapetian, the Chairman of the National Consent party, Aram Haroutiunian, the former NKR Foreign Minister, non-partisan Arman Melikian were registered as candidates for presidency.

The official election campaign will start on January 21 and will last until February 17, 24:00. The candidates can use the right of withdrawing their candidatures until February 9.

11. 8 LOCAL NGOs AND 4 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS REGISTERED AS OBSERVERS AT RA CEC AS OF JANUARY 18 [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Another local NGO, Against Legal Self-will with 43 observers and three international organizations, the monitoring missions of the CIS Executive Committee, of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly have been accredited at the CEC for the purpose of implementing a monitoring mission during the RA presidential elections.

Thus, for the present, in total, 6223 representatives of 8 local NGOs, as well as monitoring missions of 4 international organizations are accredited in CEC as observers. 40 long-term and 250 short-term OSCE/ODIHR observers accredited earlier are also among them.

12. STEPAN DEMIRCHIAN CONSIDERS PROBABLE LEVON TER-PETROSIAN'S WINNING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN VERY FIRST TOUR [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

In case of working well first Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian will win the presidential elections in the very first tour. Stepan Demirchian, the Chairman of the People's Party of Armenia, expressed such an opinion at the January 18 press conference.

According to him, PPA supports L. Ter-Petrosian's candidature, as the programs of PPA and the latter are mainly harmonious with each other. S. Demirchian attached importance to the liquidation of the atmosphere of intolerance in the country after the elections, disclosure of crimes committed in the past irrespective of the circumstance who has committed them. According to him, the crimes committed under the previous regime are spoken about for more than ten years, however, no one has been punished so far. He emphasized that L. Ter-Petrosian is the only one among the candidates for presidency, whose program includes complete disclosure of the terrorist act of October 27. S. Demirchian said that PPA can



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

have some disagreements with L. Ter-Petrosian's program, but the secondary issues should be subordinated to the main one, that is, liquidation of the clan system.

According to S. Demirchian, it would be naivety to suppose that the authorities having experience of rigging elections are going to hold free and fair elections this time. "I think this time it will be impossible to appoint someone President," the PPA Chairman said meanwhile. Asked why that was possible in the previous elections, S. Demirchian said that this time the opposition's actions will be more organized and purposeful, proper control of elections' process will be ensured. In his words, his failure in the 2003 elections was not his, but the country's failure.

13. VAZGEN MANUKIAN IS SURE THAT HE WILL PASS TO SECOND TOUR [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Today many people call for changing the power meaning changing people being in power, whereas the most important is the change of the model of state, which has been formed. Vazgen Manukian, the Chairman of the National Democratic Union (NDU), stated at the January 18 press conference.

According to him, such an approach is unacceptable, as "people come and leave," but the formed model of pyramid ensuring full power of minority in the country, the interests of which do not coincide with people's interests at all, remains. Vazgen Manukian pointed out to the necessity to create a new state model supposing passage to horizontal relations.

He said that his preelection program has been already published. The main slogan of his preelection campaign will be connected with ensuring of person's freedom, as society cannot develop normally unless free people live in it.

As regards the issue of whom he is going to support in the second tour, V. Manukian said that this issue has been turned into a game: "I do not answer that question and consider that I will pass to the second tour."

As for L. Ter-Petrosian's accusations addressed to him, voiced at Ter-Petrosian's January 11 press conference, the NDU leader stated that the first President does not admit his mistakes, and this can again deliver a blow to the state.

14. RA CEC MAKES DECISION ABOUT INVITING INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS FOR UPCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

At the January 18 sitting, the RA Central Electoral Commission (CEC) unanimously made a decision to invite international observers for the February 19 presidential elections in Armenia. According to the decision, the ambassadors of the OSCE member states, the foreign ambassadors accredited to Armenia (with their residence in Yerevan), the head of the OSCE Yerevan Office, the special representative of the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe to Armenia, the head of International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Armenia Office, the head of the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) Armenian branch, and the chairman of the CEC of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic will be invited to implement observer mission.

In making this decision, the RA CEC took into account the fact that the RA National Assembly has already sent invitations to the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, as well as to the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament, while the foreign ministry of the RA has sent invitations to the OSCE/ODIHR and the Executive Committee of the CIS.

By another decision, the CEC established the expenditure budget of the RA CEC in connection with preparation and holding of the February 19 presidential elections. The head of the CEC staff Levon Grigorian said that 769 mln 855 thousand 259 drams (about 2.5 million USD) is envisaged to allocate from the state budget for preparation and holding of the elections. Most of the indicated sum is expenditures on salaries of members of the electoral commissions. The rest will be allocated for current expenditures of the Central Electoral Commission, district electoral commissions (DEC) and local electoral commissions (LEC).

15. ACCORDING TO ROBERT KOCHARIAN, ACTIVITIES OF YEREVAN'S MAYOR OFFICE AND DISTRICT MUNICIPALITIES IMPROVED LAST YEAR [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

During the January 18 working consultation with the heads of Yerevan's communities and the respective departments, the Armenian president Robert Kocharian said that last year the activities of Yerevan mayor's office and the city municipalities improved thanks to the gathered experience and the



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

increased level of organization. According to him, it is also evident from the fact that last year the president's staff received fewer complaints about the work of the mayor's office. The president stressed that the mayor's office has created a good tradition by taking serious steps aimed at informing citizens about its work, thanks to which residents know about the work done and to be implemented next year.

NT was informed by the RA president's press service that following the brief report of the mayor Yervand Zakharian, consultation participants discussed issues related to short-term and long-term programs on development of Yerevan.

In the words of R. Kocharian, it is obvious that today the mayor's office can implement much more work and solve new problems that arise due to rapid development of the city. "The mayor's office must properly deal with new problems, and regardless of the achievements, we should realize that the number of problems is increasing and the mayor's office must ensure more dynamic development in terms of its activities," he said.

According to the president, he appreciates the work done but there are some problems that can and must be solved, in particular, problems of garbage and snow cleaning, improvement of yards, and allocation of parking lots. R. Kocharian pointed out the necessity of immediate implementation of a complex program on car parking lots, otherwise the increased traffic may create a difficult situation in the city.

The president also spoke about problems related to built-up areas, saying that development of these areas should proceed based on comprehensive architectural solutions and exclude the possibility of construction based on tastes and ideas of some developers.

