



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

AGBU NEWS

1. BAREGORTSAKAN BEING ORGANIZED IN EUROPE

MELKONIAN EDUCATIONAL COMPLEX WILL BE OPENED IN YEREVAN [Azg, 02/12/08] By Hagop Asatrian, Brussels-Prague

The assembly of Armenian General Benevolent Union's (AGBU) Central Board and AGBU European structures, which will from now on have a decisive role in the union's activities, took place in the "Metropol" Hotel conference hall on February 1-3. In 2008, as we know, the AGBU European Council headed by Alexis Govciyan, who is coordinating the activities of AGBU European branches, was established.

In his welcoming speech AGBU President Berge Setrakian underscored the beginning of a new phase adding that the AGBU European Council must work to unite the old and the new Diasporas, especially taking into consideration the fact that during the past 15 years tens of thousands of Armenians from Armenia migrated to Europe, and they are in need of self-organization. The AGBU president also spoke about the danger of assimilation. 80% of the new migrants lose their language, there are a lot of mixed marriages, most of them do not go to Armenian churches anymore. Underscoring the role of the newly-independent Armenia and the new phase of homeland-diaspora relations, Mr. Setrakian noticed that Europe may become a good bridge between the West and Armenia. On the other hand he also emphasized the role of the Russian-Armenians and the pro-Armenian activities of the Armenian community and Armenian Apostolic Church in Russia. The AGBU President also spoke about their activities in Armenia, underlining that the opening of a new Melkonian educational complex in Yerevan's Nork district will bring new quality to the Armenia-Diaspora educational-youth ties.

AGBU Central Board member Aris Atamian presented the architectural layout of the Melkonian complex, which is going to be a highly equipped modern educational center with annually 400-600 students from different educational institutions of the world.

Once again emphasizing the importance of unity of European-Armenian community and the example of French-Armenians to work jointly, President of AGBU Europe Alexis Govciyan said the new complex will contribute to the development of ties between the European Union and Armenia, strengthening of relations with the new communities and new youth organizations and realization of joint programs.

Representatives of youth organizations or Young Professionals teams from Bulgaria, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Macedonia, France also made speeches. The role of Nubarian Library of Paris as a European research center for young scholars was also underlined. AGBU Nubarian Library Director Raymond Kevorkian's speech was about history and current opportunities.

Relations with European structures were also discussed during the AGBU conference. AGBU representative Nikolas Davidyan is coordinating this issue right from the spot. Armenian studies specialist Bernard Colley's and EU Special Envoy in South Caucasus Peter Semneby's speeches were also worth mentioning. Talin Papazian presented the history of EU-Armenia relations. RA Ambassador to Belgium Vigen Chitechian also made a speech during the AGBU conference.

POLITICS

2. "HERITAGE" FACTION URGES PUBLIC TV COMPANY TO RETURN TO LIMITS OF LAW [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

The RA National Assembly "Zharangutyun" ("Heritage") faction urges once again the Public Television Company to return to the limits of law, the faction secretary Styopa Safarian stated at the February 8 briefing.

According to him, the Public Television company once again "violated the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly" and broadcast only 3 of the statements made by MPs at the February 5 sitting and only 4 out of the questions to the government - answers at the February 6 sitting, and the broadcast began 40 minutes after midnight. By the NA Rules of Procedure, the records of sittings for statements and questions-answers shall be demonstrated in full on Wednesdays.



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The deputy said that this week's plenary sittings of the National Assembly "served only one candidate for the RA presidency". S. Safarian called the statements of the parliamentary majority a "panic show", while the National Assembly - government questions-answers a "propaganda show".

3. RPA'S FORMULA IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IS "IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE, PROGRAM STRUGGLE AND NOT STRUGGLE AMONG PERSONALITIES" [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

"Beating and hooliganism are not political and political scientific categories and in any case, no matter what force instigates it, it should receive a legal response and be condemned," Mkrtych Minasian, a member of the National Assembly RPA faction, said at the February 8 press briefing, touching upon the information published in press, according to which the representatives of RA presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian's preelection headquarters the day before were attacked by the supporters of presidential candidate from RPA, Serge Sargsian in Yerevan's Nor Nork community.

The deputy affirmed that every one should realize that after the February 19 presidential elections "the Armenian people are obliged to live a normal life: nothing will be achieved by beating, by showing force, the force is in reason, the force is in ideas and in the struggle of ideas." He also said that their team has been warned by the party and by S. Sargsian personally that they "need only and only transparent, fair, free elections inspiring confidence." At the same time, M. Minasian did not exclude that "some people from this or that side do disservice."

Hermine Naghdalian, a NA deputy from RPA, in her turn, stated that RPA's formula in the presidential elections is "ideological struggle, program struggle and not struggle among personalities." She also mentioned that when carrying out preelection agitation they do not proceed from the fact who their "rivals or opponents" are.

4. ACCORDING TO PPA SPOKESPERSON, ELECTION CAMPAIGN PROCEEDS IN ATMOSPHERE OF UNPRECEDENTED CYNICISM [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

Ruzan Khachatryan, the Spokesperson of the People's Party of Armenia, considers that the election campaign of the presidential elections proceeds in the atmosphere of unprecedented cynicism and falsehood. She stated at the February 8 press conference that we have a disgraceful situation in state establishments, including educational institutions, in the days of the election campaign. In particular, the educational process is interrupted in country's comprehensive schools, as, according to R. Khachatryan, pupils and their parents are made to go to Serge Sargsian's rallies.

According to R. Khachatryan, she intentionally took part in S. Sargsian's meeting with the residents of the Achapniak community of Yerevan and the next day in various TV companies' reporting she saw what had never happened. Therefore, in her words, the TV companies do not make those materials themselves, these reportings are edited in another place and are given to the TV companies.

Touching upon the incidents happening during the election campaign, the PPA Spokesperson said that they are planned in advance. And after the incidents, according to Ruzan Khachatryan, not those initiating the incident, but those who tried to calm them down are arrested. In particular, that is the scenario of the incident that happened during the preelection meetings of RA presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian in Talin and Artashat.

5. AS STEPAN SAFARIAN EVALUATES, ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MOVED TO FORCE FIELD [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

The election campaign of the RA presidential candidates proceeds in the atmosphere of unbalanced coverage, intimidations and threats, and the "election campaign has been moved to the force field" lately. Stepan Safarian, a member of the RA National Assembly Zharangutiun (Heritage) faction, said at the discussion organized on February 8 at the National Press Club (NPC).

According to him, the inequality of conditions of holding candidates' election campaign is manifested in different ways. In particular, the election campaign of the pro-governmental candidate, Serge Sargsian is held at the expense of the state resources. And that, as the MP affirmed, means that "for him, it is more beneficial to mix state activity with the agitation, and not to present himself as a usual candidate to the people."

S. Safarian also mentioned the fact of not objective coverage of preelection meetings of candidates by the TV companies: all TV companies in the most pointed way show the most unsuccessful moments of the opposition candidates and the most successful moments of the pro-governmental candidate.



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Speaking about the positions of the West and Russia, the deputy said that a balanced approach by both the West and Russia was observed at first. However, in the recent period it was obviously emphasized that Russia gives preference to Serge Sargsian. According to Stepan Safarian, the evidence of this is the latest visits of the RF state officials to Armenia, during which Serge Sargsian finally agreed to be a "pro-Russian candidate. And the West, judging by the publications of the Gallup Poll authoritative analytical center, considers the Armenian authorities incapable of achieving the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh problem, power reduction, fighting corruption in the country.

