



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

POLITICS

1. RA PRESIDENT RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF GREAT BRITAIN FINISHING HIS DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

On January 25, RA President Robert Kocharian had a meeting of farewell with Anthony Cantor, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to RA. Expressing gratitude to the Ambassador for his efficient activity, the President wished him success in his future activity. R. Kocharian estimated the current level of Armenian-British relations as stable and their volume as positive.

According to the report provided to NT by the RA President's Press Office, in his turn, Ambassador Cantor said that he leaves Armenia with great impressions and is going to return here in the future without fail.

2. TIGRAN TOROSIAN: CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENCY, WHO GIVE GREAT PROMISES, ARE SURE THEMSELVES THAT THEY WILL NOT WIN [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

"A group of candidates for presidency gives great promises" that by coming to power they will reduce the taxes, will make some changes, and so on and so forth. However, as Tigran Torosian, the RA NA Speaker, said on January 24 in his interview to the Shant TV company, a very important circumstance proceeding from the constitutional amendments is disregarded: the President of the republic has "very limited powers" in case of not having a majority in the parliament. He also said that some of the candidates forget that they have been in power and whatever they say the people will remember their past acts. The NA Speaker considers that the people, who give great promises today, are sure themselves that they will not win.

Touching upon the predictions that the elections will end in one tour, including those made by RPA, T. Torosian said that their "motivations are first of all the observations done by independent professional structures, secondly, are their meetings and thirdly, they already have the experience of the unprecedented parliamentary elections of 2007," when RPA "gathered considerable votes" and which in difference to all elections held by the previous authorities blaming them, were recognized as meeting the international standards by international observers.

3. ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR WILL BE BROKEN BY FEBRUARY 19 IN SOCIETY, ARARAT ZURABIAN CONSIDERS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

According to Ararat Zurabian, the Chairman of Board of the Armenian National Movement (ANM), a member of the central preelection headquarters of Levon Ter-Petrosian, great changes happened in 2008 as compared with the preelection year of 2003.

Thus, in his words, still on the eve of the presidential race 18 parties declared their support to presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian, while in 2003 mobilization of opposition forces happened only in the second tour, when opposition candidates consolidated around Stepan Demirchian.

Besides, as A. Zurabian said in his interview to NT correspondent, the presidential elections of 2003 were predetermined by the incident of October 27, 1999 in the National Assembly, after which society was intimidated. In his words, in 2003, during the huge opposition rallies, people were detained in the streets and administrative arrest was imposed upon them with the accusation of participation in the so-called unsanctioned rallies. Nothing of the kind is observed today, as in his words, such actions were precisely repulsed from the very first move. "I mean release of the participants of the October 23 procession detained by the Police, who took to the streets with a megaphone to notify the people about the rally with Levon Ter-Petrosian's participation. Then the first President personally came to the police station and stayed there until his supporters were released."

The ANM leader expressed an opinion that today the fear of 2003 has been overcome to some extent. He expressed the hope that the atmosphere of fear will be broken in society by February 19.

In Ararat Zurabian's opinion, the fact that the President ran for the second term then, while today the issue of change of President is set without fail, is also positive compared with the previous



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presidential elections. "In such authoritarian states as Armenia it is very difficult to change the President running for the second term. Certainly, now it is easier to do this than in 2003."

4. ACCORDING TO RPA CANDIDATE'S PROGRAM, ARMENIA IS INTERESTED IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

According to Armen Ashotian, a member of the Board of the Republican Party of Armenia and the National Assembly faction of the same name, only the preelection program of one candidate contains dangerous approaches over the Nagorno Karabakh problem. He stated this at the January 25 discussion of the foreign policy provisions of candidates' preelection programs, however did not mentioning what candidate he means. The above mentioned approaches, according to A. Ashotian, pose danger both due to their "amplified character" and "purely agitation nature." Besides, as the RPA member added, such an important problem as the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide is not presented in that candidate's program.

According to A. Ashotian's observation, RA Prime Minister Serge Sargsian's preelection program mentions that Armenia is interested in regional integration, but the process of that integration should not be carried out at the expense of the state-national interests. A. Ashotian affirmed that today Armenia is interesting for the world and in the future will become more interesting especially in the circumstance of construction of a new nuclear power plant and Armenia-Iran railway.

5. ARTUR BAGHDASARIAN ATTACHES IMPORTANCE TO DEEPENING OF NATO-ARMENIA COOPERATION [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

Artur Baghdasarian, a candidate for presidency, the leader of the Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law) party, considers membership to the European Union the most important goal of RA in the sphere of foreign policy. Gurgen Sargsian, a member of the OYP parliamentary faction, said this at the January 25 discussion, presenting the OYP candidate's provisions of preelection program regarding foreign policy. In his words, the fulfilment of the provisions ratified by Armenia is very important on the way of European integration.

Besides, as he mentioned, the OYP candidate also attaches importance to deepening of cooperation with NATO. "The relations with Russia should be built by the principle of equality of rights and mutual profitableness and with the U.S. by the principle of friendship and partnership," G. Sargsian said.

The OYP representative declared that the foreign policy carried on today is deprived of any initiatives: Armenia only registers the events happening in the world and does nothing. In that respect, as G. Sargsian added, a doctrine of international policy should be worked out, which will outline the main foreign directions of the country.

6. AZERI PARTY HANDS OVER RA ARMED FORCES SERVICEMAN HAMBARTSUM ASATRIAN TO ARMENIAN PARTY [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

On January 25, near the Ijevan-Ghazakh border, the Azeri party handed over RA Armed Forces serviceman Hambartsum Asatrian to the Armenian party. Noyan Tapan was informed about it by the RA Defence Ministry's Press Service.

7. ACCORDING TO VAZGEN MANUKIAN'S PREELECTION PROGRAM, ARMENIA SHOULD BE COUNTRY CARRYING OUT DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

The necessity of Armenia's European integration is mentioned in the foreign policy part of the preelection program of Vazgen Manukian, a candidate for presidency, the leader of the National Democratic Union party. Shavarsh Kocharian, the Chairman of the National Democratic Party, supporting V. Manukian said at the January 25 discussion on foreign political provisions of candidates' programs, that two ways, fulfilment of commitments assumed towards the Council of Europe and membership to the European Union, are outlined for the successful process of European integration in the candidate's program.

As S. Kocharian stated, V. Manukian's program mentions that Armenia should be a country carrying out a dialogue among civilizations. "In that respect we have much to do at international structures," the NDP Chairman said mentioning that Armenia should "show" the world the Armenian-Iranian fully-fledged relations as an example of co-existence of two too different civilizations.



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S. Kocharian said that according to the NDU leader's program, Armenia should be the guarantor of Artsakh people and its self-determination, but only the Karabakh party should conduct the negotiations on the NKR status and liberated territories.

8. ACCORDING TO LEVON TER-PETROSIAN, AUTHORITIES HAVE REPEATEDLY ATTEMPTED TO BRIBE HIM AND HIS SUPPORTERS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

The first Armenian president, candidate for the RA presidency Levon Ter-Petrosian on January 24 visited Kotayk marz where he had meetings in the cities of Charentsavan and Hrazdan and the villages of Alapars, Arzakan, Bjni, Solak, Qaghsi, Aghavnadzor and Meghradzor. The presidential candidate was accompanied by the chairman of People's Party of Armenia Stepan Demirchian, the chairman of "Republic" party Aram Sargsian, the chairman of the Liberal Progressive party, former governor of Kotayk marz Hovhannes Hovhannisian, representatives of other political forces supporting him.