R. Kocharian drew attention of the consultation participants to the problem of controlling the quality of construction, saying that he is not sure of efficiency of the mechanism of control and responsibility. He stressed the necessity for conducting independent expert checks of the construction of several randomly selected new buildings, especially from the viewpoint of their seismic safety. He added the lessons of the 1988 earthquake should not be forgotten.

The president also spoke about condominiums: in his opinion, not enough attention is paid to establishment of this institution. In his words, it is necessary to show new approaches to formation of effectively functioning condominiums.

16. FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF SLOVAK REPUBLIC PRESENTED WITH "MKHITAR GOSH" ORDER [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The Armenian foreign minister Vartan Oskanian on January 18 received the Slovakian delegation headed by the former prime minister of the Slovak Republic, chairman of the Slovakian-Russian Union Yan Carnogursky. During the meeting, V. Oskanian expressed gratitude for adoption of the resolution on the Armenian Genocide by the Slovakian parliament in November 2004.

Expressing satisfaction at the current state of Armenian-Slovakian relations, the sides discussed the programs on their promotion, underlining the importance of developing the legal and contractual field. Issues related to the process of Armenia's Eurointegration were also addressed. At the conclusion of the meeting, Vartan Oskanian handed a "Mkhitar Gosh" order to Yan Carnogursky.

According to the RA MFA Press and Information Department, the delegation will also meet with high-ranking officials of Armenia and the NKR and Catholicos of All Armenians.

17. ARMENIAN MINISTER OF DEFENCE: SPEAKING ABOUT RESUMPTION OF WAR, AZERBAIJANI LEADERS SHOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT POSSIBILITY OF LOSING ANOTHER 20% OF THEIR COUNTRY'S TERRITORY [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Despite the belligerent statements of official Baku and the sharp growth of Azerbaijan's military budget, the Armenian armed forces are ready to give a fitting rebuff to any encroachment of the adversary, the RA defence minister Mikael Harutyunian stated during a talk with reporters on January 18.

Saying that the Armenian side does not want a war, he expressed confidence that Azerbaijan's people is not in favor of military solution of the Karabakh problem either and prefers a peaceful way of settling the problem. In his words, the Azerbaijani leadership, which constantly speaks about loss of 20% of the country's territory and 1 million refugees, should think about what will happen if in case of a new war their country loses another 20% of its territory and has another 2 million refugees.

Responding to the question about the possibility of resumption of war in connection with presidential elections to be held in Armenia, the minister said: "I do not believe in the possibility of such internal political developments in our country that will undermine its security and allow the Azerbaijani side to attack first". He expressed confidence that the election process will proceed in accordance with



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

the Constitution and laws. He reminded that in 1990 when the internal political situation became strained in Azerbaijan, the Armenian side took advantage of it. However, not this circumstance but the fact that Armenia was stronger than Azerbaijan was the main reason for Armenia's victories.

18. ARMENIAN DEFENCE MINISTER MAKES ANNUAL REPORT [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The Armenian army was provided with modern armaments, the air force was increased, and the creation of modern anti-aircraft defence system was completed in 2007, the RA minister of defence Mikael Harutyunian stated at the January 18 press conference when presenting the results of 2007 and the programs for 2008.

Attaching special importance to the structural changes made in the armed forces in 2007, the minister said that the muster-roll of a peacekeeping brigade was compiled, and the headquarters staff of this brigade and a battalion are being formed. New field-engineer and reconnaissance companies, and a rifle battalion were formed on the contract basis. The process of manning the personnel with contract servicemen, sergeants and special civil servants is underway.

In 2007, payments to the personnel were increased by 20%, while allocations for replenishment and maintenance of the material and technical basis, capital construction and major repairs of structures and buildings grew by 30%.

M. Harutyunian said that this year payments to servicemen and salaries of civil servants will grow by 10%, so the average monthly money allowance of officers will make about 180 thousand drams (about 600 USD), of non-commissioned officers - 109 thousand drams, of contract servicemen - 91 thousand drams, and of servicemen - 57 thousand drams. Starting from 2008, the army will be manned with sergeants whose average monthly money allowance will make 125 thousand drams. In 2006, the average monthly money allowance of officers was about 137 thousand drams, in 2007 - 165 thousand drams.

In 2007 the number of crimes at military units and organizations of the RA ministry of defence declined by 16%, the cases of voluntary absence - by 27% and the number of accidents - by 17.2%. The number of murders and deaths of servicemen for a fixed period made 31 (2 cases happened when servicemen were on leave) in 2007, declining by 2 as compared with 2006. According to the defence minister, it was the lowest index since the formation of the army, however, in his words, it cannot be considered an achievement because even one death is a great loss.

The active participation of the Armenian armed forces in international peacekeeping operations continued in 2007. The RA ministry of defence is now conducting negotiations on the possibility of expanding Armenia's peacekeeping activities. It is planned to double the number of Armenian peacekeepers in Kosovo in 2008 by increasing the number of the platoon's servicemen into that of a company.

Military exercises "Rubezh 2008" will be held in Armenia in July-September 2008 within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while tactical military exercises under a NATO program will take place in September-October 2008.

19. USAID AND IRI DECIDE NOT TO CONDUCT EXIT POLLING IN ARMENIA DURING 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

After intensive and detailed discussions with interested parties regarding a proposal to conduct exit polling in Armenia during the 2008 presidential elections, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and Baltic Surveys Ltd/Gallup Organization were unable to resolve all of the detailed procedural questions in a way that was fully satisfactory to all sides. Consequently, the U.S. Embassy and USAID have decided to cancel the project, is said in a press release of the U.S. embassy in Armenia.

"In this particular case, however, given the limited preparation time remaining prior to the February 19 election and the questions raised from various parts of the political spectrum, we decided it would be wiser not to go forward with a project that faced implementation problems and risked becoming an unhelpful distraction in the Armenian political debate," is stated in the press release.

20. IF ELECTED VAZGEN MANUKIAN WOULD CHANGE SYSTEM NOT PEOPLE [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Presidential candidate Vazgen Manukian, chairman of the National Democratic Union (NDU), will be campaigning with a slogan which reads: "Let Us Become Masters of Our Country, Our Victories."



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

Vazgen Manukian's election program was posted on Internet yesterday. Speaking to a news conference Manukian said he had read the manifestos of other candidates, which have many good ideas and provisions, but his ideology, he said, is somewhat different.

He said unlike other candidates, he is not inspired by the idea of changing the people. What he wants to change is the governing system.