6. HAYK DEMOYAN: DEEP PROCESSES OF HISTORY REHABILITATION GO ON IN TURKEY [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

A dialogue between the Armenians and the Turks is needed, Hayk Demoyan, the Director of the Museum-Institute of Genocide, considers. At the international conference under the title "The Countries of the South Caucasus and Middle East as Possible Partners in the Process of Formation of a Regional Security System" he said that the Turks should realize that the Genocide is part of their history, which they carefully hid for many years. According to H. Demoyan, the dialogue will contribute to establishment of confidence between the young generation of the Armenians and Turks. In his words, it is pleasant that a positive dynamics is observed in the past year: the number of Turks, who are interested in this subject, has grown. "The citizens of Turkey come to the museum to get acquainted with history, but other history, about which it is not accepted to speak in Turkey, as there is Article 301 of the Criminal Code and there is the general atmosphere," Hayk Demoyan said.

Turkey's actions on denying the fact of the Genocide result in deepening of crisis phenomena in the Turkish society. Thus, a special organization has been created in Turkey at the level of the National Security Council. The activity of that organization is aimed against recognition of the Armenian Genocide. And the further denial of that fact is a threat to Turkish identity: "Official interpretation of history is one thing and when absolutely a different thing is spoken and written in the world, it is already a serious challenge, as the most terrible thing may happen, when the citizens will stop believing their own leadership. A conflict emerges, which may result in the collapse of the state. Deep processes of history rehabilitation are already going on today: the heritage of Ataturk is being discussed, which was not accepted before."

In his words, the discussion of the issue of Genocide, certainly, is a challenge for Turkey. At the same time, Armenia's task is not to make things more pointed: "We should not present Turks in the image of an enemy or potential enemy but should consider them as our partners in the dialogue that will be favorable for the peoples of both countries."

Cemal Usak, the Vice-President of the Fund of Journalists and Writers from Istanbul, also spoke at the conference. In his speech he also emphasized the necessity to establish a dialogue between the representatives of both societies.

7. VAZGEN MANUKIAN CONSIDERS THAT NO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HAS FORMED TEAM [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

No matter who is elected RA President, Vazgen Manukian, the Chairman of the National Democratic Union, RA presidential candidate, will not agree to work with him. Stating this at the February 11 press conference, the latter also explained that he held various posts under Levon Ter-Petrosian, as he worked with his team. However, in his opinion, no presidential candidate has a formed team at present.

Touching upon the provisions of his preelection program concerning the economic sphere, V. Manukian said that it is envisaged to carry out indexation of consumer prices once every three months. Armenia's economy is divided among oligarchs sponsored by the authorities and dozens of thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises has suffered much in consequence of the amendments made to the RA law On Simplified Tax. According to the amendments, if a company's annual circulation exceeds 50m drams, it cannot work with a simplified tax. V. Manukian said that they propose making 50m drams 100m drams to encourage small and medium-sized entrepreneurship.

V. Manukian said that liquidation of monopolies will be possible only after the adoption of a new Constitution, as well as after judicial system's being really independent.

The presidential candidate did not deny that some businessmen also support him during the election campaign, but did not wish to publicize their names.



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8. LEVON TER-PETROSIAN: I HAVE NO INSUPERABLE OBSTACLES [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

Today the Armenian people is afraid of the authorities. Stating this at the rally held on February 9 in Yerevan with the participation of many thousands of people, RA presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian assured: "I return for the people not to be afraid of the authorities any longer, for the people to feel free and independent and to be able [as before] to criticize me again."

According to him, people is filled with fear in two cases: when the authorities are alien and second, when the authorities are criminal and hide something from the people.

Levon Ter-Petrosian stated that thanks to his meetings and rallies the atmosphere in the country has changed considerably, people's moods have also changed. In particular, in Yerevan and in four regions around Yerevan, in Aragatsotn, Armavir, Ararat, and Kotayk, the situation has already changed and there is no atmosphere of fear. However, in his words, there are still such moods in the country's remote regions. At the same time, he expressed the hope that the national movement will have an impact on the remote regions as well.

The first President's speech was accompanied by the words "Freedom" and "Victory" voiced by the rally participants.

A procession with the participation of many thousands of people was held after the rally. The procession's participants led by Levon Ter-Petrosian and his supporters went towards Mashtots Avenue, then to Koryun, Abovian, and Tumanian streets. The procession, which was held without any incidents, ended in Liberty Square, where the first President again spoke. The latter thanked the people: "This rally and procession proved how big the barrier between the people and the authorities is, as well as proved that I indeed have no insuperable obstacles," Levon Ter-Petrosian stated.

9. IN CASE SERGE SARGSIAN IS ELECTED, POVERTY LEVEL WILL REMAIN UNCHANGED, HRANT BAGRATIAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

According to Nikol Pashinian, the editor of the Haykakan Zhamanak daily, the February 9 rally of first RA President, presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian and a number of public-political forces supporting him is a rally of victory, Armenian people's revival, the bright future of the Republic of Armenia. As he evaluated, the number of the rally participants reached 150 thousand. N. Pashinian refuted the information spread by Public Television that allegedly L. Ter-Petrosian is going to withdraw his candidature: "The candidate who will withdraw his candidature will be the only one named Sergik," he said adding that the author of this false information is Alik Haroutiunian, the Director of H1 TV company, the friend of Nairi Hunanian, who has committed the October 27 terrorist act.

Yervand Manarian, a member of the Council of Elders of Armenian Intellectuals, said in his speech that the citizen, who on February 19 will vote not with his conscience, but under the influence of bribes or compulsion, will be cursed.

Hrant Bagratian, the Chairman of the Azatutiu (Liberty) party, the former RA Prime Minister, assured that the pro-governmental candidate, Prime Minister Serge Sargsian does not promise anything essential in the economic sphere, and in case the latter becomes President the "relative poverty will remain unchanged." According to H. Bagratian, if S. Sargsian is President, we will have not even the current 38 oligarches, as according to his program, the whole wealth will be concentrated in the hands of two megaoligarches, S. Sargsian and Robert Kocharian.

During the rally N. Pashinian stated that the freedom-fighters of the Soul's Ordeal organization and RA NA deputy Sasun Mikayelian have expressed readiness to support L. Ter-Petrosian.

10. PUBLICATION OF DATA OF SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEYS ON RA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' RATINGS PROHIBITED FROM FEBRUARY 12 [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

According to the RA Electoral Code, it is prohibited to publicize the results of the sociological surveys on ratings of the candidates and political forces nominated in the elections within 7 days preceding the voting day up to the official end of voting inclusive. According to it, in the forthcoming presidential elections this prohibition will work from February 12 to February 19, 20:00.

Though the Electoral Code stipulates that the violation of this provision leads to liability, no concrete punishment is envisaged for the above mentioned act by the RA legislation. Publishing the results of the sociological survey in the prohibited period will be considered as a violation of the established order of preelection agitation, for which according to Article 40.1 of the RA Electoral Code of Administrative Offences, a fine of 200 000 - 500 000 drams (nearly 1600 USD) is envisaged.



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11. RESULTS OF VOTINGS OF RA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS TO BE ACCESSIBLE SIMULTANEOUSLY FOR CEC MEMBERS AND WEBSITE'S VISITORS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

The website of the RA Central Electoral Commission (CEC) renewed with the immediate assistance of the OSCE Yerevan Office will give a possibility to receive the whole information in case of not only state elections, including the RA presidential elections of February 19, but also in case of local self-government elections. CEC Chairman Garegin Azarian said at the February 11 launching of the renewed website.

In his words, the information in Armenian and English placed on the website will be accessible for not only journalists, but also each person who will visit the www.elections.am website in any corner of the Earth. At that, all data concerning voting will appear in Internet in the same real regime, parallel with their entering, for visitors and CEC members.

The data from 28 regional district electoral commissions will be conveyed to CEC by the computer network. And the voting results from 13 district electoral commissions of Yerevan will be moved to CEC through the Armenian Encashment (Hayinkasatsia) specialized organization.

12. SERZH SARGSIAN CONDUCTS MEETINGS IN GEGHARKUNIK PROVINCE [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Presidential candidate, Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsian conducted today meetings in different settlements of the Armenian province of Gegharkunik, where he presented his program and his vision of the future of the country.