In his speeches L. Ter-Petrosian stated that he came not to "ask for votes", his purpose is to get rid of the current authorities rather than to come to power. According to him, in case of Serge Sargsian's becoming president, war will resume and it will not be a war in the name of national liberation struggle but a war in the interests of the current authorities. L. Ter-Petrosian said that Kotayk marz took an active part both in the Karabakh movement and in the elections, voting for Karen Demirchian in 1998 and for Stepan Demirchian in 2003. The presidential candidate stated that by voting for him, people will give their votes to the above mentioned people, as well as to sparapet Vazgen Sargsian. By the way, according to L. Ter-Petrosian, in 1996 he lost in Kotayk marz but in this connection he did not say any acrid word to the then governor Hovhannes Hovhannisian. L. Ter-Petrosian assured those present that he and his supporters do not aspire to power, high positions or wealth. He said that Stepan Demirchian has been repeatedly offered a ministerial position in return for giving up his political struggle, while Aram Sargsian was offered ownership of the cement plant and even the release of his brother from prison. According to L. Ter-Petrosian, the authorities even made an attempt to bribe him by offering - in various ways and through various people - the position of director of the Matenadaran six months prior to the elections.

During the meeting in Charentsavan, L. Ter-Petrosian said that according to his information, the governor of Kotayk marz Kovalenko Shahgaldian and his son - the mayor of Charentsavan Hakob Shahgaldian had tried to intimidate people and forbid them from participating in the meeting. Some old people from among those present expressed their displeasure at the visit of the first Armenian president and tough speeches of his supporters. The meeting organizers considered it to be a provocation organized by the authorities. Demonstrating his certificate of presidential candidate, L. Ter-Petrosian underlined the fact of his and his team's immunity and called on the authorities to refrain from infringements. In his words, by trying to prevent lawful pre-election meetings from being held, the governor and his son have committed a crime and must be punished.

Not so many people attended the meetings in the two large cities of the marz, especially the meeting in the regional center Hrazdan.

In villages, people welcomed the candidate with flowers, presenting him with an offering of bread and salt. All those present were eager to get not only booklets with L. Ter-Petrosian's program but also discs with his speeches. In a village, the first president, as he put it, "granted amnesty" to a sheep to be killed as a sacrifice, promising that in case of victory he will make an offering himself.

9. PRELIMINARY NUMBER OF VOTERS MAKES 2,312,945 IN ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

As of January 24, the preliminary number of voters on the electoral rolls of the February 19 presidential elections made 2,312,945, the head of the RA Police Passport and Visa Department Colonel Alvina Zakarian announced at the January 25 meeting. According to her, since January 10 when the preliminary electoral rolls were posted up, 4,001 Armenian citizens aged above 18 received their passports, while the data on 1,981 citizens who died was removed from the rolls. To recap, the final number of voters made 2,285,830 at the parliamentary elections held in Armenia in May 2007.

A. Zakarian said that the police hot line, which was created on January 19 in order to reveal inaccuracies in electoral rolls, received 28 calls. There was no alarm call from any party, no applications were filed to the hot line.

A. Zakarian again denied the possibility of printing forged passports: each newly printed passport is fixed in 10 places, reports are submitted on each passport sheet, even useless sheets are registered.

A reporter said that in case of being elected, the presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian aims to raise the issue of registering Robert Kocharian as a candidate for presidency of the Republic of



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Armenia in violation of the Constitution and then the reporter asked A. Zakarian if she is not concerned at the fact that she will be held accountable as the head of the department that had given a certificate for registration. A. Zakarian said: "I am a representative of law and I am subject to law. If it is revealed that I made a mistake and shall be held accountable, I am ready". She added that L. Ter-Petrosian speaks as if he is already president of Armenia.

A. Zakarian announced that the law on dual citizenship has already taken effect in Armenia and those citizens, who previously were granted citizenship of a foreign country without giving up their Armenian citizenship, now submit declarations on their dual citizenship and are included as dual citizens of the RA in the state register of the population. A. Zakarian failed to state the number of those who received dual citizenship, saying that there are probably a thousand persons with dual citizenship. In her words, the amendments to the RA Electoral Code envisage that dual citizens shall be included in electoral rolls and may vote at elections if they reside in Armenia.

10. SERZH SARGSIAN SAYS ALL GROUNDS EXIST TO SAY THAT AFTER 5 YEARS THE PEOPLE WILL LIVE IN COMPLETELY OTHER COUNTRY [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

"I assure that Armenia will be a brilliant country, I assure that there exist all grounds to say that in five years we will live in a completely new country," candidate for presidential elections, prime minister Serzh Sargsian said today addressing people of the Nor Nork district. According to him, positive changes are obvious though they are not enough for being satisfied.

"Such meetings make us warmer, give additional strength and are obliging. Such meetings alarm certain people, make them desperate but I ask you not to respond to evil with evil, not to respond to hatred with hatred because our aim in the elections is not only to get more votes but to move Armenia forward, change the moral-psychological atmosphere, establish peace and mutual trust in the society. With evil we will never do a good job," S. Sargsian said.

Armenian prime minister noted that the atmosphere of meetings he conducted in two Armenian provinces during the past two days give food for thought – what the president of the republic must do to have the trust of the people after elections as well. He said he made a conclusion for himself that independent of the elections, the president of the republic must always be in direct contact with the people.

Saying that in the period after the parliamentary elections it was succeeded to break the stereotype of the people that the authorities are cut from the people and that the officials afraid to contact with them, hear good word or remarks, Sargsian said that it was possible to carry out the promises.

"My whole activity has been dedicated to serving my country, now as well my most important interest is the interest of my country, we have a brilliant opportunity to develop, we need to go forward to prosperous and more secure Armenia. The slogan of all the active citizens must be "Forward Armenia"," Sargsian said.

On January 26 Serzh Sargsian will conduct meetings with the people of Kentron district.

11. VAZGEN MANUKIAN MEETS REPRESENTATIVES OF NGOs [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

About 14 Armenian non-governmental organizations addressed to all the nine candidates for presidential elections asking them to stop applying "black PR" and fight in constructive and ideological field. Besides, the leaders of the organizations also addressed questions to the candidates trying to get answers to the questions they are interested in. Today, to receive those answers, the representatives of the organizations met with candidate for the coming presidential elections, head of the National Democratic Union party Vazgen Manukian who was first to reply to them.

The author of the initiative, head of the "Republican Council of Women" Nora Hakobian said, "We are not interested in the promises which the candidates give, but we are interested in the mechanisms of making those promises. We want that on the next day of the elections it will not be stated again that the elections were falsified. We are interested whether the candidates have enough potential, resources and can control the elections," Nora Hakobian said.

The circle of interest of the heads of NGOs varied – starting from ethnographic issues till developing and applying effective mechanisms for fighting against corruption.

Vazgen Manukian noted that there are many NGOs in Armenia but not civil society. "It sounds strict but it is so. In the beginning of 1988 roots of civil society appeared but unfortunately they vanished in several years," he noted.

As to applying "black PR", the leader of the party assured that neither he nor his party uses this method but it is being used towards them. "We are against "black PR" but telling the truth is right" he said.



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As a candidate and citizen of Armenia, V. Manukian said he wants to live in a national state, see regulated Karabakh conflict, establishment of relations with Turkey without ignoring Armenian genocide issue. He said he wants Armenia to be strong in the region and be a competitive state where each one will live free and will be protected. "Until our economy is not separated from politics, until our Constitution is not changed neither of points of the program can be implemented. Systematic changes must take place," he pointed out.

In response to the question whose candidacy V. Manukian will support in case of two-round elections, Manukian said, "I think we will not have to face alternative in the second round."

12. PRIME MINISTER REITERATES HIS PLEDGE TO DOUBLE WAGES, PENSIONS AND GDP [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Prime minister Serzh Sarkisian reiterated his pledge to make Armenia a different country with better living conditions, higher wages and retirement pensions if his country fellows vote for him in the February 19 presidential election.

Addressing a crowd in Yerevan's Erebuni district on Sunday Serzh Sarkisian said the core of his program is to build a prosperous Armenia.

"To make a judgment of a society's moral standard we need to look at what it is doing for its younger generation. I offer the concept of a prosperous, protected Armenia, I propose that we build a country in which young people will have good opportunities to grow and develop and in which senior citizens will be protected and secured," he said.