"Some people say there was a good country where everything was good, but a group of people seized the power and everything went wrong... Let us drive this group out and everything will be all right again," Manukian said adding that this is a wrong perception and not what some people argue is the evolutionary way of progress.

Manukian said the evil is the system that was established 10-15 years ago and his ultimate task would be to change it because no matter who is at the helm, the life would not change for better unless the corrupted system is destroyed.

He said he has also specified in his manifesto his first step if he were elected president. He said one of his first steps would be to entirely change the Constitution, which would be preceded by sweeping changes in the judiciary and governance model.

Manukian disagreed with an opinion that Armenians would live a better life once they surrendered Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

"This is not only a question of Nagorno-Karabakh people's right to self-determination, but it also refers to Armenia's national security. It is an issue that can rally all Armenians," he said.

21. GOVERNMENT HAS WILL TO HOLD FREE ELECTION, KOCHARIAN SAYS [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Speaking to journalists after a meeting with the leadership of Yerevan municipality president Robert Kocharian said today the government is doing everything so that the February 19 presidential election be held in a proper manner.

Kocharian said the authorities have political will to hold free, just and transparent election. He said this will was demonstrated in 2007 parliamentary elections. He said the government realizes that it has no right to defeat from what was archived last year.

"We are very serious (about the February 19 election) and we expect members of various-level election commissions to be beyond parochial party interests and I look at themselves as government officials, because a lot will be depending on the quality of all-level election commissions' work," he said.

Kocharian shrugged off speculations that the authorities plan to publish thousands of extra passports to rig the vote. He said no cent of 178 million Drams envisaged by this year's budget for passport printing will be spent in the first quarter of the year.

22. BERNARD FASSIER SAYS WAR NOT TO REGULATE KARABAKH CONFLICT [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

In case of restarting military activities the Karabakh issue will not be regulated, the OSCE Minsk Group French co-chairman Bernard Fassier told today at a press conference in Baku, summing up the results of regional visit.

"In that case it will be difficult to solve the issue, new war will bring only new losses, new victims, new refugees. The war is suicide. We have often said it and repeat that war is not a sensible way of conflict regulation," the French diplomat said.

23. ARMENIAN FM RECEIVES WFP ARMENIAN REPRESENTATIVE [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian received today the newly appointed head of the Armenian representation of World Food Program Maria Dolores Castro Benites.

Armenian Foreign Ministry press service told Armenpress that during the meeting the minister congratulated the head of WFP representation on her appointment and highly assessed the efficiency of the programs carried out by the WFP in Armenia.

On her part Maria Dolores Castro Benites said that she is impressed with the results of the Poverty Reduction Strategic Program carried out by the government and highly assesses cooperation between government and WFP.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

24. ARMENIAN DELEGATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PACE SESSION [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Delegation of the Armenian National Assembly will be in Strasbourg from January 20-26 to participate in the works of the PACE session.

Public relations department official of the NA told Armenpress that the delegation is headed by the head of the NA's state-legal affairs permanent commission David Harutyunian. It consists of the head of the European integration affairs permanent commission Avet Adonts, member of the same commission Vahe Hovhannissian, member of the NA's economic affairs permanent commission Hermine Naghdalian, the head of the NA's "Heritage" faction Raffi Hovhannissian.

25. OSCE MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS HOPE TO REGISTER PROGRESS IN 2008 [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs hope that the 2008 will be a resolute in the Karabakh conflict regulation negotiation process after the conflicting sides agreed over the suggestions presented by the co-chairs in Madrid.

"The running year is very important as presidential elections are going to take place in Azerbaijan and Armenia and each new president has time to try to solve the issues the country is facing. We hope that the new presidents will be able to use it to find regulation of the conflict," Fassier said.

"We hope that in 2008 we will succeed to make the sides agree over all the 15 principles to start the development of main points of the agreement," Merzlyakov said.

"We will prepare our vision of the further document on the basis of the current visit to the region," Russian co-chairman said.

26. EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON CAUCASUS ADDRESSES NAGORNO-KARABAKH [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

The European Parliament's resolution on a more effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus passed on January 17, 2008 with several paragraphs referrers specifically to Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.

The Armenian foreign ministry said the resolution refers extensively to the need to resolve regional conflicts as well as transport and energy issues, and economic cooperation.

The resolution affirms that "a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict -- a conflict which exacerbates relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan -- and of Georgia's internal conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is essential for stability in the EU neighborhood, as well as for the economic and social development of the South Caucasus region."

Referring to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the resolution states that "the project bypasses the existing and fully operative rail line in Armenia; it urges the South Caucasus republics and Turkey to pursue effectively policies of regional economic integration and to refrain from any short-sighted and politically motivated regional energy and transportation projects which violate ENP principles of sound development."

Further, regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict specifically, the European Parliament "notes that the contradiction between the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity contributes to the perpetuation of the unresolved post-Soviet conflicts in the South Caucasus region; it considers that this problem can be overcome only through negotiations."

Finally, the Parliament "calls on key actors in the region to play a constructive role in resolving unresolved post-Soviet conflicts in the region and to take steps to normalize its relations with neighbors; it reiterates its call upon Turkey to engage in serious and intensive efforts for the resolution of outstanding disputes with all its neighbors, in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and other relevant international conventions, and including a frank and open discussion on past events.

It reiterates its call on the Turkish and Armenian Governments to start the process of reconciliation for the present and the past, and calls on the Commission to facilitate this process while taking advantage of the regional cooperation realized within the ENP and Black Sea Synergy policy. The Resolution also calls on the Commission and the Council to address the opening of the Turkish border with Armenia with the authorities of those two countries."



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

27. POLICE URGE VOTERS AND POLITICAL PARTIES TO VERIFY VOTER LISTS [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Armenian police have urged citizens to check their names in preliminary voter lists which can be reached on the Internet at www.elections.am website.

The police which are in charge of preparing and verifying voter lists, have called on individuals, political parties and non-governmental organizations to check the lists for detecting possible inaccuracies and report them to passport and visa departments.

The most widely reported inaccuracies are presence of deceased people's names, names of voters who have changed their residence, names of servicemen called up for mandatory military service and names of Armenians who are absent of the country.

The police have opened a hot line which will be effective until February 18, a day before the February 19 election.

In a statement the police also denied allegations by a deputy chairperson of the opposition Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law) party, Heghine Bisharian, who claimed during a news conference earlier this week that part of 178 million Drams, earmarked by the budget for printing new passports this year, would be spent on printing extra passports to be used for rigging the election.