"We must be happy that we have an opportunity to erect statehood with our own strength. During these 16 years we have seen many difficulties, we have seen big and small victories, we have seen dark and cold years and now the republic has completely been connected to gas network and we are also exporting electricity. We have seen time when salaries and pensions were not paid for months. We have seen how the intolerance may be displayed and how we succeeded that the international community assesses our elections as good," Serzh Sargsian told in Sevan.

In general, according to him, many things has changed, people have changed, their demands and wishes.

"Time has come when we are forced to build a strong state, and quicken our development tempo. We are far behind European countries and we do not have time to move forward slowly. We must quicken the development and take a worthy place among the countries of the world," Sargsian said.

In the town of Gavar he called on the people to consolidate what has been acquired as a result of parliamentary elections in May.

"I state that I am responsible for good and bad, I am responsible that there are still families in the country living in bad conditions. But I am also responsible that we have a strong army, double digit economic growth. I am also responsible for the future of Armenia as I am sure that you will give your vote to the program of our people," the candidate pointed out.

In Martuni Sargsian said that the town and nearby villages may serve as a model for the whole country. The candidate said that there are a lot of issues but opportunities for building better country exist.

Within the framework of the visit S. Sargsian visited "Textile" fabric of Tsovazard, met with the people of Gandzak, Sarukhan, Noratus, Yeranos, Dzoragyugh, Tsakkar, Vardadzor, Upper and Lower Getashen villages.

On February 12 the candidate will conduct meetings in Aragatsotn.

13. CONSTITUTIONAL COURT DECLINES TER-PETROSIAN'S APPEAL [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Armenia's highest Constitutional Court turned down on Monday former president Levon Ter-Petrosian's demand to postpone Armenia's presidential election by two weeks because he was facing 'insurmountable obstacles' caused by Public TV's biased coverage of his election campaign.

Under the Armenian Electoral Code, a presidential election can be put off if one of the candidates is deemed to be facing 'insurmountable obstacles' during the campaign. If those obstacles are not eliminated by authorities within two weeks, the vote must be cancelled and held anew 40 days later.

Last Thursday, Ruben Torosian, Artak Zeynalyan and Robert Sanoyan, representing Ter-Petrosian's campaign, submitted an application to the Constitutional Court claiming that "the obstacles already raised in the 2008 presidential election, for reasons not depending on presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian, make impossible [the candidate's] further participation in the electoral processes set



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by the electoral legislation of Armenia.” They asked the Constitutional Court to recognize the obstacles as “insurmountable” in accordance with powers vested in it by the Constitution.

Before issuing the verdict Constitutional Court Chairman Gagik Harutyunian stated that the Court was not considering whether the claimed violations and obstacles took place indeed, but whether they could be considered as “insurmountable”.

In its verdict the Constitutional Court ruled that the alleged obstacles are not serious enough to be considered insurmountable. At the same time the court said after four-hour deliberations that Ter-Petrosian's complaints are ‘legitimate’ and should be addressed by the National Commission on TV and Radio, the Central Election Commission and lower-level courts. It warned that their failure to do so could ‘generate distrust in the election process.’

14. NO ARF MEMBER DEFECTS TO FORMER PRESIDENT

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) has denied rumors claiming that three members of the party, all veterans of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, have come out with a statement on supporting former president Levon Ter-Petrosian’s presidential bid.

The ARF said an examination revealed that these rumors were untrue.

The press office of the ARF said these three men simply could not come out with such a statement ‘because they are ARF members and therefore they are supporting its candidate, Vahan Hovhanesian.’

15. NATIONAL SENSE NGO TO SUPPORT SERZH SARKISIAN [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

A non-governmental organization of political scientists, called ‘National Sense’, has announced today its support to prime minister Serzh Sarkisian’s presidential bid.

In a statement disseminated to media the organization said after a close look into the ongoing political and public processes, regional and international developments, challenges which Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are facing they have concluded that political, social and economic stability is the main guarantee of continued strengthening and development of the country.

The statement also said that prime minister Sarkisian is the candidate who is able to guarantee political progress in the next five years.

They also commended Serzh Sarkisian for his political will and resolve to establish public accord and solidarity.

16. VAZGEN MANUKIAN QUESTIONS OPPOSITION CANDIDATES’ CHANCES FOR OUTRIGHT WIN [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

A presidential candidate Vazgen Manukian, nominated by his National Democratic Union (NDU,) has questioned today chances of opposition candidates to win the February 19 presidential election outright.

Speaking at a news conference he said none of 8 opposition candidates could win more than 20 percent of all votes in the first round. Therefore, he concluded, there will be a run-off.

He also questioned chances of prime minister Serzh Sarkisian to win the polls in the first round, “People will vote as they like and those of opposition candidates who enjoy a strong support of their sympathizers will get equal share of ballots,” he said, adding that the election output will become a sort of a self- assessment for the society.

He said also the opposition candidate who wins the right to a run-off will win only in case he enlists the support of others.

17. KOCHARIAN APPOINTS NEW DEPUTY POLICE CHIEF [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

President Robert Kocharian has appointed Sasha Afyan deputy chief of police force. Before his new appointment Sasha Afyan served as deputy chief of Yerevan police department.

The news was announced by Kocharian’s press service.



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18. OMAN AMBASSADOR HANDS CREDENTIALS TO KOCHARIAN [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Al Sheikh Abdullah Ben Zahir Ben Sahiv Al Housni, the new ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Armenia (seated in Moscow), presented today his credentials to president Robert Kocharian.

Kocharian was said to emphasize the importance of expanding relations with the Arab world, saying also that cooperation with countries of the Gulf has considerably increased over the past years.

The parties expressed willingness to undertake concrete steps for development of collaboration between Armenia and Oman. In this regard they stressed the importance of reciprocal visits, intensification of business contacts, exchange of information, which will help to clarify the possible spheres of cooperation.

19. VAZGEN MANUKIAN AGAINST ARMENIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

A presidential candidate and the chairman of the National-Democratic Union (NDU) Vazgen Manukian questioned today the wisdom of Armenia's possible membership in NATO saying this prospect would spoil its relations with two strong allies-Russia and Iran.

Speaking to journalists at the NATO Information Center in Yerevan Manukian said Armenia's potential NATO membership would not raise the level of its national security.

According to Manukian, considering the prospects of Armenia's membership in NATO, one "should take into account all positive and negative repercussions." At the same time he said nothing could be ruled out and that the situation in the world may change radically in 10 years.

Vazgen Manukian said Armenia should further its relations with Russia. "However, I am absolutely against relations, in which Armenia will be a toy in the hands of Russia, or its "outpost," he added.

20. BOTTLE WITH EASILY INFLAMMABLE LIQUID THROWN INTO PRE-ELECTORAL HEADQUARTERS OF REPUBLICAN PARTY OF HAGHTANAK VILLAGE [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

As the official internet site of the RA Police informs, a bottle filled with easily inflammable liquid was thrown into the territory of the pre-electoral headquarters of the Republican party located in the Haghtanak (Victory) village of the Armavir region by breaking the glass of the window during the period between February 9 21:10 and February 10 09:30, as a result of which the club chair and the pasteboard box have been burnt. According to the same source, preliminary investigation is being carried out.

21. ZHARANGUTIUN SUPPORTS LEVON TER-PETROSIAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The Zharangutiun (Heritage) party headed by Raffi Hovhannisian will support the candidature of Levon Ter-Petrosian in the February 19 presidential elections. This decision was made on February 12 as a result of the long-lasting sitting of the administration of the party held late in the evening by the simple majority of votes of the nine members of the administration. This statement was made by Hovsep Khurshudian, the party spokesman of Zharangutiun, and Vardan Khachatrian, the Secretary of the party, at the press conference held on February 12. According to them, the party is calling to all its members and supporters for voting for Levon Ter-Petrosian, the first President of the Republic of Armenia, on February 19. The party is also calling to all the citizens of Armenia for going to the election, exercising their civil right and not being bribed, as well as standing for their votes with all the legal means after the election.