Sarkisian admitted that the biggest problem is to eradicate poverty, and this could be done with a strong and just state.

"We have a very good ground to build a prosperous Armenia, to at least double wages, to double the government budget by 2012 and increase per capita GDP to 7,000 US Dollars," he said.

Serzh Sarkisian said when he had worked as interior and national security minister in 1996-1999 many government ministers, court judges and officials were tried and sentenced to different prison terms for abuse of their powers. He vowed to renew the crackdown on corruption and pursue the fight for justice.

The same day Sarkisian met also with residents of Nubarashen district of Yerevan.

13. ARMENIA'S LEADERSHIP REMEMBERS KILLED SOLDIERS ON ARMY DAY [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

President Robert Kocharian, prime minister Serzh Sarkisian, other high-ranking government and parliament officials, army brass and Catholicos Karekin II, head of the Armenian Church, visited today the Yerablour cemetery on a Yerevan outskirt to remember all those who died in the battle for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

They laid flowers at the graves of late prime minister Vazgen Sarkisian, parliament chairman Karen Demirchian and at a memorial erected in memory of all killed soldiers. The ceremony was timed to mark the 16-th anniversary of the establishment of Armenian armed forces.

Speaking to journalists defense minister Mikael Harutunian said the Armenian army is getting stronger and more efficient with every passing year.

"Despite incessant Azerbaijani war rhetoric it does not dare to resume hostilities and this is evidence of the growing might of our army, which is ready to rebuff any possible aggression and ensure the security of our nation,' the minister said.

The minister downplayed speculations that the army is ready to shift from mandatory conscription to a contract one.

"In order to have a professional army we need to have a very strong economy, a strong budget to run a contract army,' he said, adding also that shifting to a contract army is contingent , apart from finances, on some other, particularly, regional factors.

The minister's remarks came in retaliation to ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian's recent arguments that Armenia could have a 10,000-15,000 army.

"Armenia can not cut the army to that size because that would jeopardize our security,' the minister said.

Apart from being a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Armenia participates also in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PiP) program. Armenia is also in the process of implementation of the Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) which it signed with NATO. IPAP is a program for those countries that have the political will and ability to deepen their relationship with NATO.



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In late 2004, Armenia deployed a unit of 46 soldiers, which included a logistic, medical and support soldiers to Iraq in support of the American-led Coalition. Armenia is involved also in peacekeeping operations in Kosovo, joining the peacekeeping activities in 2004. Armenian 34-member "blue helmets" platoon serve there within the Greek battalion.

Armenia's military budget for 2008 will increase 20 percent to 124.366 billion drams (about \$380 million).

14. DEFENSE MINISTER TO VOTE FOR SERZH SARKISIAN [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Defense minister Mikael Harutunian told journalists today that he will vote for prime minister Serzh Sarkisian in the February 19 presidential election.

He said for him Serzh Sarkisian is the man who is capable to rule the country, to be its commander-in-chief (a position reserved for the country's president by the constitution), a man who is resolute in decision-making and can lead the armed forces in case of war.

Asked whether the army would vote also for Sarkisian the minister said the decision is up to every soldier and officer, but added that in his view the overwhelming majority will vote for the prime minister.

"I know this because everyone in the army knows about Serzh Sarkisian's nation-committed activity, about his efforts and zeal to build a strong and effective army when he was defense minister," he said.

15. PROSECUTORS PROBING INTO BAGHDASARIAN'S OFFICE ATTACK [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Prosecutors in Armenia's third largest town of Vanadzor in northeastern province of Lori have launched an investigation into an attack on the election campaign office of the opposition Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law) party.

Sona Truzian, a spokeswoman for the office of procuracy general, told Armenpress that the criminal case was started under article 185 of the Criminal Code that envisages punishment for deliberate destruction of property.

The attack was reported on January 25 when some unknown people broke the windows of the campaign office of Arthur Baghdasarian, nominated by the party as a presidential candidate and damaged some furniture inside.

Prosecutors are also investigating an alleged attack on a resident of Talin on January 27 which occurred moments before ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian was going to address a crowd that gathered to listen to him on the town's square.

The investigation was started on a complaint by the attacked man, identified by Sona Truzian as Sarkis Karapetian, who was said to be assaulted and beaten by a group of his town fellows.

16. ARF AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE SPEAK AGAINST GIVING ARMENIAN-CONTROLLED AREAS BACK TO AZERBAIJAN [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

A top member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and a presidential candidate argued today against giving back to Azerbaijan seven Armenian-controlled regions surrounding the administrative borders of Nagorno-Karabakh, saying this issue should be looked at from the perspective of history, Armenians' security and their future.

Kiro Manoyan, head of an ARF office for promoting international recognition of the Armenian genocide and a presidential candidate, Arman Melikian, backed incorporation of these regions into Nagorno-Karabakh as its integral part. According to Kiro Manoyan, this is option of resolving the dispute with Azerbaijan is spelled out in Vahan Hovhanesian's election manifesto, who is nominated by the party as its presidential candidate.

Manoyan said recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence would be the first stage of this program whose ultimate goal is joining Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

But Melikian said the ARF's position on how to settle the dispute, as it is presented in Vahan Hovhanesian's election program is vague, written in a 'diplomatic' language and may stir up different interpretations.

Manoyan responded that the 'diplomatic' language does not change the core of his party's approach-which is that the Armenian-controlled regions and Nagorno-Karabakh must become part of Armenia.



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17. TOROSIAN RECEIVES RUSSIAN DUMA CHAIRMAN [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Today parliament speaker Tigran Torosian received the chairman of the Russian State Duma (lower parliament chamber) Boris Gryzlov. The meeting was attended by Armenian deputy parliament speaker Arevik Petrosian, chairmen of standing committees, Russian ambassador to Armenia Nikolay Pavlov, Armenian ambassador to Russia Armen Smbatyan and other officials.

Tigran Torosian appreciated Gryzlov's visit to Armenia after last year's Russian parliamentary elections and expressed confidence that the current visit will mark the beginning of a new phase of relations between the two countries.

Boris Gryzlov noted that Russian businessmen are gradually increasing investments into Armenian economy and expressed hope that the commodity turnover will reach \$1 billion in 2008.

Gryzlov also spoke about Armenians residing in Russian, underscoring their contribution to the political life and economic development of the country. Other issues of bilateral interest were also discussed.

18. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE PRAISES MEDIA FOR 'POSITIVE' CHANGES

Chairman of the National Democratic Union (NDU) party Vazgen Manukian, one of nine candidates to contest the February 19 presidential election, said today media provides equal access to air waves to all candidates.

Manukian, speaking to journalists, praised it for a set of 'positive' changes. Nevertheless, he complained that despite extensive coverage of all nine presidential candidates' campaigns some of newspapers and TV stations do not show or write what he would like to be shown or written.

He also justified retaliatory attacks by some of the candidates saying if one of them is assaulted by others, it is normal to expect the attacked one to respond.

"What I can not accept in this struggle is when a candidate claims that all others who are not with him are government puppets," he said.

Manukian also argued that unlike the 2003 election this time there are no frontrunners among opposition candidates.

19. IT IS MORE INADMISSIBLE WHEN AUTHOR OF BRAWLS AND CLASHES IS NOT POWER, BUT OPPOSITION, NDU CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/28/08]

"The brawls that happened during the elections of 1999 and 2003 were instigated exclusively by the authorities, as a result of their hysteria. However, it is more inadmissible when such clashes are caused by the opposition." Vazgen Manukian, the Chairman of the National Democratic Union party, a candidate for presidency, stated at the January 28 press conference, commenting upon the brawl instigated by the supporters of first Armenian President, candidate for presidency Levon Ter-Petrosian during the preelection meeting in Yerevan the day before.

Touching upon the first President's statement about having an army of 10 thousand servicemen, V. Manukian said that in rigging the elections, in the process of organization of repeated voting, as well as for suppressing the opposition rallies by force an army of 10 thousand servicemen is really sufficient.