The police statement said the money is to be used for printing new passports for replacing the old passports issued in 1996 which are no longer valid.

The statement accused Mrs. Bisharian of reviving allegations of some opposition parties' claims in the wake of 2007 May parliamentary elections that the authorities had printed thousands of fake passports for double voting in their favor.

28. ARMENIA PLANS TO DOUBLE TROOPS IN KOSOVO [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Defense minister Mikael Harutunian said Friday that Armenian defense officials were negotiating plans to double the number of peacekeeping troops in Kosovo as part of the country's commitment to expand its participation in multinational peace-keeping missions abroad.

Speaking at a news conference which he called to sum up the past year the minister said the plan is to double the number of peace-keepers in Kosovo this year.

Armenia deployed 34 Armenian servicemen in the former Yugoslav province four years ago. The platoon is part of a special peace-keeping battalion of Armenia's Armed Forces set up with the financial and technical assistance of the United States, Greece and other NATO member states.

Armenia also has a 46 non-combat personnel for the U.S.-led multinational force in Iraq.

The minister said officers' wages have grown this year substantially and the average wage is now 180,000 Drams (\$600) and that of warrant officers is 110,000 Drams. Contract servicemen will get 91,000 Drams.

29. ARMENIAN POP SINGERS TO SUPPORT PRIME MINISTER [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

A group of Armenian pop stars have announced today their support to prime minister Serzh Sarkisian's presidential bid.

Nune Yesayan, Shushan Petrosian, Forsh, Hayko and some others said it was not an imposed decision.

"The Republican Party is our friend and it has always been by our side helping many singers organize their concerts. Serzh Sarkisian is well aware of our pains and our victories," Shushan Petrosian said at a news conference.

"The candidate whom I would like to see as president of our country (Serzh Sarkisian) is resolute, courageous and intelligent," Nune Yesayan said.

Hayko said the country's president must be a commander (military), so that 'when we are by his side we feel strong, reliable and citizens of a good country.'

Before to wrap up their news conference they performed a special song composed to campaign for Serzh Sarkisian.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

30. HERITAGE URGES OPPOSITION CANDIDATES TO REVISE THEIR ELECTION STRATEGIES [Aravot, 01/19/08]

The governing council of the oppositional Zharangutyun (Heritage) party has urged today Vazgen Manukian, Vahan Hovhanesian, Arthur Baghdasarian and ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian to revise their election strategies as 'alone none of them will be able to win the February 19 presidential election.'

In a statement the party's governing board said the fact that the presidency is being competed by so many candidates who regard themselves as opposition to the incumbent government is evidence that political groups have failed to learn lessons from the last year parliamentary elections.

Heritage said if these opposition groups want to beat the pro-government candidate they should unite.

U.S.-born former foreign minister and Zharangutyun party Chairman Raffi Hovhanesian was denied registration as a presidential candidate on the grounds that he acquired Armenian citizenship only in 2001; Armenia's election law stipulates that presidential candidates must have been citizens of the Republic of Armenia for a minimum of 10 years prior to the ballot.

31. PRIME MINISTER TOURS SHIRAK PROVINCE [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Prime minister Serzh Sarkisian toured the northwestern province of Shirak Saturday to see how budget money, earmarked for development projects, was being utilized.

His first stop was in the village of Sarnaghbyur which will have a repaired road connecting it with Maralik town. The project's cost is 200 million Drams. The village that has over 3,000 population is also set to be connected soon to the natural gas network.

The network will then extend to neighboring villages of Dzithankov and Karaberd. In Maralik, the center of the same-name region, prime minister Serzh Sarkisian visited a factory which produces towels, threads, bed sheets and socks. The factory has 200 workers whose average wage is 70,000 Drams.

The prime minister then headed for Akhurian town to see the pace of construction of a sugar plant, which is supposed to be over in 2009. The plant is being constructed by Salex company which will have invested a total of \$55 million in it. It is expected to process annually 1 million tons of sugar beet. When ready it will hire up to 1,200 people.

The prime minister also visited the town of Artik and then he headed for nearby villages which are being connected to the natural gas network.

During a meeting with officials of Artik Serzh Sarkisian said by the end of May each homeless family in this area that was hit by 1988 earthquake will know for sure when they will move to new houses or apartments.

32. BULGARIAN LAWMAKERS REJECT ARMENIAN 'GENOCIDE' RESOLUTIONS [Azg, 01/19/08]

Bulgaria's parliament announced it had rejected Thursday four proposals by opposition lawmakers to officially recognize the Ottoman massacre of Armenians during World War I as genocide.

Legislators voted against three draft resolutions and against issuing a declaration "condemning the genocide against the Armenian people within the Ottoman Empire," the parliamentary press office said.

The proposals, tabled separately by the ultra-nationalist Ataka party and the right-wing parties Bulgarian People's Union and Union of Democratic Forces, were rejected by the Socialist-led ruling coalition.

The coalition also includes a Turkish minority party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms, and the centrist NMSP party of former king Simeon Saxe Coburg.

Almost a third of the lawmakers present in the 240-seat legislature abstained from the vote.

"I do not believe that there is a deputy in this hall who is not aware what the physical destruction of over one million Armenians means, but the historical truth is one thing, and politics completely another," Socialist deputy Alexander Radoslavov said after the vote.

A number of countries and official bodies, notably the European Parliament, France, Canada and a US House of Representatives committee, have labeled the killings as genocide.

But Bulgaria has several times refused to pass a "genocide" resolution for fear of sparking a diplomatic row with neighboring Turkey.

The Balkan state of 7.6 million people has an 800,000-strong Turkish minority population and is also home to over 10,000 descendants of Armenian refugees who fled the killings.



33. CHIEF PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE TO SET UP TASK FORCES TO PREVENT ELECTION FRAUD [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

The office of Armenian prosecutor-general will set up task forces for detecting all possible election fraud during the February 19 presidential election and punishing the guilty. These groups will be coordinated by deputy prosecutor general Aram Tamrazian.

This was announced by prosecutor-general Aghvan Hovsepian when he met on January 19 with Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, head of the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission in Armenia.

Sona Truzian, a spokeswoman for the office of prosecutor-general, told Armenpress that the prosecutor general and European observers discussed ways to prevent possible attempts of vote rigging and punishing the perpetrators.