It was also mentioned at the conference that negotiations with four candidates running for presidency were held before that: the support probability concerned four candidates: Vazgen Manukian, Levon Ter-Petrosian, Arthur Baghdasarian, and Vahan Hovhannisian. However, supporting Levon Ter-Petrosian, according to V. Khachatrian, is not a result of a negotiation, but a step of generalization. In addition to this, according to V. Khachatrian, that decision was contributed by the circumstance that Levon Ter-Petrosian is currently the candidate, who, perhaps enjoys the widest popularity, about which speak his crowded rallies. In the words of H. Khurshudian, the fact that the authorities submit the very Levon Ter-Petrosian to an unprecedented and total criticism speaks about the fact that he, perhaps, has a resource for implementing shift of power and system change in the country.

Vardan Khachatrian and Hovsep Khurshudian stated that they have no expectations concerning receiving any part of the authorities after the shift of power and they have deliberately removed that question in order to avoid speculations. "The most important expectation the party has is the same as society's: system changes," H. Khurshudian said. And V. Khachatrian mentioned that irrespective of the



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call of Zharangutiun to vote for Levon Ter-Petrosian, not all the questions have been settled. For example, Zharangutiun wants Levon Ter-Petrosian to give a thorough answer concerning the regulation of the Karabakh issue.

22. LEAFLETS SPREAD IN MARTUNI AGAINST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE SERGE SARGSIAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The collaborators of the police section of Martuni discovered leaflets containing swearings fixed on the walls of a number of buildings on February 11, which were addressed to Serge Sargsian, a candidate running for the post of the RA President, and a number of officials of the city of Martuni.

According to the message of the RA Police, measures are being taken in the direction of finding the people having committed the above-mentioned deed. A preliminary investigation is underway.

23. ALLIANCE CIVIL INITIATIVE TO HOLD EXIT-POLL ON DAY OF VOTE OF RA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The Alliance civil initiative will hold an exit-poll with the assistance of 30 non-governmental organizations on February 19: on the day of the vote of the RA presidential elections. This statement was made by Gevorg Melikian, the Deputy Chairman of the initiative, at the press conference held on February 12. He mentioned that the poll will be conducted in 100 electoral districts of Yerevan and different regions within the frameworks of the 0.1% of citizens or approximately 3000 electors, having suffrage.

According to Gevorg Melikian, the exit-poll will give an opportunity to make a right idea of the vote of the presidential elections. The civil initiative will also conduct a monitoring mission. In the words of the Deputy Chairman of the initiative, the Alliance conducted monitoring mission during the parliamentary elections and it was the one, which recorded serious electoral violations and electoral falsifications.

24. BUSINESSMEN SUPPORTING LEVON TER-PETROSIAN'S CANDIDATURE NEED PROTECTION [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

According to some information, the authorities have started exerting pressure on Hakob Hakobian ("Lady Hakob"), a NA deputy, the Chairman of the Soul's Ordeal NGO, and his relatives after the latter stated that he is going to support Levon Ter-Petrosian's candidature. It should be mentioned that the statement was voiced during the rally held on February 9 in Liberty Square.

It is also informed that the enterprises belonging to Hakob Hakobian were closed on February 12. According to the data of the Aravot newspaper, on February 11, Shmavon Galstian, H. Hakobian's companion-in-arms, the Director of the Anush textile factory, was brought to the Malatia-Sebastia police station. H. Hakobian stated that in case of not releasing S. Galstian and exerting pressure on the heads of the enterprises belonging to him he will organize a rally with his employees and will tell why this is done.

It should be mentioned that heads of the enterprises belonging to another businessmen supporting L. Ter-Petrosian's candidature, MP Khachatur Sukiasian, the owner of the Sil concern, also had some problems.

25. ARMAN MELIKIAN: PREELECTION DEVELOPMENTS ARE NEGATIVE [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

"The preelection developments are negative and proceed in the atmosphere of mutual distrust, which will preserve on the election day as well," RA presidential candidate Arman Melikian stated at the February 12 press conference. He said that psychological pressure is being exerted on the people who stand near him in TV broadcasts lately. He said that he wishes to inform especially people who distinguish themselves by political short-sightedness that no NGO supports him and he is against any statements on support.

Touching upon the document on the Nagorno Karabakh problem proposed by presidential candidate Aram Haroutiunian, A. Melikian said that he will not sign it as NKR's unification with Armenia is unacceptable for him. "NKR should be recognized as a state in its current boundaries. No unification with Armenia can be even spoken about," A. Melikian said. At the same time, he added that no incomplete decision must be made, each approach should be all-embracing, otherwise it is senseless to make a decision.



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Speaking about deprivation of RA citizens abroad of the right to take part in the elections, the presidential candidate said that before the press conference he met with RA NA Speaker Tigran Torosian in connection with this issue. Though the latter in principle spoke for the variant of the law in force, at the same time he assured that in six months that issue will be discussed, and the respective legislative amendments can be adopted with the participation of specialists.

26. LEVON TER-PETROSIAN MEETS WITH DMITRY MEDVEDEV IN MOSCOW [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

First RA President and presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian, who had left for Moscow on February 11, met with Dmitry Medvedev, the RF government's Deputy Prime Minister. This was mentioned in the publication in the Russian Argumenti I Facti periodical under the title "The Armenian Presidential Candidate Found Support in Moscow and in the Homeland." It was mentioned that during the meetings in Moscow L. Ter-Petrosian clarified his positions over pivotal issues. During his visit to Moscow L. Ter-Petrosian was accompanied by his former Spokesperson Levon Zurabian.

The publication also mentioned that according to the latest data of sociological surveys and studies, 75% Armenia's voters is ready to vote for L. Ter-Petrosian.

It should be mentioned that D. Medvedev has been nominated a presidential candidate by the United Russia RF ruling party. RF President Vladimir Putin supports his candidature, and he is considered the future President of Russia.

27. APPEALS CIVIL COURT KEEPS UNCHANGED SENTENCE ON CASE OF NOT GIVING CERTIFICATE TO ARAM KARAPETIAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

On February 12, the Appeals Civil Court presided over by judge Karine Hakobian made a decision to keep unchanged the sentence pronounced by the first instance court on the case of the lawsuit of Nor Zhamanakner party Chairman Aram Karapetian against the Passport and Visa Department of the RA Police. A. Karapetian appealed against the department's decision not to give him a certificate on 10 years' permanent residence in Armenia.

28. PARLIAMENT CHAIRMAN DOWNPLAYS CANDIDATE'S ARGUMENTS [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

Parliament chairman Tigran Torosian downplayed today the arguments of a presidential candidate, Arman Melikian, who would repeat that a legislation amendment banning Armenian expatriates from participating in national elections was unconstitutional, albeit the Constitutional Court rejected earlier to consider Melikian's appeal against the amendment.

During a meeting with Melikian today the parliament speaker cited legal, technical and moral reasons to ground why Armenians living abroad should not be allowed to participate in Armenia-held elections.

Torosian said from the legal perspective holding elections in Armenia is invulnerable and this, he said is not in conflict with international requirements.

From the technical perspective, he said in view of the fact that Armenian expatriates are living in dozens of foreign countries it is impossible to organize elections for all of them.

Melikian argues that the ban has affected as many as 500,000 expatriates banning them from taking part in the February 19 presidential election. He would also say many of them would vote for him. But Torosian said in the past elections few precincts were opened in embassies and consular buildings.

From the moral perspective, Torosian said elections actually define the country's course for the next several years and will effect the lives of those who choose to stay here. "Armenia exists thanks to people who live in it and therefore, it is they who should decide its fate," he said.

29. CANDIDATE SERZH SARGSIAN CONDUCTS MEETINGS IN ARAGATSOTN [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

"The opportunities of the state have increased and time when fair demands of citizens were not being implemented reasoning with not having means have passed. All the raised issues on reconstruction of roads, medical centers, schools, on overcoming social issues will get their solutions according to the already formed schedule," presidential candidate, Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsian said today in the town of Aparan of the Armenian province of Aragatsotn.