20. ROBERT KOCHARIAN: STRONG, EFFICIENT ARMY IS NOT A BURDEN FOR ECONOMY, BUT A GUARANTEE OF STABILITY, SUPPLY OF INDEPENDENCE, SOURCE OF RESPECT TO COUNTRY [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/28/08]

On January 28, on the occasion of the Day of Army, RA President Robert Kocharian gave state awards to a group of servicemen of armed forces for their considerable contribution to ensuring preparedness for action of the troops, bravery and selflessness shown during their service.

At the end of the awarding ceremony the RA President said that "a strong, efficient army is not a burden for economy, but a guarantee of security, a supply of independence, a source of respect to the country, all of us should understand it."

R. Kocharian also said that the Armenian army is much spoken about today, even those who have not served even a day in the army, have no idea about the army, about security problems speak about it: it is proposed reducing the army, passing to only professional service. "Dear politicians, restrain your preelection populism, find other, neutral subjects for language exercises. Country's security and people's security is an absolute value, an absolute goal, which is not subject to any bargaining and any moods and certainly, we will not permit anyone to weaken this structure," the RA President said.



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Robert Kocharian emphasized that professional servicemen, officers, non-commissioned officers, term servicemen make more than one third of the army today, and the professional part will grow in the army, but Armenia's security will be endangered without compulsory term service. "Renouncing it by a country being under a direct military threat is absurd, is someone makes such a proposal in Israel, he will become a political clown for everybody," the RA President said.

As the head of state evaluated, the creation of the Armenian army is one of the achievements of the people, perhaps the most important one, all parts of people and all strata of society have made their complete contribution on the difficult way of its creation. "Today Armenia's armed forces are a serious factor in our region, they firmly stand in the positions of controlling peace of our borders and people. We highly evaluate peace, we strive for peace, but we are ready at any moment to quickly respond to any danger threatening us," R. Kocharian said.

According to the RA President, the efficiency and the equipment level of Armenia's armed forces improves day by day, the social problems of the servicemen are solved much better, army's international involvement increases, its international contacts deepen. "Today army's budget is larger than the 1996-97 budget of the Republic of Armenia and imagine what possibility is given to the state to pay attention to the issues of our people's, our country's security," the RA President said.

21. ARAM HARUTUNIAN TO START CAMPAIGNING ON FEBRUARY 2 [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08]

A low-profile presidential candidate Aram Harutunian will begin his election campaign by visiting several towns and villages in the northwestern province of Shirak.

Speaking at a news conference today he said the first visits are scheduled for February 2. Before that he plans to publish his election manifesto and distribute it to people.

He said before starting his regional tours he will continue advertising his election program on TV, 'because it is the shortest and most effective way to convey our ideas and visions to a broader audience.'

Harutunian praised media for equal and unbiased coverage of all nine presidential candidates' campaigns and called on his rivals to refrain from smearing each other.

He also emphasized that his election program calls for passage of a law on opposition saying such legislations have Germany and UK.

22. ARMENIA INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN NATO SEMINAR IN BAKU [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08]

Armenia was sent an official invitation to participate in a NATO-sponsored seminar 'Rose Roth,' scheduled for March 6-8 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The news was announced by Azeri APA news agency which quoted a NATO Parliamentary Assembly coordinator Roberta Kalori as saying that invitations had been sent to all members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. She said no response from Yerevan arrived yet.

Armenia refused to send its representatives to a similar seminar in Baku in 2004 after authorities there refused to give security guarantees to Armenians.

An Azerbaijani delegation, however, arrived in Yerevan in 2005 to take part in a regular 'Rose Roth' seminar.

23. CLEARING NKR OF MINES WILL TAKE UP TO 6 YEARS [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08]

Nagorno-Karabakh prime minister Aram Harutunian met yesterday with Valon Kumnov, the outgoing head of the local office of the British non-governmental organization called Halo Trust and Patrick Thomson who will replace Kumnov.

Kumnov served in this capacity for three years helping local authorities in demining activities. He also said clearing of all mines in Nagorno-Karabakh will take at least from 5 to 6 years.

Patrick Thomson said the mine clearing personnel will be increased to 280 people.

The organization was commended by the prime minister for its role in raising the safety of local people.



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BUSINESS

24. CREDIT AGREEMENTS OF 106.6 MILLION DOLLARS AND GRANT AGREEMENTS OF 131.9 MILLION DOLLARS SIGNED IN 2007 THROUGH RA MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMY [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

12 credit agreements of the total sum equivalent to over 106.6 mln USD were signed in 2007 through the RA ministry of finance and economy. 56% of this sum was provided by the World Bank, the minister Vardan Khachatrian stated at the January 24 press conference.

He said that 16 grant agreements of a sum equivalent to over 131.9 mln USD were signed, 98.9% of which was signed under the EU TACIS programs.

It was stated that a credit agreement and 2 grant ones are at the preparatory stage for being signed, with their sums making 8.5 mln euros and 114 mln euros respectively.

According to V. Khachatrian, in 2007 the sums of a total of 9.4 mln USD envisaged by 2nd-5th bids to Millennium Challenge Corporation were received under the Millennium Challenge - Armenia program.

25. ARMRUSGAZPROM INITIATES INSTALLATION OF GAS-SENSITIVE DEVICES [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

ArmRusgazprom has initiated installation of gas-sensitive devices with the aim of increasing the safety of operation of in-house gas service systems and the level of accident prevention. NT correspondent was informed by spokeswoman for the company Shushan Sardarian that in order to implement this process and start the activity of providing gas consumers of apartment buildings with safety systems throughout Armenia, ArmRusgazprom has applied to the RA ministry of urban development with the request to make changes in technological normative documents and to the RA Public Services Regulatory Commission with the proposal to include this program in the company's investment program.

According to the spokeswoman, signaling devices are used to control content of inflammable gases in buildings with installed domestic gas equipment. In case when the established amount is exceeded, such devices produce a light and sound signal and give a command to stop gas supply to gas equipment.

26. ACCORDING TO VARDAN KHACHATRIAN, STABLE BASES EXIST FOR ARMENIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

The main economic indices of Armenia in 2007 show that the country's economic development has stable bases, the RA minister of finance and economy Vardan Khachatrian said at the January 24 press conference.

He underlined the importance of high economic growth indices in conditions of macroeconomic stability. These indices are conditioned by, among other factors, a balanced tax and budgetary policy in 2007.

The minister reminded that in 2007 economic growth made 13.8% in Armenia - against the average economic growth of 12.6% in the past three years. The growing investments also had an impact on this economic growth: these investments made up 34.4% of GDP in 2007 (1 trillion 83 bln drams or 3 bln 166 mln USD) - against 33,6% in 2006 and 18.6% in 2000. The minister said that the economic growth is mainly encouraged by construction and service sectors, which contributed to economic growth by 4.6% and 3.6% respectively in 2007.

It was mentioned that the consumer price index made 6.6% in December 2007 on the same period of 2006, while the average annual index made 4.4%. In 2000-2006, the annual inflation was mainly stable and did not exceed 3.4%. The minister announced that in 2007 the consumer price index in Armenia was the lowest among CIS countries.

He added that in 2007 Armenia's real GDP exceeded by 47% the 1989 level and threefold the 2000 level. By preliminary data, in 2007 nominal GDP made 3 trillion 140.4 bln drams or 981 thousand drams (2.848.4 USD) per capita. In 2007 per capita GDP expressed in dollars grew 3.3fold on 2003 and 4.8fold on 2000.

It was stated that in 2007 Armenia's foreign trade growth made 40.7% - against the average annual growth of 20.1% in 2000-2007. Foreign trade grew 3.8fold in 2007 on 2000, exports - 4.1fold, foreign direct investments - 3.6fold, with their amount making 4 bln 500.3 mln USD, 1 bln 218.5 mln USD



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and 375 mln USD respectively. In 2007, exports grew by 23.7%, while imports grew by 49.7% - against the average annual growth of 23.1% and 19.1% respectively in 2000-2007.