The chief prosecutor was quoted as saying that prosecutors began the preparatory work to thwart election fraud in this year's election still last year when they held responsible 12 members of election commissions for rigging the results of voting in some precincts in the May 12 parliamentary elections.

The chief prosecutor said all instances of election fraud will be posted on the office's website.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe launched the monitoring of Armenia's February 19 presidential election on January 10. The observation mission deployed by the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) will closely watch the pre-election campaign, voting and counting of ballots to assess the election's conformity with democratic standards.

34. BARACK OBAMA CALLS FOR PASSAGE OF ARMENIAN GENOCIDE RESOLUTION [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

U.S. Presidential candidate Barack Obama shared with the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) a strongly worded statement calling for Congressional passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution (H.Res.106 & S.Res.106), and pledging that, as president, he will recognize the Armenian Genocide, ANCA reported.

In his statement, the Presidential hopeful reaffirmed his support for a strong "U.S.-Armenian relationship that advances our common security and strengthens Armenian democracy."

He also pledged to "promote Armenian security by seeking an end to the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockades, and by working for a lasting and durable settlement of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict that is agreeable to all parties, and based upon America's founding commitment to the principles of democracy and self determination."

"Armenian American voters welcome Senator Obama's powerful call for real change in how our government addresses the core moral and foreign policy issues that hold such great meaning for our community," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian.

"After decades of White House complicity in Turkey's efforts to block American recognition of the Armenian Genocide, most recently in the form of President Bush's personal efforts this past October to delay the Armenian Genocide Resolution, the time has clearly come for a President who will personally lead – not obstruct – the commemoration of this crime against all humanity."

As a Senator, Barack Obama has spoken in support of U.S. affirmation of the Armenian Genocide and cosigned a letter urging President Bush to properly recognize the Armenian Genocide. He has forcefully called for the adoption of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, but has yet to formally cosponsor this legislation. While visiting Azerbaijan in August 2005, Senator Obama was asked by reporters why he cosigned the letter to President Bush. Obama defended his decision by stating the genocide was a historical fact. The Illinois Senator publicly criticized the firing of former U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Evans, who was dismissed for speaking truthfully about the Armenian Genocide.

In recent weeks, the ANCA has invited each of the candidates to share their views on Armenian Americans issues, and to comment on both the growing relationship between the U.S. and Armenian governments and the enduring bonds between the American and Armenian peoples. Questionnaires sent to the candidates have invited them to respond to a set of 19 questions, including those addressing: affirmation of the Armenian Genocide, U.S.-Armenia economic, political, and military relations, self-determination for Nagorno Karabagh, the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockades, and the genocide in Darfur.

Armenian Americans, in key primary states and throughout the country, represent a motivated and highly networked constituency of more than one and a half million citizens. The ANCA mobilizes Armenian American voters through a network of over 50 chapters and a diverse array of affiliates, civic advocates, and supporters nationwide. ANCA mailings reach over a quarter of a million homes, and, through the internet, updates and action alerts reach well over 100,000 households.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

35. ARTHUR BAGHDASARIAN UNVEILS HIS ELECTION MANIFESTO [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

A former parliament chairman, forced to step down last year, lashed out today at 'the highest caste of the country' who do not care a bit about respecting the country's constitution and laws.

Armenian Baghdasarian, chairman of the opposition Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law) party and one of nine presidential candidates, made the accusations when unveiling his election manifesto. "Constitution in this country does not work," Baghdasarian claimed.

Baghdasarian also attacked the judiciary system saying its verdicts are all biased and accused tax and customs agencies of rampant corruption. He said while the government reports double-digit economic growth about 1 million Armenians are classified officially poor and as many are jobless.

The former parliament speaker said there is actually no economic competition as all major lucrative businesses-particularly, imports of consumer commodities are controlled by few businessmen with close government connections. The subsequent result is steep price hikes of major food commodities.

Baghdasarian said he will be campaigning under the slogan of New Armenia and New Opportunities for All. "Once I am elected president my country fellows will wake up next day in a new country," he said.

Baghdasarian also vowed to make Armenia one of fifty nations with most competitive economies and get the country into all regional energy and transport projects. He also promised to start building of the second Iran-Armenia gas pipeline.

On his foreign policy agenda Baghdasarian said he would pursue a balanced policy with NATO, USA and Russia and press for democratic reforms to seek a European Union membership. He said Armenia should also seek new ways to improve relations with Turkey.

The former parliament speaker also spoke in favor of gradual transition to a contract army, but said this would become possible only after resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which should be resolved peacefully either through implementing its right to self-determination or joining with Armenia

On economy, he promised to cut some taxes and their types and place stronger stress on development of regions beyond Yerevan and create 100,000 jobs in the next five years.

36. UNION OF POLITICAL ANALYSTS TO MONITOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Chairman of the Union of Armenian Political Analysts, Hmayak Hovhanesian, said today he will not ask its members to defend a specific presidential candidate.

He added that the Union will be monitoring the election campaign and the processes on the voting day when Armenians will be electing president on February 19.

Speaking at a news conference he said he and his peers will be watching all election related process to detect any instance of deviation from what is allowed by the law.

He asked local media to convey his future observations to audience so that the people know the truth and assured that despite his strong endorsement of former president Levon Ter-Petrosian, that will not have any impact on his observations.

He predicted a run-off because the presidency is being contested by 9 candidates.

BUSINESS

37. AGREEMENT SIGNED ON SECOND TRANCHE OF CREDIT RESOURCES UNDER GERMAN-ARMENIAN PROGRAM ON DEVELOPMENT OF STABLE HOUSING FINANCING MARKET IN ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The Armenian representative of Kreditenshaft fur Wiederaufbau (KfW) bank (Germany) Karapet Gevorgian and the chairman of the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) Tigran Sargsian on January 18 signed an agreement on provision of the second 6 million-euro tranche of the credit resources under the program on development of stable housing financing market in Armenia.

To recap, an intergovernmental agreement on provision of credit resources of 12 million euros by KfW to the CBA was signed between the governments of Germany and Armenia in March 2006. The allocation of the first 6 million-euro tranche of these resources started in early 2007. By late 2007, 343 mortgage credits of the total amount of about 2 bln 40 mln 816.1 thousand drams were given through the program partners: 9 banks and 2 credit institutions of Armenia. Under the program, KfW provides credit



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

resources to the CBA at a 0.75% interest rate, for a repayment period of 40 years, including a 10-year grace period.