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The candidate said that the victory in parliamentary elections became possible thanks to people of Aparan as well. Sargsian expressed assurance that in this fight the victory will also be on his side and it will bring to better Aparan and poverty reduction. He called on to fight with the joint efforts against the sole enemy – poverty; according to him all prerequisites exist for it.

“We will win by all means in spite of the fact that in pre-electoral period many candidates are trying to bring forward evil, trying to incite battle friends against each other, tempting people with offices, satisfy their unsatisfied ambitions and are trying to reach something by dividing the public,” Sargsian said.

“Together we will go towards prosperous, wealthy Armenia. I am sure no one wants to live in a bad country, no one wants to see poor neighbor,” the candidate pointed out.

In the town of Talin Serzh Sargsian expressed assurance that as a result of the choice of the people all the candidates will see what they will gain. Those who sow evil, will take their harvest, who spoke about kindness and peace will have their fruits.

“We must withdraw evil from us, we can develop only by peace, mutual respect and there is no other way,” he said.

Serzh Sargsian also said that there will not be winners and losers after the elections. “Our team consists of professionals and the potential of all will be used,” the candidate said.

Serzh Sargsian also conducted meetings in Tsaghkahovit, Alagyaz, Kuchak, Hartavan, Ohanavan, Karbi and other settlements.

30. RUSSIAN ARMENIANS SUPPORT PRIME MINISTER SERZH SARKISIAN [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

The Moscow-based businessman of Armenian descent, Ara Abrahamian, who is a Russian citizen, said today in Yerevan that the Union of Russian Armenians, of which he is chairman, will support prime minister Serzh Sarkisian in the February 19 presidential election.

Announcing this Ara Abrahamian said the decision was made after a careful scrutiny of all candidates' election programs. Abrahamian said their investigation showed that Sarkisian has been consistent over the last ten years in improving Armenian-Russian relationships.

“Russian Armenians have great expectations from this election. We want it to proceed in a transparent and clean manner,” Abrahamian said.

He also called on Armenians to participate actively in the election as every vote is important.

31. ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DISMISSES ALLEGATIONS OF LAND SWAP FOR RESOLVING KARABAKH ISSUE [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

Foreign minister Vartan Oskanian echoed president Robert Kocharian on Tuesday to dismiss media speculations claiming that president Robert Kocharian had agreed back in 1999 to give the Armenian region of Meghri to Azerbaijan in return for Nagorno-Karabakh within its 1988 borders and the Lachin region of Azerbaijan, which would become internationally recognized parts of Armenia.

A local daily Haykakan Zhamanak published last Saturday the text of a Nagorno-Karabakh peace plan drafted ostensibly by international mediators, which it claimed was accepted by Kocharian in 1999.

During a televised appearance on Shant TV Tuesday evening Oskanian said no official or semi-official document related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement had ever mentioned Meghri as part of a land swap option.

Oskanian said the text of an agreement, published by Haykakan Zhamanak, refers to a settlement option proposed by a U.S. expert Paul Goble that was circulated in early 1990-s and was denied flatly by 2000.

Media stories in Armenia claimed that Kocharian was going to cede Meghri to Azerbaijan and thus deprive Armenia of a 45 km long border with friendly Iran, but Oskanian said the OSCE Minsk Group, the sole internationally mandate team to help Armenia and Azerbaijan end their dispute, had never proposed a swap option.

Ter-Petrosian's allegations, which he sounded during a rally in Yerevan on February 9, were dismissed earlier by president Robert Kocharian as a “cheap pre-election ploy.” Addressing the crowd on Freedom Square Ter-Petrosian said if materialized the agreement would entail the loss of a common border with Iran and would have disastrous consequences for the landlocked Armenia. He further claimed that the document was authentic.

On Tuesday Oskanian likewise described ex-president's allegations as ‘a cheap election ploy.’ “His (Ter-Petrosian's) allegations are not true. They are speculations and unfortunately, I have to say they are immoral as he is trying to link it to the October 27, 1999 parliament attack,” Oskanian said.



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Ter-Petrosian claimed that the plan was strongly opposed by late prime minister Vazgen Sarkisian and parliament speaker Karen Demirchian at a meeting of Armenia's National Security Council which took place shortly before the October 27, 1999 armed attack on parliament in which both of them were killed. Ter-Petrosian further argued that this must be examined as "one of the likely theories" of the parliament attack.

However, according to Oskanian, after his resignation in 1998 Ter-Petrosian never met with late prime minister Vazgen Sarkisian while president Kocharian had 'excellent' prelatships with him.

Oskanian said back in 1994 a narrow circle of Armenian leaders had discussed the so-called Goble plan and he was present at it in the capacity of a deputy foreign minister. He said Ter-Petrosian had expressed an opinion saying 'if the northern section of Azerbaijani exclave Nakhichevan were given to Armenia to ensure a border with Iran, the Goble plan would be beneficial for Armenia.'

At that Oskanian said he could not say that "Ter-Petrosian wanted to hand Meghri to Azerbaijan because it is absurd, not correct as Ter-Petrosian never said anything like that".

Oskanian said the region of Meghri is vital for Armenia and has become the symbol of Iranian-Armenian partnership. He said Iran-Armenia gas pipeline, an inter-state highway run through Meghri, and soon a refinery will be built there and a hydro power plant will be built on the River of Arax. He said all these projects were conceived 10 years ago.

BUSINESS

32. PROGRAM ON RESTORATION-RECOGNITION OF CITIZENS' RIGHTS OF REAL ESTATE OWNERSHIP TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN YEREVAN BY 2009 [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

A program on restoration-recognition of citizens' rights of real estate ownership is being implemented in Yerevan. The mayor of Yerevan Yervand Zakarian said at the February 11 press conference that the program is aimed at recognizing citizens' rights of real estate they have used for decades.

According to the mayor, this work in several development zones started as early as last year. The deadline for restoration of property rights is December 2009.

Under the program, property rights of Yerevan residents will be restored in 2008 in the following way: the first quarter of 2008 - rights will be restored for residents of Avan and Nork-Marash communities, the second quarter - rights of residents of Kentron community, the third quarter - rights of residents of Shengavit community, the fourth quarter - rights of residents of Malatia-Sebastia community. In 2009, this work will be done in Erebuni, Ajapniak, Davitashen, Arabkir, Kanaker-Zeytun and Nubarashen communities. 10 thousand citizens of non-development zones will restore their rights.

Y. Zakarian said that the areas adjacent to Circus, Wine Plant, Republican Stadium, Engineering University and the market in Mashtots Avenue, as well as Fidousi, Kond and Kozern districts will be developed within the next two years. As a whole, according to the mayor, urban development work will be done in 23 areas.

33. LARGE-SCALE WORK IN YEREVAN WAS NOT DONE FOR PR PURPOSE OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE SERGE SARGSIAN, MAYOR OF YEREVAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The mayor of Yerevan Yervand Zakharian considered as irresponsible the RA presidential candidate Artur Baghdasarian's recent statement that the prices of lands in central Yerevan were established at a lower level than their cost price at the auctions organized by the mayor's office. The mayor explained at the February 11 press conference that the mayor's office is obliged to establish the reserve price of lands to be auctioned at 50-70% of the average market price. According to him, control of these prices is done by the State Committee of the Real Estate Cadastre.

In response to the question about whether the large-scale work done in Yerevan by the mayor's office in 2007 had a PR purpose for the RA presidential candidate Serge Sargsian, Y. Zakharian replied that this work was done within the 2004-2007 programs on socioeconomic development of Yerevan and has no relation to PR of this candidate for presidency.



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34. NUMBER OF TOURISTS TO ARMENIA GROWS BY 33.5% IN 2007 ON PREVIOUS YEAR [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

510,287 tourists visited Armenia in 2007 - against 382,240 in 2006, with the growth in their number making 33.5%.

According to the RA National Statistical service, 467,574 people left Armenia for tourism purpose in 2007. The growth on the year 2006 made 38.7%.