In the opinion of V. Khachatryan, there are good bases in Armenia for continuing the efficient macroeconomic management, and the focus will be on ensuring a high sustainable economic growth in the medium term, reduction of unemployment and maintaining a controllable level of inflation.

27. POSSIBLE ECONOMIC RECESSION IN U.S. TO HAVE IMPACT ON ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

The anticipated economic recession in the U.S. will have some impact on the Armenian economy as well, the director of the Armenian-European Policy and Legal Advice Centre (AEPLAC) Tigran Jrbashian stated at the January 24 press conference. In his words, the possible consequences of this impact should be clearly evaluated now in order to take steps aimed at their mitigation. He said that the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) has been conducting discussions and studies on this issue for four months.

According to T. Jrbashian, if the recession becomes reality and continues long in the U.S., economic growth will slow down worldwide. "We will have problems with prices of metals and raw materials, which represents the second largest source of our economic growth," he said. The possible recession in the U.S. may also affect the amounts of remittances to Armenia. "They will decrease and result in a change of our economic conditions," he remarked.

In the economist's opinion, it is still early to speak about global recession. However, in his words, "its phantom is moving, making a serious influence on all markets". It has already begun to affect the oil market: oil prices have fallen by about 4% in the last two years.

28. NEW OWNERS OF ARARAT GOLD RECOVERY COMPANY ASSUME OBLIGATION TO COMPENSATE FOR DAMAGE DONE BY PREVIOUS ONES [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

The Armenian minister of environmental protection Aram Harutyunian recently met with the director general of Ararat Gold Recovery Company (AGRC) Dmitry Kalandadze and the chairman of the board of directors Vardan Vardanian. The minister informed reporters on January 25 that during the meeting, they discussed a number of issues related to capital investments in Sotk and Meghradzor mines, re-equipment of production, use of new environmentally friendly technologies, revaluation of the mines' resources, as well as some environmental problems.

A. Harutyunian said that the new owners of AGRC have assumed the obligation to compensate for the damage done by the company's previous managers as a result of violations, including deliberately underestimating the mineable reserves.

29. ABGAR YEGHOYAN DOES NOT RULE OUT THAT UNREASONABLE INFLATION MAY FOLLOW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

"Protection of Consumer Rights" NGO (PCR) in December 2007 presented the problems raised by the NGO to all the candidates for the RA presidency with a proposal to include their solutions in their pre-election programs, the chairman of PCR Abgar Yeghoyan said at the January 25 press conference.

According to him, PCR has attached special importance to the formation of a fair economic competition environment in the consumer goods market, the necessity to combat unreasonable inflation, the creation of a system of protection of consumer rights and fair tariffs in the public services sector, as well as to food safety. In the words of A. Yeghoyan, these are problems that create a serious obstacle to development of the Armenian economy today.

A. Yeghoyan announced that they received information from the pre-election headquarters of Serge Sargsian and Vahan Hovhannisian that these issues have been included in the pre-election programs of these candidates. Besides, according to A. Yeghoyan, the problems of eliminating the monopolies are reflected in the programs of almost all the candidates. In particular, in his pre-election campaign Artur Baghdasarian mainly addresses the fight against monopolies, while Arman Melikian addresses issues related to food safety.

"We urge consumers to take into account, when making a choice, what the given presidential candidate promises regarding solution of consumer problems," A. Yeghoyan said. He did not rule out that unreasonable inflation may again follow the elections.



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30. NO CHANGES IN NUMBER OF REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS OBSERVED IN ARMENIA DURING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

There were no notable changes in the number of real estate transactions in Armenia during the 2007 parliamentary elections. The head of the State Committee of the RA Real Estate Cadastre Manuk Vardanian said at the January 25 briefing that nevertheless, some decline in the number of transactions was observed in April and May of 2007. In particular, there were 12,569 transactions in March, 11,684 in April, and 11,299 in May, after which a growth was registered: 16,007 transactions in October, 14,976 in November, 16,068 in December.

According to M. Vardanian, a total of 155 thousand transactions on real estate sale, rental, etc. were conducted last year, which was more by 24.5% compared with 2006. A growth was registered with respect to all types of real estate transactions.

M. Vardanian said that the transfer of 1 million hectares of lands to communities finished last year, while the transfer of lands outside the administrative borders of communities will be completed this year. These lands will be redistributed among communities either as state or as community property. The description of the borders of all communities (except those of 5 communities where some disputable issues exist) was also completed.

The historical geographical names of rural communities have been restored, with about 40 thousand names being changed.

31. ARMENIA ACQUIRES RELIABLE PARTNER IN PERSON OF GAZPROMBANK, CHAIRMAN OF BANK SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

Gazprombank faces serious competition in Armenia: the country's banking system is developing rapidly, in 2007 alone, branches of five foreign banks started operating in Armenia. The RA president Robert Kocharian said this when receiving Gazprombank's chairman Andrey Akimov and the board chairman Farid Kantserov on January 25. According to a press release of the RA president's press service, R. Kocharian stated that being quite liberal, the Armenian banking legislation also envisages strict supervision of activities of banks.

Presenting the work of Gazprombank, A. Akimov said that it is one of Russia's largest banks, which makes considerable investments in the economy along with carrying out banking activities. In his words, the bank is not pursuing immediate goals in Armenia but it intends to do serious work and has far-reaching goals and long-term programs. He assured the Armenian president that Armenia acquires a reliable and reasonable partner in the person of Gazprombank.

32. ARARAT GOLD RECOVERY COMPANY PAYS BACK 1.5 BILLION DRAMS TO STATE BUDGET

Ararat Gold Recovery Company (AGRC) has paid back about 1.5 billion drams to the RA state budget, NT correspondent was informed by the State Tax Service (STS). It was mentioned that this agreement has been reached between the company and the STS.

To recap, in May the tax service specified the execution of mutual relations with the state budget and the fulfilment of some tax service-supervised legislative requirements by the company, as a result of which AGRC was offered to transfer an additionally chargeable sum of 3 bln 401 mln 35.9 thousand drams (11.1 mln USD) to the state budget.

33. ADDITIONS TO BE MADE IN RA LAW ON STATE REGISTRATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

At the January 25 sitting, the Armenian government approved the bill on making additions to the RA Law on State Registration of Property Rights. The bill will be submitted to the RA National Assembly in the order prescribed by law. The adoption of the bill is conditioned by the necessity to bring the indicated law's provisions on information provision from the database of the cadastre into line with the provisions of the amended Constitution of the RA and to restrict the use of documents containing information about a person's private and family secrets, in particular, to restrict access to copies of such documents.

The head of the State Committee of the RA Real Estate Cadastre Manuk Vardanian told reporters following the sitting that the bill stipulates that information on property rights of a person shall be provided only in case of availability of a written consent of the given persons, as well as based on a letter of attorney given by this person or a court decision.



34. ZANGEZOUR PLANT TOPS LIST OF 300 BIGGEST TAX PAYERS [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

The list of 300 biggest taxpayers last year was topped by Zangezour copper and molybdenum plant in the southern province of Syunik.

According to the list, unveiled by state taxation service, the Zangezour plant paid 33.6 billion drams in taxes and dues last year. Almost 32 billion were paid as taxes.

The second biggest taxpayer was ArmenTel telephone company which paid almost 21 billion drams, of which over 17 million drams were paid as taxes.

The third line was occupied by the Russian-Armenian ARG natural gas operator which paid about 16 billion drams.

The ARG was followed by the second mobile telephone operator VivaCell, Citypetrol Service and Flash fuel importers and Salex Group, a major importer of food commodities.