According to K. Gevorgian, provision of the second tranche will become possible after the signing and ratification of an interstate agreement between Germany and Armenia, which will take place no sooner than in May 2008. In his words, the use of the whole amount of the first tranche was restrained by considerations of not causing a deficit of mortgage credit resources provided by financial institutions. The second tranche is expected to be placed until the end of 2009, after which it will be possible to ensure the program's continuity at the expense of repayment of the credits provided to customers and financial institutions - partners.

T. Sargsian said that the Armenian-German program on mortgage crediting has promoted development of the Armenian mortgage market. Among the program's goals are the introduction of the "minimal quality measurements" of mortgage crediting in credit providing institutions and the creation of prerequisites for developing the secondary mortgage market in the medium term.

38. ARMENIAN BRANCH OF PROCREDIT BANK (GERMANY) TO OPEN OFFICIALLY ON FEBRUARY 5 [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The Armenian branch of ProCredit Bank (Germany) will be opened officially on February 5, the Armenian representative of the German bank Kreditenschaft fur Wiederaufbau (KfW) Karapet Gevorgian announced during the January 18 press conference.

According to him, the Armenian branch will be 23rd in ProCredit Bank's international network. 17% of the Armenian branch's capital will belong to KfW and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). K. Gevorgian said that it will be the first case when KfW has a share in the capital of an Armenian bank.

KfW's representative said that in all likelihood, starting from late 2009 this bank will no longer finance the program on development of stable housing financing market of Armenia, which is being implemented under an intergovernmental agreement. It is envisaged that on a private basis, KfW will provide credit resources to ProCredit Bank's Armenian branch, possibly to other Armenian banks as well, for small and medium business and mortgage crediting. K. Gevorgian reminded that in 2006 KfW allocated credit resources of 10 million dollars to ACBA Credit Agricole Bank.

39. ACADEMICIAN AGHANBEKIAN WILLING TO ASSIST WITH SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF ARTSAKH [Aravot, 01/19/08]

The president of the NKR Bako Sahakian on January 17 received the honorary member of the RA National Academy of Sciences, academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Abel Aghanbekian and the writer and publicist Zori Balayan. During the meeting, issues related to the current socioeconomic situation in Nagorno Karabakh and the development prospects of its economy, education and science were discussed. The interlocutors paid special attention to investment policy and the development of an investment package for Artsakh.

The president of the NKR underlined the necessity of involving the scientific potential of the Diaspora in this process, saying that using the experience of such a famous scientist as Abel Aghanbekian will have a positive impact on further progress of Artsakh's economic and scientific life. A. Aghanbekian in his turn expressed a willingness to assist with socioeconomic development of Artsakh. NT was informed by the Main Information Department of the NKR President's Staff that then the meeting continued in an enlarged form, with the NKR prime minister Ara Harutyunian and the ministers of finance and economy also taking part in it. Investment opportunities in various sectors of the NKR's economy were discussed. A preliminary agreement was reached, according to which A. Aghanbekian will again visit Artsakh in March in order to familiarize himself with concrete investment programs on the spot.

40. MORTGAGE CREDITING GROWTH RATES WILL REMAIN THIS YEAR, CBA CHAIRMAN FORECASTS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

In 2007, the overall crediting by Armenian financial institutions grew by 72% compared with the 2006 index of 243 bln 413 mln 950 thousand drams, while the mortgage crediting doubled as compared with the 2006 index of 23 bln 770 mln 50 thousand drams, the chairman of the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) Tigran Sargsian said at the January 18 press conference. It was stated that the growth rates of mortgage crediting by Armenian credit institutions were higher than those by the country's banks in 2007 as compared with 2006.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

According to T. Sargsian, the mortgage crediting growth rates will remain in 2008 and will be several times as high as GDP growth rate. The mortgage crediting growth rates will remain regardless of the fact that 2008 is an election year and stagnation has been observed in the real estate market. It was mentioned that demand for mortgage credits currently makes 1 billion dollars in Armenia.

The Armenian representative of KfW bank (Germany) Karapet Gevorgian said that in early 2007 mortgage credits were provided at 16-18% interest rates for 5-7 years, whereas now such credits carry 11-14% interest rates and are provided for 14-15 years and even 20 years (by 1-2 banks). In his words, further reduction in interest rates of mortgage credits by 3-4% is impossible because in Armenia deposits are attracted at average interest rate of 9-11%.

41. ARMENIAN-SLOVAKIAN COMMERCIAL LINKS TO DEEPEN [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Issues related to Armenian banks' guarantees for commercial deals to be concluded between companies of the Slovak Republic and Armenia were discussed at the January 18 round table at the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA). The CBA deputy chairman Vache Gabrielian, heads of Ardshinvestbank, Anelik Bank, Prometey Bank, Areximbank, Armbusinessbank, Unibank and Cascade Bank participated from the Armenian side in the event initiated by businessman Ashot Grigorian, the head of Armenian community of Slovakia. The Slovakian side was represented the first deputy minister Peter Kazimir, the chairman of the Committee for Economic Issues of the National Council Marosh Kondrot, the chairman of Eximbank Igor Likhnovsky, the chairman of VUE company Ferenz Milan and the chairman of ABC Klima company Peter Pokhaba.

Peter Kazimir said that Slovakia and Armenia are small countries and have similarities in the transitional stages of their economic development, which facilitates the cooperation of the sides. The chairman of Eximbank expressed a wish that in parallel with maintaining its development rates, Armenia would rise from 6th to 5th and higher zones on the investment riskiness scale established by the European Union.

Members of the Slovakian delegation responded to questions of representatives of Armenian banks regarding issues of cooperation between the sides. In the opinion of the Slovakian side, although Armenia is included in the 6th zone according to the EU's investment riskiness classification, Armenian businessmen have the opportunity to use credits of Slovakian banks.

At the press conference finalizing the results of the 5th Armenia-Artsakh-Slovakia business forum held in Yerevan on October 19-20, 2007, A. Grigorian said that during the forum Eximbank expressed a willingness to insure Slovakian-Armenian commercial deals' crediting of a total of over 50 million USD for 15 years by VUB and CSOB banks of the Slovak Republic. A number of Armenian banks expressed a willingness to give financial guarantees of up to 3% for deals to be concluded between various companies of Armenia and Slovakia, as well as those of Artsakh and Slovakia.

The organizers of the above mentioned business forum were the Armenian Development Agency, the Development and Investment Agency of Slovakia, the Armenian community of Slovakia.