35. CONVERSE BANK TO PARTICIPATE IN FOUNDATION OF POST BANK [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

Serious work is being done in Armenia with the aim of founding Post Bank, and an agreement on its joint creation has been reached with Converse Bank, the RA minister of transport and communication Andranik Manukian told reporters on February 12.

Speaking about activities of HayPost in the past year, the minister said that many positive changes have taken place in the postal system after its transfer for management: the manager has made investments in some post offices, which were repaired and brought into line with international standards. A. Manukian announced that 50 post offices will be repaired this year.

According to him, the process of reducing HayPost' staff has finished, and the manager promised to create normal working conditions for employees.

The minister did not exclude the possibility of privatization of HayPost in the future, adding that this issue is not under discussion now.

36. BLACK SEA TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BANK PROVIDES 5 MILLION DOLLAR CREDIT TO ARMECONOMBANK [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) has provided a 5 million dollar credit to Armeconombank. The credit agreement was signed on February 12. NT correspondent was informed by Armeconombank that these resources will be used for crediting small and medium enterprises in Armenia, particularly, companies engaged in production, trade and service sectors.

According to the same source, crediting will be done by the BSTDB-developed and established procedures and standards of credit provision to small and medium enterprises. Based on it, Armeconombank will receive credits for 5 years. The minimum amount of a credit for a borrower will make 400 thousand dollars.

As of January 1, 2008, the overall capital of Armeconombank exceeded 8.47 bln drams (about 27.3 mln USD). Its overall assets make over 50.4 bln drams, the net profit in 2007 amounted to 1.88 bln drams. The bank has 45 branches in Armenia and Artsakh.

37. FIFTH INTERNATIONAL "BRIDGE 2008" ECONOMIC FORUM TO BE CONDUCTED IN TSAKHKADZOR [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

Fifth international economic forum "Bridge 2008" will be conducted in Tsakhkadzor from February 15-18. An official from the "Master" international integration support center told Armenpress that at the event present will be politicians, representatives of legislative and executives bodies, industrialists, and businessmen. Heads of diplomatic and trade organizations registered in Armenia will also participate in the event.

More than 10 countries have already informed about participation of their delegations in the event.

The organizers of the fifth international economic forum "Bridge 2008" are Union of Armenia's Manufacturers and Businessman and "Master" international integration support center with the support of the Armenian Trade and Economic Development Ministry, Foreign Ministry, Central Bank and Armenian Development Agency.



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DIASPORA

38. TURKISH ACTIVISTS DEMAND JUSTICE AT DINK MURDER TRIAL [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Turkish intellectuals and politicians called for a fair and transparent ruling Monday in Istanbul as the third hearing began in a case against three alleged killers of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, news reports from Turkey said.

"This stain must be cleaned so that a Turkey where opinions are no longer judged and those who express them are no longer condemned can exist," said a statement read to journalists near the Besiktas court.

The statement was signed by politicians from various leanings, as well as well-known intellectuals who called for "complete transparency" in a case that is being closely followed by the European Union, which Turkey is looking to join.

On January 19, 2006, 52-year-old Dink was shot outside the office of the weekly publication he ran -- the Turkish-Armenian *Agos* -- by a 17-year-old boy with close links to Turkish nationalists.

A group calling themselves "The Friends of Hrant Dink" read a statement to a separate crowd of several hundred people in Besiktas. They demanded that justices "do their job correctly and follow this through to the end." The courthouse was surrounded by police as those standing trial arrived in armed police vans.

Dink campaigned for reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia, but ran into trouble with the law for articles in which he labeled the 1915-1917 mass killings of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire during World War I a "genocide." The journalist was slapped with a suspended sentence of six months in jail under article 301 of the Turkish penal code, which deals with offences that insult Turkishness and is denounced by the EU.

Monday's hearing took place behind doors due to the fact alleged murderer Ogun Samast is a minor. Samast has confessed to the murder and could face up to 42 years in prison. His co-charged, Yasin Hayal and Erhan Tuncel, allegedly ordered the attack on Dink and could face life in prison. Sentences ranging from 7.5 to 35 years have already been handed out to 16 others accused in the case.

39. AMERICAN ARMENIANS MOURN PASSING OF TOM LANTOS [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) joined with Armenian Americans from across the United States in mourning the loss of long-serving California Congressman Tom Lantos, a Holocaust survivor and human rights champion who, in his final months in office, played a vital role, as Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, in this panel's adoption of the Armenian Genocide Resolution.

In separate letters to Congressman Lantos' wife of 58 years, Annette, and to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, ANCA Chairman Ken Hachikian underscored the gratitude of the Armenian American community to Chairman Lantos for his leadership in rejecting the powerful forces of denial and securing, this past October, his Committee's passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution.

Hachikian also shared the hope and expectation that the full House of Representatives will, in the coming weeks, complete the Chairman's unfinished work by securing full Congressional recognition and commemoration of this crime against all humanity.

Speaking on the PBS Newshour on October 11, 2007, a day after the Resolution's adoption at the committee level, Chairman Lantos told correspondent Margaret Warner that, "This is one of those events, Margaret, which has to be settled once and for all: 1.5 million utterly innocent Armenian men, women and children were slaughtered. And the Turkish government, until now, has intimidated the Congress of the United States from taking this measure. . . I think it's important, at a time when genocides are going on in Darfur and elsewhere, not to be an accomplice in sweeping an important genocide under the rug."

"Throughout his career, Congressman Lantos demonstrated great courage and conviction as he worked tirelessly to address countless human rights issues," said AAA Executive Director Bryan Ardouny. "We join with Armenian Americans from across the country in mourning his passing and hope that his important work in defense of human rights will continue to inspire future generations."



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40. FLORENCE AVAKIAN DISCUSSES THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE ON AL JAZEERA TELEVISION [Azg, 02/13/08]

Florence Avakian, an accredited United Nations journalist, and free lance writer based in New York, recently was interviewed on Al Jazeera television which has a worldwide audience of over 70 million. The interview which took place at United Nations headquarters in New York, focused on the Armenian Genocide, and its prospects for recognition by the United States Congress.

She emphasized that the issue was one of moral and human rights, and should not be compromised because of political expediency. This first genocide of the 20th century was a catalyst in persuading Rafael Lemkin to call the mass slaughter of a people a "genocide", she said.

Ms. Avakian pointed out that early United States administrations had recognized the magnitude of the Armenian tragedy perpetrated by Ottoman Turkey, and that The New York Times during that period, had run front page articles about the horrific events. This accentuated the plight of the refugees, and resulted in American efforts to help the survivors. Even Hitler, she reiterated, had chillingly stated, "Who remembers the extermination of the Armenians", before he started his own plan.

When asked about Turkey's intention to close the American base in Turkey, as well as other such threats, she said the issue must not be one of "callous political expediency". As an influential world power, the United States should stand up as a beacon of justice. Even today, the world is seeing genocides and ethnic cleansing continue, with virtually no action taken to prevent them, a precursor to future genocides, she noted.

With huge military and industrial corporations joining the well-financed Turkish lobby and the Bush administration to stop the Genocide bill, several members of Congress caved in, causing the bill to be tabled indefinitely, she pointed out.

While a freshman student at Hunter College High School in New York, Ms. Avakian had represented her school on the NBC television series "The New York Times Youth Forum" on the topic of genocide. At that time, she was privileged to meet Rafael Lemkin who was the moderator of the program. Florence Avakian received a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Political Science on a Falk Fellowship at Michigan State University. She was also awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellowship in Journalism to Cornell University, and an English Union Speaking Fellowship to Oxford University in England.

At the United Nations, she has interviewed several world leaders including India's Indira Gandhi, Georgia's President Edward Schevardnadze, Turkey's President Bulent Ecevit, and Cypriot Presidents Archbishop Makarios, Glafkos Clerides, and Spyros Kyprianou, among others. She is a regular member of the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA).