35. ARMENIAN PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES SHOULD FIND COMMON ASPECTS OF COOPERATION WITH BIG FOREIGN COMPANIES, ADA OFFICIAL SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/28/08]

The international market of pharmaceutical production is divided among several powerful companies, and in order to enter this market, Armenian companies should find some common aspects of cooperation with these companies, the director for investment attraction of the Armenian Development Agency (ADA) Natalia Artsruni said during a talk with NT correspondent.

According to her, the establishment of cooperation may start with the Armenian pharmaceutical companies' proposal on a number of long-term scientific developments. The obtaining of their patents by foreign companies or the financing of laboratories engaged in scientific developments will contribute to their integration into the international pharmaceutical research market, later - also to the introduction of some pharmaceutical production cycles in Armenia by foreign companies.

"Unfortunately, big companies make investments in countries with a large market. The Armenian market is small, which is the greatest obstacle to attraction of investments to the country's pharmaceutical sector," the ADA's official underlined.

It was mentioned that liquid medicines that are easy to synthesize, as well as ointments and pills are mainly produced in Armenia. All the four institutes of fine organic chemistry conduct pharmaceutical studies.

In the words of N. Artsruni, with the aim of bringing the production quality and conditions into line with European standards, three Armenian pharmaceutical companies have introduced certificates of correspondence with Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards. "However, new standards are used in Europe now. Certificates of correspondence to Drug Master File standards are required for the import of new medicines, even food supplements for animals, which in its turn requires considerable investments," she said.

In her opinion, from the viewpoint of satisfying the requirements on European standards, Armenian pharmaceutical companies may enter the market by exporting medicines, whose production patents have expired in some or other European country. She added that markets of "third world countries" may be considered as perspective for Armenian pharmaceutical companies.

Natalia Artsruni links the hopes of using the potential of Armenia's pharmaceutical companies and research institutions with the USIAD-financed Competitive Armenian Private Sector (CAPS) project. In November 2007, the pharmaceutical sector was included in the list of sectors receiving the project's assistance - in addition to information technologies and tourism sectors.

According to ADA's information, there are 11 pharmaceutical companies with a total of 500 employees in Armenia. The production of these companies is sold in the domestic market and exported to Russia, Georgia and Turkmenistan.

DIASPORA

36. ARMENIAN MEMORIAL IN UK ATTACKED

A monument set up in Cardiff to remember 1.5 million Armenians who were massacred in 1915 was vandalized ahead of a service for all the victims of genocide, news reports from Wales, UK, said.

The memorial in the Temple of Peace, Cathays, Cardiff, made of sandstone and Welsh slate, was struck with a sledgehammer on Saturday night, smashing the cross off it.



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Yesterday was Holocaust Memorial Day and a service was held to remember all those who have died at the hands of ethnic cleansing.

Members of the Turkish community have condemned the damage.

Caerphilly Councillor Ray Davies, who campaigned for the Armenian monument to be erected, said many people at the service yesterday were close to tears when they saw what had happened.

"The desecration of the monument reminds us that we must always be vigilant against racism and hatred which is never far from the surface," he said.

The pillar of pink stone was unveiled in November to remember all those Armenians who were murdered by Ottoman Turks in 1915. It caused controversy at the time, with members of the Turkish community denying the killings amounted to genocide.

The sledgehammer which damaged the monument was found close to the scene yesterday.

But the service still went ahead as planned, despite protests from a small number of people who shouted through loud hailers.

Director of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs Stephen Thomas said: "It was particularly saddening for the Armenians present that this happened on the day of the Holocaust Memorial Day. This service wasn't specific to the Armenians. We were trying to be all-inclusive about all those historical events where people have been massacred. It wasn't very helpful in terms of trying to create a bridge and links between Turkey and Armenia that this was carried out. People were upset when they turned up and saw what had happened."

Hal Savas, a member of the five-man delegation from the Committee for the Protection of Turkish Rights, was present at the service.

"Whoever has done it should be ashamed of themselves," he said. "We would condemn any damage done to any religious monument."

37. EDWARDS CALLS FOR PASSAGE OF GENOCIDE RESOLUTION, STRONG US-ARMENIA RELATIONS [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Former North Carolina Senator and Democratic Presidential hopeful John Edwards added his voice to the list of Presidential candidates calling for passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

In his January 24th letter to the ANCA, Sen. Edwards stated that, "I support the Congressional resolution declaring the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire in 1915 a genocide." Edwards went on to note that, "we must also continue to strengthen our relationship with Turkey, an important democratic ally against the forces of tyranny in the region.

"Remarking on U.S.-Armenia relations, Edwards stated that, "As President, I will prioritize our special relationship with Armenia and the goal of a lasting peace to Nagorno-Karabakh and the entire region."

As a Senator, John Edwards cosponsored successive Armenian Genocide Resolutions beginning in 2002. He also supported Section 907 restrictions on U.S. aid to Azerbaijan due to its ongoing blockades of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

38. ERDOGAN'S INSULTING WORDS ABOUT OBAMA MAY HAUNT TURKEY AFTER THE ELECTIONS [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08] By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier

Armenians can always count on Turkish leaders to make berserk and emotional statements that inadvertently further publicize the issue of the Armenian Genocide.

Last week, when presidential candidates Sen. Barack Obama, Sen. Hillary Clinton, former Sen. John Edwards, as well as Sen. Joe Biden, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, issued statements reaffirming the Armenian Genocide, Turkish Prime Minister Rejep Tayyip Erdogan made rude and insulting comments about Sen. Obama, thus attracting further media attention to the Genocide committed by Ottoman Turkey.

Sen. Obama called for Congressional passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution and pledged that he would recognize the Armenian Genocide, if elected President. He said: "I share with Armenian Americans -- so many of whom are descended from genocide survivors -- a principled commitment to commemorating and ending genocide. That starts with acknowledging the tragic instances of genocide in world history. As a U.S. Senator, I have stood with the Armenian American community in calling for Turkey's acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide. Two years ago, I criticized the Secretary of State for the firing of U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, after he properly used the term 'genocide' to describe Turkey's slaughter of thousands of Armenians starting in 1915. I shared with



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Secretary Rice my firmly held conviction that the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable. An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy. As a senator, I strongly support passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution (H.Res.106 and S.Res.106), and as President I will recognize the Armenian Genocide."

Sen. Obama also pledged to maintain U.S. assistance to Armenia, strengthen its democracy, seek an end to the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockades, work for a lasting and durable settlement of the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict, promote growth and development through expanded trade and targeted aid, and strengthen the commercial, political, military, developmental, and cultural relationships between the U.S. and Armenian governments.

Sen. Joe Biden, who until recently was a presidential candidate, followed suit by officially announcing his support for the Congressional reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide. He thus became the 34th Senator to cosponsor the Genocide Resolution. Sen. Biden is a longtime supporter of U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide and many other Armenian issues.

Sen. Hillary followed by issuing her own statement supporting the adoption of the Congressional Resolution on the Armenian Genocide and pledging to recognize it, if elected President. She said: "Alone among the Presidential candidates, I have been a longstanding supporter of the Armenian Genocide Resolution. I have been a co-sponsor of the Resolution since 2002, and I support adoption of this legislation by both Houses of Congress. I believe the horrible events perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against Armenians constitute a clear case of genocide. I have twice written to President Bush calling on him to refer to the Armenian Genocide in his annual commemorative statement and, as President, I will recognize the Armenian Genocide. Our common morality and our nation's credibility as a voice for human rights challenge us to ensure that the Armenian Genocide be recognized and remembered by the Congress and the President of the United States."

Sen. Clinton also said that she valued her friendship with the vibrant Armenian American community: "This is in keeping with my dedication to the causes of the Armenian American community over many years. I was privileged as First Lady to speak at the first-ever White House gathering in 1994 for leaders from Armenia and the Armenian American community to celebrate the historic occasion of Armenia's reborn independence. I will, as President, work to expand and improve U.S.-Armenia relations in addressing the common issues facing our two nations: increasing trade, fostering closer economic ties, fighting terrorism, strengthening democratic institutions, pursuing our military partnership and deepening cooperation with NATO, and cooperating on regional concerns, among them a fair and democratic resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As President, I will expand U.S. assistance programs to Armenia and to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh."