Representatives of Slovakian VUE and ABC Klima companies have come to Armenia with the aim of completing the negotiations on conclusion of deals with their Armenian partners.

The Slovakian delegation will discuss issues of cooperation with representatives of some NKR companies on January 19.

42. ARMENIA'S PURE IRON RAISES FERROMOLYBDENUM OUTPUT 10% IN 2007 [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Pure Iron Works increased production of ferromolybdenum by 10.2% year-on-year to 2,845.4 tons in 2007, an executive at the company said. In value, production of ferromolybdenum grew 9.1% to 37.432 billion dram.

However, production of pure molybdenum dropped 20.1% in volume and 18.3% in value to 389 tons and 8.229 billion dram.

The company also produced 85.8 kg of rhenium salt with 64% rhenium content, worth 62.4 million dram, up from 8.5 kg worth 1.44 million dram the previous year.

Pure Iron increased exports of ferromolybdenum by 7.7% to 38.339 billion dram, while reducing exports of pure molybdenum by 21.6% to 8.335 billion dram. The company also exported 103 kg of rhenium salt worth 125 million dram; this product was not exported in 2006.

Germany's Cronimet Mining owns 51% of Pure Iron, and the remaining shares are owned by Armenian residents.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

43. KfW TO GIVE 6 MILLION EURO MORTGAGE CREDIT TO ARMENIA [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Governor of Armenia's Central Bank Tigran Sarkisian and Karapet Gevorkian, the representative of German KfW bank in Armenia, have signed a credit agreement today in Yerevan whereby the German bank will give a 6 million euro mortgage credit.

The loan is given at 0.75 percent annual rate and with a 49 year repayment period.

This will be second mortgage credit to the Central Bank from KfW. The first one, also in the amount of 6 million euro, was released in 2006.

Karapet Gevorkian said the first loan was distributed to 9 commercial banks and two crediting organizations. He said 75 percent of the first tranche were made available to 343 people. The second loan is supposed to be made available before 2009.

Armenian banks give mortgage credits at 11 percent of annual interest rate.

44. RUSSIA HAS INVESTED \$1 BILLION IN ARMENIA [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Addressing an Armenian-Russian business forum in Yerevan today Armenian prime minister Serzh Sarkisian said the event was an important avenue for businessmen of both countries to seek new ways for boosting their ties.

He said Russian investments in Armenia's real sector of economy since its independence have amounted to nearly \$1 billion or one third of all foreign investments and about 900 ventures with joint capital have been opened.

The Armenian prime minister singled out, particularly, IT, machine building, tourism and some other sectors as areas in which both countries have huge resources to make progress.

The forum was attended by Igor Levitin, Russian transport minister who co-chairs together with Serzh Sarkisian the bilateral government commission for cooperation.

Igor Levitin for his part described Russia's relations with Armenia as dynamic. He said trade between Armenia and Russia grows over 50 percent annually. For example, it grew 60 percent in 2006 and is expected to grow 63 percent for 2007.

The Russian minister also spoke about Russian investments in Armenia's major sectors-energy, transport, mining and banking. He said removing transport obstacles will give a very strong push to bilateral trade.

Armenia has had no overland connections with Russia since 2006 July after Russia closed a border check point on its border with Georgia for a repair that was to end in several months. The trade is being carried out through ferry boats which join Georgian ports with Ukraine and Russia.

The Russian minister urged Armenian companies manufacturing building materials not to miss their chance and take part in construction of sporting facilities for southern Russian city of Sochi that will host 2014 Winter Olympic games.

Levitin reminded that Russia is ready to invest in prospecting of uranium in Armenia. An agreement to that end was signed in Yerevan last year.

DIASPORA

45. HISTORIAN SAYS TURKISH GOVERNMENT, MEDIA AND LAW ENFORCERS HARASS, INTIMIDATE AND PERSECUTE INTELLECTUALS [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

One year after Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was assassinated on an Istanbul street, Taner Akçam, a Turkish historian and university professor, says the Turkish government, media and law enforcement bodies are working in tandem to harass, intimidate and persecute intellectuals who challenge the government's version of the events of 1915, the Armenian Assembly of America reports.

During a press conference at the National Press Club Akçam, a leading scholar in the field of Holocaust and Genocide studies at the University of Minnesota, said that dissent and free speech are restricted due to a dangerous mindset that exists within Turkey. He said the atmosphere of intolerance has worsened, rather than improved, in the year following Dink's murder.

"A climate has been created such that to attack and persecute intellectual is considered a patriotic act," Akçam explained. "The media targets and attacks intellectuals and turns them into prey, free for the hunting...the justice system punishes the intellectuals, and thugs are used as pawns by the law enforcement agencies to attack and kill the targeted intellectuals. The government conceals these crimes, blurs the evidence and backs the law enforcement officers who are involved in these crimes."



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

Akçam left his native Turkey and relocated to the US in 2001, after his writing on the Armenian Genocide began to appear in English. Following the 2006 publication of his book, "A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility," Akçam says the campaign against him intensified. He has received death threats, been physically attacked and has had his book tours violently disrupted. He has been labeled a "traitor" to his country, and was recently detained for hours at a Montreal airport due to a vandalized Wikipedia entry in his online biography.

In addition to denying the historical truth, the Turkish government maintains that the events of 1915 are a matter for historians. Ironically, scholars and writers like Akçam and Dink are routinely prosecuted under Turkey's infamous Article 301 of the penal code for acknowledging the genocide.

According to Akçam, Dink was targeted because he was a direct threat to what Turks call the "deep state," the unelected body of government known for targeting reformists and other perceived enemies in the name of nationalism. As a Turkish citizen of Armenian descent, the newspaper editor was a fierce defender of freedom of the press and was determined to speak the truth, even as ultra-nationalist forces were determined to silence his voice.

"What we want is very simple," Akçam explained. "We want freedom of speech and we want justice."

Dr. Payam Akhavan, a renowned scholar of International Law at McGill University, is representing Akçam in a case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) against the Republic of Turkey and also took part in the press conference.

A former UN war crimes prosecutor, Akhavan provided an overview of the criminal charges brought against Akçam in Turkey. He said the case pending before the ECHR challenges the validity of Article 301 as a violation of freedom of speech. He argued that scholars like Professor Akçam be allowed to engage in research and publication without fear of prosecution or vigilante justice.

Akhavan said that Article 301 continues to be used to silence free speech and debate on the Armenian Genocide, which only serves to keep modern Turkey hostage to its past rather than reckoning with historical injustices and encouraging a democratic culture in which reconciliation with Armenians may be possible.