In the last several years, Ms. Avakian has had her Op Ed articles on the Armenian Genocide and Armenian issues published in The New York Times, Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Examiner, Baltimore Sun, and the Hearst Feature Service Ms. Avakian is a frequent contributor to The Armenian Reporter, and to Ararat Magazine. She is also the news reporter in English every week on the Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey.

41. DINK'S ASSASSINATION HEARING RESTARTED [Azg, 02/13/08]

Istanbul Court started third hearing of "Akos" newspaper editor-in-chief Hrant Dink's assassination. It is informed that 19 suspects will appear in court.

Delegation of International Federation for Human Rights arrived in Istanbul to follow the hearing, "Hurriet" informs.

General Secretary of the Federation announced, "Dink's assassination hearing will be a test of human rights for Turkey".

42. ARMENIAN CITIZENS OF GERMANY DISAPPOINTED [Azg, 02/13/08]

Armenian citizens that live in Germany sent a letter to RA Foreign Ministry, Central Electoral Commission and OSCE expressing their disappointment and dissatisfaction on the changes in RA Election Law that deprive them of their electoral franchise.

"The fact is observed as a violation of electoral franchise of RA Constitution and all citizens of the Republic of Armenia".



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43. BRYAN ARDOUNY: ARTICLE 301 HAS BECOME A PAINFUL REMINDER OF OPEN WOUNDS OF GENOCIDE [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

Executive Director of the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), addressed a letter to Pittsburgh Post-Gazette to appreciate publication of "Freer Speech" editorial dedicated to the problem of article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code.

"We commend you for your Jan. 29 editorial ("Freer Speech") highlighting Turkey's continued and inexplicable use of Article 301 to indict citizens for openly discussing the Armenian Genocide.

"Turkey is the only country in the world where speaking the truth about the Armenian Genocide is regarded a prosecutable offense. For simply mentioning the atrocities, Hrant Dink was hauled to court and convicted in 2005. His life was ultimately taken by forces determined to squash public discussion of this fact of world history.

"Sadly, one year after Mr. Dink's assassination, Ankara has yet to overturn the climate of intolerance, prejudice and repression which led to this unspeakable crime. Instead, Mr. Dink's son, Arat Dink, was recently convicted under this much-criticized law for referencing the Armenian Genocide.

"Article 301 has become a painful reminder of the open wounds of genocide and its denial. It is time for Turkey to provide more than just lip-service and get to the business of reforming its laws and stop its ongoing campaign of denial," Mr. Ardouny wrote in his letter.

44. ARMENIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY HAS COME A LONG WAY... By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

We all can recall the time when a city councilman would show up at an annual banquet with a proclamation commending Armenians and their achievements. Those in attendance would welcome the politician with rousing applause and a standing ovation. And if the elected official managed to greet the audience with one or two mangled Armenian words, he or she would be hailed as a hero.

Those times are a distant memory now. Members of Congress routinely attend Armenian events. Governors keynote April 24 commemorations and proclaim Armenian Genocide Day, despite the opposition of the Federal government. Virtually all U.S. presidential candidates issue statements that not only reaffirm the Armenian Genocide, but also express support for most Armenian issues.

Clearly, Armenians have come a long way! The great progress they have achieved is owed to the activism of numerous Armenian-American organizations, and specifically to thousands of community members who have been involved in many political campaigns as volunteers, staff members, and financial contributors. Many others have run for political office -- one, George Deukmejian, was elected governor of the great state of California.

Other Armenian-Americans became high-ranking civil servants, members of Congress, state legislators, mayors, city councilmen, and distinguished members of the judiciary -- Dickran Tevrizian became the first Armenian-American Federal Judge, and Justices Armand Arabian and Marvin Baxter served on the California Supreme Court.

Despite the community's great progress in recent years, much more could be accomplished with greater activism and organizational effort. Unfortunately, there are always those who remain on the sidelines and throw stones at those who are politically active, effectively discouraging others from getting involved in community affairs. They see the cup as half empty rather than half full. They contend that there is no point in political activism either because politicians cannot be trusted or that there is an anti-Armenian conspiracy orchestrated by one group or another that would never allow Armenians to attain their objectives. These inactive Armenians refuse to spend the time, energy and money to further the Armenian agenda. Instead of using the achievements of more successful ethnic groups as a model to emulate, these naysayers either begrudge or denigrate them.

Let's look at the example of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) which is getting ready to celebrate its 102nd anniversary in a couple of months in New York City. Among the distinguished guests who are invited to speak at AJC's conference are: Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations; Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State; Francois Fillon, Prime Minister of France; Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of Russia; Dominique Strauss-Kahn, President of International Monetary Fund; Lee Bollinger, President of Columbia University; Anne-Marie Slaughter, Dean of Woodrow Wilson School; and Taib Fassi Fihri, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco.

I would not be surprised if in the not too distant future, major Armenian-American organizations would be hosting an equally distinguished list of dignitaries at their annual conferences or gala banquets. Indeed, in recent years, a number of Armenian groups such as the AGBU, ANCA, Armenian Assembly,



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Diocese, Prelacy, Children of Armenia Fund, and the USC Institute of Armenian Studies have held very prestigious events with important elected officials and celebrities as their guests.

Another yardstick with which one can measure the Armenian community's progress is the amount of money it raises and contributes to various projects in Armenia and the Diaspora. Dozens of Armenian-American organizations raise tens of millions of dollars annually for a variety of causes. One of the most prominent fund-raising events is the annual telethon of the Armenia Fund. This group has raised around \$15 million during each of the last two years and millions more in earlier telethons.

As a point of reference, and in order to encourage Armenian-Americans to get even more involved in community affairs, it would be interesting to note the fund-raising successes of the American Jewish community.

According to Howard Rieger, the President of the United Jewish Communities (UJC), the North American Jewish Federation system raised \$2.4 billion last year. This group now has more than \$13 billion in endowment funds, which yield approximately \$1 billion per year. Of course, it is understood that the American Jewish community is older, larger, more prosperous and better organized than the Armenian-American community. Yet, Armenians can accomplish much more than they have by expanding their base of support both at the grassroots and the leadership level.

To be sure, Armenian-Americans have come a long way in becoming a part of the American body politic. By getting better organized, more engaged in political activities and mobilizing those who are inactive, the Armenian community can increase its economic and political clout, both in national and international forums.

The day may soon arrive when some of the world's famous and powerful would come knocking on the door of Armenian organizations, to address the community's core issues, concerns and interests.

ARTS

45. ARAME RECOGNIZED BEST SINGER OF YEAR 2007 AND ARSEN GRIGORIAN BEST PEOPLE'S SINGER [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The results of the fifth National Music Awards were summed up on February 10 at A. Spendiarian National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. Through the voting of the jury members, Arame was recognized The Best Singer of the Year, Arsen Grigorian (Mro) The Best People's Singer, Sirusho The Best Singer, Anna Mayilian The Best People's Singer.

Vardan Badalian was recognized winner in the nomination Year's Discovery and the Armenian State Youth Orchestra conducted by Sergei Smbatian became Year's Discovery in the sphere of classical music. Akunk was recognized The Best Ethnographic Ensemble of the Year, Armenoids The Best Pop Group, the concert program dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Armenian State Jazz Band became winner in the nomination The Best Jazz Project, the concert of the Chamber Orchestra held in Artsakh in the nomination The Best Classical Project. Hayko's disk "There are no words" became The Best Album of the year, Anna Mayilian's Ethnovocal album The Best People's Album. The prize in the nomination The Best Hit was given to Sofi Mkheyan for her song "The day and the present." Director Hrach Keshishian received the prize in the nomination The Best Video Clip of the Year for Emmi's and Super Sako's song "If you go away."

Tigran Naghdalian prize was given to RA Merited Artist Hayko for music written for the film "Don't be afraid."