Finally, presidential candidate John Edwards issued his own very supportive statement: "I am proud of my record in the U.S. Senate fighting hard for the concerns of our nation's one and a half million Americans of Armenian heritage. In the Senate, I stood against threats to Armenia's security, including the blockades it continues to endure. As President, I will prioritize our special relationship with Armenia and the goal of a lasting peace to Nagorno-Karabakh and the entire region. I strongly believe that the United States must stand for telling the truth about all genocides. I support the Congressional resolution declaring the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire in 1915 a genocide. We must also continue to strengthen our relationship with Turkey, an important democratic ally against the forces of tyranny in the region. The resolution should therefore be integrated with a comprehensive diplomatic effort to make sure that our friends in Turkey today understand that the resolution is not aimed at them but instead at atrocities committed almost a century ago by the Ottoman Empire."

The Armenian American community naturally welcomes all four statements. However, given the long chain of not kept promises by previous presidential candidates, Armenians should not judge these candidates by the above statements alone. They should evaluate the candidates' long-standing commitment to Armenian American issues and be suspicious of opportunistic statements made on the eve of the decisive upcoming primary elections. The Armenian American community should also judge these candidates by their circle of close advisors. If that core group includes individuals that have been antagonistic to Armenian issues in the past, there is a good chance that the next president would be dissuaded from carrying out his or her promises after the election.

Despite the distinct possibility that the statements issued last week may be useless after the election, they have already had a very positive effect on propagating the Armenian Cause, thanks to the rude reaction of Prime Minister Erdogan. According to the Turkish press, Prime Minister Erdogan called Sen. Obama "an amateur of politics. A day may come when you will have to choose between 70 million Turkey and two million Armenia. One has to think carefully before uttering such words. I suggest that he



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outgrow the amateur period of his political career." It appears that Prime Minister Erdogan is more concerned about numbers than choosing between right and wrong -- truth and lies!

Should Sen. Obama be elected President, he may not look kindly at Turkish Prime Minister's insulting words. Armenians would hope that Erdogan would similarly lash out at all the presidential candidates who have issued similar statements. That way, no matter which candidate gets elected, there would be a backlash on U.S.-Turkish relations, lessening the likelihood that Turkish leaders would get away with blackmailing the White House again in the future!

39. HAYASTAN FUND CONTINUES RENOVATION OF ARMENIAN CHURCH IN TBILISI [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08]

Hayastan All-Armenian Fund said it continues renovation of Surb Etchmiadzn (Saint Etchmiadzn) Armenian church in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The press office of the Fund told Armenpress that the church that was built 200 years ago, saw difficult times. Earthquakes and construction of a subway in Tbilisi weakened the damaged structure.

To prevent the collapse of the church, the Argentinean chapter of the Hayastan Fund and the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church in the USA initiated last year a program to reinforce the building. It was accomplished in 2007 February. As a result the church has been reinforced.

In 2007 November the second stage of this program was launched. Now extra reinforcement work is being carried out together with interior improvement. The program is planned to be accomplished in late 2008.

ARTS

40. PARAVON MIRZOYAN SAYS RECEIVES STATE AWARD IS HONOR FOR ARTIST [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

"Getting a state award is a great honor for each painter: it means that the state has underscored your role in the national culture," the director of National Gallery Paravon Mirzoyan said.

He said he has submitted an application for President's Award in 2003 as well but in that year the commission has not presented anyone in fine art and sculpture nominations. But already in 2007 200 works have been presented and the commission presented him for the state award for 13 works.

The works which got state award in March and the works made in previous years will be shown in Vanadzor. Afterwards the works of the artist will be presented in Saint Petersburg.

"I have graduated from Saint Petersburg academy of fine art and 30 years ago I want to show my works to my friends, professors and in general to those who love Armenian culture," P. Mirzoyan said.

Referring to the Armenian national fine art, the director of the gallery said that today many of the artists have gone far away from their roots, they are creating in mixed and non-understandable directions to sell their works abroad. According to him, when art becomes business it stops being art.

Speaking about work of the National Gallery, P. Mirzoyan said that last year a number of interesting exhibitions were conducted but the visits are not satisfactory.

"Our people are speaking about culture very much but they do not like to visit cultural centers," he said.

41. NICOSIA HOSTS "FRIENDSHIP OF IRAN AND ARMENIA" EXHIBIT [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

An exhibition of photography entitled "Friendship of Iran and Armenia" opened in Nicosia, Cyprus on Saturday, The Tehran Times reported.

A total of 40 photos depicting Armenian historical temples and cultural monuments in Iran have been put on display for three days.

A group of Armenians and Iranians residing in Cyprus, as well as local reporters attended the opening ceremony.

Iran's ambassador to Nicosia, Alireza Bigdeli made a short speech about Iran's ancient history and civilization.

The representative of the Armenian nation in Cyprus expressed his thanks to Iran's embassy for holding the exhibit and said, "Iran has always provided good living conditions for Armenians."

He also noted that this exhibit exemplifies the great efforts that Iran has made to promote dialogue between religions.



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42. RUSSIAN-ARMENIAN FILM DIRECTOR WINS SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL PRIZE [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Russian-Armenian film director Anna Melikyan won the world cinema dramatic directing award for "Mermaid" Saturday at the Sundance Film Festival in the USA. Her film is a story of a fantasy-prone young girl who is forced to face a harsher reality as she grows up.

Nino Kirtadze won the world cinema documentary directing award for the French tale of a right-wing Russian man who holds sway over his acolytes in "Durakivo: Village of Fools."

"Man on Wire," James Marsh's documentary look at Philippe Petit's 1974 tightrope walk between the Twin Towers, took home both the Grand Jury and the Audience Prize in the World Cinema category Saturday at the Sundance Film Festival in the USA.

In other top prizes, Courtney Hunt's single-mother immigrant drama "Frozen River" scored the Dramatic Grand Jury Prize and Jonathan Levine's coming-of-age dramedy

"The Wackness," in which a young pot dealer in mid-'90s New York finds a mentor and customer in his shrink, took home the Dramatic Feature Audience award.

Also at the ceremony, the grand jury handed best documentary to Tia Lessin's and Carl Deal's Hurricane Katrina documentary "Trouble the Water," which uses extensive footage from before and after the 2005 disaster to expose the real stories of the hurricane's impact on New Orleans.

The World Cinema dramatic jury prize went to Jen Jonsson's "The King of Ping Pong," a Swedish feature that tells of a neglected teenager who seeks solace in ping-pong.

43. TURKISH UNIVERSITY TO OPEN ARMENIAN, GREEK AND HEBREW DEPARTMENTS [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Turkey's Nevsehir University is preparing to open new departments on Armenian, Greek and Hebrew languages.

The Dean of Faculty of Science and Letters at Nevsehir University Prof. Dr. Metin Hulagu was quoted by The New Anatolian as saying that the university will be the first one in Turkey to open departments on the three languages.

"We want to open new departments on the three languages to promote Turkey's relations with Armenia, Greece and Israel. There is presently a lack of Turks speaking these languages fluently," he said.

Nevsehir University is awaiting for a permission from the Turkish Higher Board of Education in order to officially open the language departments.

Nevsehir University was established on May 17th, 2007. The campus is located in the central Anatolian province of Nevsehir.

Earlier this year Turkish Public Radio and Television (TRT) said it was gearing up for starting to broadcast Armenian language programs along with seven other languages.

TRT's chief director, Ibrahim Sahin said in an interview with CNN Turk that the idea of Armenian language broadcasting had been welcomed by state minister Mehmed Aydin

"Armenia is Turkey's immediate neighbor. Despite the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries and existing political problems Armenian citizens are interested in Turkey," TRT chief director said.