"The use of Article 301 is a flagrant violation of freedom of speech under Article 10 of the European Convention," Akhavan said. "What the Turkish government is doing through its failure to repeal Article 301 is that, instead of criminalizing hate speech, Article 301 is actually legitimizing hate speech by denying or minimizing the destruction of Armenians in 1915."

"If the position of the government is that the issue of the Armenian Genocide should not be politicized, should not be debated before the U.S. Congress, then that position has no credibility whatsoever so long as free speech on this issue is criminalized in Turkey," he added.

Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny said, "One year after Dink's murder, Ankara has done precious little to overturn the climate of prejudice and repression that led to this unspeakable crime. Instead, Armenians and other minorities are still at risk. All people of goodwill should unite in calling for a repeal of Article 301."

46. TURKS GATHER TO COMMEMORATE MURDER OF ETHNIC ARMENIAN JOURNALIST [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

Thousands of Turks on Saturday took part in a ceremony in Istanbul to mark the first anniversary of the murder of ethnic Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.

The crowds carrying banners with slogans including "We want justice" and "For Hrant, for justice" gathered outside the offices of the Agos newspaper where Dink was shot dead on January 19 2007.

Police closed the streets around the office of the newspaper of which Dink was editor when he was murdered, in order to allow for the thousands to take part in the ceremony which included speeches from friends and colleagues of Dink as well as his widow Rakel.

"What has this country's justice system done to those police officers who knew exactly who would be killed," Rakel Dink asked the crowd after a minute of silence was observed.

Dink was shot dead by a 17-year-old nationalist from the Black Sea city Trabzon. He immediately confessed to the murder and is on trial along with associates.

The murder investigation has also unveiled that security authorities had failed to act on numerous death threats that Dink and his family had received.

Dink was targeted by nationalists angry at his writings in which he called on Turkey to acknowledge responsibility for mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman forces during the First World War.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

SOCIAL

47. SCIENTISTS FIND "MATERIAL EVIDENCE" OF THE EXISTENCE OF NOAH'S ARK ON MOUNTAIN ARARAT [ARMENPRESS, 01/21/08]

For the first time in the seven decade-long history of the search for the legendary Noah's Ark, a Turkish-Hong Kong exploration team on Tuesday came out with "material evidence" to prove that the Ark was nestled on Mount Ararat, Turkey's highest mountain peak bordering Iran and Armenia, Qatar's leading English daily The Peninsula said Friday.

"A panel of experts, comprising Turkish authorities, veteran mountaineers, archaeologists, geologists and members of Hong Kong-based Noah's Ark Ministries International, also displayed an almost one-meter-long piece of petrified wood before the media and specially invited international experts."

"The structure was discovered in the interiors of an unusual cave. The 11.5m wide and 2.6m high white wooden texture was revealed after removing thick layers of volcanic ash on the cave wall," panel members said at a press conference.

One of the underlying issues in the search for the Ark is the proper identification of its wood fragments. A petrographic examination carried out by the Applied Geosciences Centre of the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Hong Kong, identified the object as a petrified wooden structure, the panel said.

"Some of the big holes found on the structure indicate the locations where branches used to grow on tree. In places, original holes are partly or completely replaced by individual minerals and crystalline materials that can be found in rock materials," said Dr Ahmet Ozbek, a panel member, who is also a faculty of Geology Engineering Kahramanmara Suctcu Imam University."

SPORTS

48. TIGRAN L. PETROSIAN AND SIRANUSH ANDRIASIAN CONTINUE TO TOP POINTS TABLES AT ARMENIA'S HIGHEST GROUP CHESS CHAMPIONSHIPS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

Games of the 8th round of Men's Highest Group Championship of Armenia took place on January 16. Karen Asrian beat Tigran L. Petrosian who, however, tops the points table with 6 points. Smbat Lputian beat Levon Babujanian and is in 2nd place with 5.5 points. Samvel Ter-Sahakian beat Artashes Minasian and is in 3rd place with 5 points. Ara Minasian has 4.5 points, while 3 other players earned 4 points each.

At the 4th round of Women's Chess Championship, Siranish Andriasian beat Liana Aghabekian and continues to top the points table with 3.5 points. Nelli Aghinian beat Lia Martirosian and is in 2nd place with 2.5 points. 3 players - Mariana Gasprian, Narine Gasprian and Anahit Kharatian are in 3-5 places with 2 points each.

49. SAMVEL DILOYAN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF TABLE TENNIS FEDERATION OF ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The reporting and election conference of the Table Tennis Federation of Armenia was held at Yerevan's Congress Hotel on January 16. The 2-year activities of the federation's president Hrant Avagian were given a positive assessment.

At the conclusion of the conference, Samvel Diloyan (Vanadzor) was unanimously elected the new president of the Table Tennis Federation of Armenia. Prior to that he headed the Table Tennis Federation of the city of Vanadzor.

50. ANASTASIA GREBYONKINA-VAZGEN AZROYAN PAIR TO REPRESENT ARMENIA IN EUROPE FIGURE SKATING CHAMPIONSHIP [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

On January 19, Europe Figure Skating Championship will start in the city of Zagreb, Croatia. The dancing pair Anastacia Grebyonkina - Vazgen Azroyan, who left for Zagreb with their trainer, Olympic Champion Alexei Zhulin, will take part in the competitions from Armenia.



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, January 19, 2008

51. THREE PARTICIPANTS IN LEAD AFTER 5 TOURS IN WIJK AAN ZEE INTERNATIONAL CHESS FESTIVAL [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/19/08]

The games of the 5th tour of the International Chess Festival, which is being held in the city of Wijk aan Zee, Holland, were held on January 17. Levon Aronian with white draw the game with Vishvanathan Anand (India). Three participants, L. Aronian, Magnus Carlsen (Norway) and Teymur Rajabov (Azerbaijan) gained 3.5 points each and share the 1-3rd places.

In the 6th tour fixed for January 18, L. Aronian will compete with Vladimir Kramnik (Russia), and in the next two tours with Teymur Rajamov and Shakhriyar Mamedyarov (both from Azerbaijan).

In the 5th tour of tournament B, Sergei Movsisian representing Slovakia, drew the game with Pentala Harikrishna (India) and shares the 3-6th places with 3 points. Gabriel Sargsian also drew the game with Humpy Koneru (India) and shares the 10-12th places with 2 points.

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