According to him, this would allow to present the Turkish view of what happened in 1915 "contrary to Armenian Diaspora's allegations that 1.5 million Armenians had been slaughtered by the government of Turkey." He argued that 'by pushing to the forefront the common history of Armenian and Turkish peoples the programs will help Armenians and Turks to build close ties."

The Turkish daily Sabah reported that apart from news programs the Armenian language broadcasting will also feature musical shows and screening of movies.

RELIGION

44. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT SAYS NO SATANISTS IN ARMENIA [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08]

Hranush Kharatian, head of a government department in charge of religious and national minorities issues, declined speculations that there are groups in Armenia worshipping Satan. She said studies have revealed there are no organizations or group of people who are Satanists.



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Speaking to a news conference on Monday Mrs. Kharatian said a murder committed back in 2002 was classified as a crime committed by Satanists, but she added she knew nothing about it as the files of the crime are not accessible to her.

"Sometimes we are urged to follow closely the activity of some religious organizations, which are said to be likely worshipers of Satan, however our studies have shown that there are no Satanists in Armenia and we can declare that Armenia is clean of people worshipping Satan. At any rate we did not meet such people," she said.

45. ARAM I EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES ON THE DEATH OF ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE [ARMENPRESS, 01/29/08]

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the second Armenian Catholicosate in Lebanon, expressed his condolences in a letter sent to the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church on the death of His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos, the head of the Orthodox Church of Greece.

"Dear members of the Holy Synod, we came to learn with deep sorrow the passing away of His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos, the head of the Orthodox Church of Greece.

His Beatitude played a significant role in giving a new vitality to the Orthodox church of Greece in its evangelistic, social and ecumenical witness. He opened a new page in the modern history of the church, particularly in respect to the active role of the church in the life of people. His strong commitment to the Gospel values and the traditions of his church will be always remembered by the people and by all those who came to know him.

A close relationship and collaboration were established between us on formal and personal levels. His Beatitude has always expressed his great appreciation for the dedication of the Armenian community of Greece for the prosperity and progress of Greece.

On this sad occasion, on behalf of our people and church and personally I would like to express our deepest condolences to Holy Synod, to state authorities and to the people of Greece.

May God accept the soul of His Beatitude in His heavenly kingdom. We have delegated the Primate of our community in Greece, His Grace Bishop Khoren Doghramadjian to represent us at the funeral.'

SOCIAL

46. 31 APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR PROVISION OF LOANS TO REPRESSED PERSONS IN 2008 [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

378 applications for provision of loans on concessionary terms to repressed persons and their first-generation heirs for house construction are currently registered at the RA ministry of labor and social issues. NT correspondent was informed by Anahit Gevorgian, deputy head of the ministry's department on problems of disabled and elderly persons that the loan makes 2-5 million drams (about 6.5-16 thousand dollars).

According to her, 35 persons received loans in 2007. 31 bids on loan provision in 2008 were filed to the RA ministry of finance and economy.

47. NATIONAL PARK "ARPI LICH" TO BE CREATED IN ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/25/08]

The RA ministry of environmental protection together with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is implementing a project on creation of specially protected areas in Ashotsk region with the assistance of KfW bank (Germany). During the January 25 event dedicated to the start of this project, the RA minister of environmental protection Aram Harutyunian stated that the project's aim is to preserve the unique biodiversity of Javakhk-Shirak Plateau on the Armenian-Georgian border by creating "Arpi Lich" national park. In his words, the 2.2 million-euro project to be implemented in a three-year period will create new opportunities for developing summer and winter tourism in the region. The project implementation office has been set up in Gyumri.

Javakhk-Shirak section is located on a plateau of volcanic origin. It is unique in the Caucasian ecoregion by its mountainous steppes, alpine meadows, lakes and damp areas. There are more than 140 bird species here, 80-85 of which build their nests in this area.

It was stated that KfW is financing a project implemented near the Georgian border, with the WWF being advisor. A special Transborder Coordinating Council will be created.



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48. 40,000 SETTLEMENTS AND GEOGRAPHIC SITES RETURNED THEIR ARMENIAN NAMES [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Chief of the state cadastre committee, Manuk Vardanian, said Friday the government accomplished last the process of renaming thousands of settlements and geographic sites which had alien, mainly Turkic names.

He said the move affected all country except Yerevan and overall some 40,000 sites, villages, mountains, rivers and so on were renamed and given their true Armenian names.

He said a special guide book about the renamed settlements and sites was also published. He said few of names in Yerevan bear a foreign impact and will be renamed in future.

49. NEW CABLE ROAD OPENS IN TSAKHKADZOR [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Last Saturday president Robert Kocharian was in the resort town of Tsakhkadzor for official opening of the fifth cable road. The construction and purchase of equipment for it was funded by Hayastan All-Armenian Fund.

The new cable road is 2 km long. Its construction started in 2004. Parallel to it a 7.5 km long and 30 meter wide ski-track is being renovated.

50. HUNDREDS KM OF ROADS TO BE REPAIRED THIS YEAR [ARMENPRESS, 01/26/08]

Some 273 km long road sections will be repaired this and next year. The funds, almost 15 billion Drams, will be released from the US-government backed Millennium Challenges Program.

Armenian transport and communications ministry said a 25 km long section of a road from Armavir to Gyumri will also be repaired. It said another 110 km long road sections' repair, to start this year, will be funded by a loan from the Asian Development Bank.

51. ONLY 2% OF ARMENIAN POLLING STATIONS ACCESSIBLE TO DISABLED PERSONS WITH LOCOMOTOR PROBLEMS [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/28/08]

Only 2% of polling stations in Armenia are accessible to disabled persons with problems of the locomotor system, including those moving in wheelchairs, Armen Alaverdian, the chairman of Unison NGO dealing with problems of the disabled, said during a talk with NT correspondent. Out of nearly 145 thousand disabled Armenian citizens who have the right to vote, about 3 thousand move in wheelchairs. According to A. Alaverdian, no steps have been taken in recent years in order to solve this problem.

The head of the Legal Expert Examination Unit of the RA Central Electoral Commission (CEC) Sevak Hovhannisian explained that under a decision of the CEC, community heads are obliged to make the polling stations accessible to disabled persons. However, in his words, no responsibility is envisaged for nonfulfilment of this decision.

A. Alaverdian said that 13 members of their NGO have been accredited to implement observer mission in Yerevan, Spitak and Meghri during the presidential elections.

SPORTS

52. LEVON ARONIAN WINS CORUS CHESS TOURNAMENT

Levon Aronian of Armenia and Magnus Carlsen of Norway drew their games and remained half a point ahead of the field at Corus chess festival in Dutch Wijk aan Zee Saturday, with Aronian taking first with a slightly better tiebreak score.

Behind them were Vishu Anand of India in third and Teimour Radjabov of Azerbaijan in fourth.

In the B Group it was Armenia-born Sergey Movsesian of Slovakia ahead of Nigel Short of UK and Bacrot of France, and in the C Group young Fabiano Caruna two full points ahead of everyone else

Magnus Carlsen and Levon Aronian drew their games against Teimour Radjabov and Judit Polgar respectively.

Levon Aronian has won the tournament for the second time.



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53. JUDOIST FROM GYUMRI, HOVHANNES DAVTIAN RECEIVES PERMIT TO TAKE PART IN BEIJING 2008 [NOYAN TAPAN, 01/28/08]

Women's and Men's International Judo Rating Tournaments took place on January 25-27 in Sofia and Tbilisi. In Sofia Anush Hakobian (52 kg, Nor Hachn) was defeated and in Tbilisi Hovhannes Davtian (60 kg, Gyumri) took the fifth place the received a permit to take part in Beijing-2008. Hakob Arakelian (90 kg, Yerevan), concluded the first seven.

It should be mentioned that among Armenian judoists, Armen Nazarian (66 kg, Hrazdan) also received a permit to take part in Beijing 2008.

Thus, the number of Armenian sportsmen, who will take part in the Olympic Games, reached 13.

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