The special prizes of National Music Awards were given to the Sharm company for the concert dedicated to the 15th anniversary of Armenian army's formation, the Shant TV company for its project People's Singer, the Armenian State Youth Orchestra for its concert in Berlin, Armen Tutunjian for the Jazz Time program of Nor Alik TV company. For his considerable contribution in the radio sphere a special prize was posthumously given to Sedrak Davidian.

46. GYOTE INSTITUTE AND GERMAN EMBASSY DONATE BOOKS TO ARMENIAN SCHOOLS [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

Institute after Gyote and German embassy in Armenia are carrying out book donation program aimed at promoting German classes in the Armenian schools. Today the first part of the books was donated to the school # 1 of the Armenian town of Sevan.

German ambassador to Armenia Andrea Viktorini said today at a press conference that the program is intended for 20 schools. The overall cost of the books is 50,000 euros.



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Besides, Gyote Institute is providing scholarships to the specialists of German language for participating in training programs in Germany, conducts training classes in Yerevan and Armenian provinces.

"In Armenia and Georgia Gyote Institute is carrying out pilot program within the framework of which two schools from each country will be selected where German is being taught and training classes will be organized after which the trained teachers will train their colleagues of other schools," director of Gyote Institute Werner Wyol said.

He also said that an office of an expert who will implement the programs will open in Yerevan, whose main mission will be to oversee the quality of teaching of German and organize events spreading German language in Armenia.

47. ARMENIAN EMBASSY IN GREECE HOSTS PAINTING EXHIBITION [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

The foreign affairs ministry said an exhibition of Greece-based painters representing different cultures opened in the Armenian embassy in Athens on February 11.

The exhibition features the works by Gagik Altunian (Armenia), Yanis Adamakis (Greece), Alexei Kirilov (Russia), Valeri Bregen (France) and Iraklis Parkharidis (Greece).

The exhibition was opened by ambassador Vahram Kozhoyan. The opening was attended by local authorities, Armenian clergymen, businessmen and media. The exhibition will run through February 21.

RELIGION

48. CATHOLICOS KAREKIN II: "ARMENIAN CHURCH TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT PROGRESS OF ARTSAKH" [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The Armenian Church will continue to support the progress of Artsakh. This statement was made by Patriarch Karekin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians, receiving Bako Sahakian, the President of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin on February 11. His Holiness also expressed his satisfaction to the NKR President with the kind attitude displayed towards the Armenian Apostolic Church and the support the authorities display towards the Armenian diocese of Artsakh. In his turn Bako Sahakian mentioned that Artsakh has always felt the assistance of Mother Church and His Holiness.

According to the information provided to Noyan Tapan by the Information Services of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, during the meeting they also touched upon the forthcoming presidential elections of Armenia. His Holiness and the President of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh considered it important that the elections should pass in a circle of legality, in an atmosphere of peace and solidarity.

49. ARMENIAN CHURCH MARKS TRNDEZ FEBRUARY 14 [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

The Armenian Church will mark on February 14 a feast called Trndez. According to religious custom this holiday is connected with the idea of coming forward to the Lord with fire, after 40 days of his birth.

The Armenian Church celebrates it on February 14th - 40 days after January 6th, when Armenians mark their Christmas, from which it derives the religious name: "Tearn end aradj" or "Trndez"- Coming Forward to the Lord.

The main ceremony of the holiday is a bonfire, symbolizing the coming of spring. Songs and dances around the fire continue until the fire dies down. Domestic animals and seeds are brought to the area of the festivities. Newly married couples are the first to leap over the fire.

This leaves the bad events of the past behind. The couple lands, purified and cleansed, amid the blessings of the next year. Recent mothers also jump over the fire to leave behind the traditional isolation period of forty days and to be freed from any evil.

The direction the smoke blows is used to forecast the crop for the year. If it goes South or East, it is a good omen for the wheat crop. If it blows to the North or West, however, the forecast is not favorable. The direction of the winds in February is an indication of the abundance of the autumn crop.



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The celebration starts on the evening of 13 February. Fields and orchards are blessed during an evening liturgy. After the liturgy people light their candles from the candle lit in the Church to set fire in their yards.

Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II, declared the feast the day of blessing the newly-weds.

SOCIAL

50. ARMENIA'S PERMANENT POPULATION GROWS TO 3,229,900 [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Armenia's permanent population by January 1, 2008 amounted to 3,229,900. The National Statistical Service said urban population was 2,069,300 and rural population was 1,160,600.

The Service said the country's permanent population grew by 7,000 people last year due to new-born babies who made 26 percent and decrease in negative migration balance.

Overall 40,141 babies were born in 2007, by 7 percent more than in 2006. Also 27,400 deaths were registered.

51. SOME 539 HIV CASES REGISTERED SINCE 1988 [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

Some 64, 243 Armenian citizens were examined last year for the purpose of finding out whether they had HIV. Some 50,000 of them were females.

The National Statistical Service said almost 31,000 were residents of Yerevan, 22,000 were residents of other towns and almost 11,000 were from rural communities. Some 29,000 were aged 20-30 years old, 270 were below 15 years old and over 2000 were over 60 years old.

According to the National AIDS Prevention Center, a total of 530 HIV cases were reported in the country since 1998 to 2007, but independent experts say the figure is far higher. One hundred people were diagnosed with HIV in 2007 alone.

The growth rate of HIV infection makes the HIV/AIDS epidemic a real danger for the country with a population of 3.2 million. A number of factors such as labor migration to Russia and other former Soviet republics and massive increase in individual high-risk behaviors are contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

52. ARMENIA FUND PROVIDES MARTAKERT WITH LONG-AWAITED WATER [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Armenia Fund announced completion of the Martakert drinking and irrigation water systems project. Armenia Fund International Executive Director Vahe Aghabegians and deputy director Ararat Khghatyan attended the opening ceremony of the Martakert water main, the key project of the Fund in Nagorno-Karabakh for the last 18 months. Nagorno-Karabakh president Bako Sahakyan and prime minister Ara Harutyunian attended the ceremony as well.

Armenia Fund International Executive Director Vahe Aghabegians and president Bako Sahakyan cut the ribbon during the opening ceremony.

"I feel proud witnessing today how excited the whole city of Martakert is in seeing the water flow right into their city. With the availability of this vitally important infrastructure, no doubt, life will change radically for the better. Providing conditions for a decent life in a bordering location is twice as important today," said Vahe Aghabegians.

"This truly impressive project is yet another demonstration of the huge potential of the Armenians living in the homeland and the Diaspora, the immense capacity, which results in deliveries of much-needed infrastructure such as roads and highways, water and gas lines," he added.

During the war, the Martakert Region's infrastructure was catastrophically damaged, leaving innocent civilians in a deplorable condition. Residents did not have access to clean drinking or irrigation water. The lack of water in the region became a priority problem that required a long term solution.

A portion of the newly built pipeline - delivering fresh, clean water to Martakert "A regular supply of freshwater in the region is very essential," commented Sergei Ohanyan, governor of Martakert. "Now, when we at last have what was so crucial to the whole region, we can think about the next steps that will help push the country to greater changes and success."

The water pipeline will provide drinking water to more than seven thousand people in the region and adjacent villages. According to initial estimations, the quantity of water is well above demand capacity and can also be used for irrigation purposes by local farmers.



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The Martakert water main construction cost \$3.3 million USD and was implemented thanks to funds raised during Telethon 2005. The construction of the 19 mile water main was implemented in two stages. The first stage of the project resulted in the first 8 miles of the main; shortly afterwards, the construction of the last 11 miles was completed.

The water main branches into pipelines in Mets Shen (1.4 mi), Maghavuz and Varnkatagh villages (3.4 mi). The water pipeline network is fed from the Trzi River; it is located 3 miles from the Ereik Mankuk Monastery Complex. The area is located on a sharp relief landscape that ranges from 3,743 ft to 1,775 ft elevation above sea level.

The water main crosses the Tartar River at the lowest point where an 82 ft long bridge has been built to hold the main, as well as serve its maintenance staff. The steel pipes used to construct the main are well-protected against corrosion. The air release and water discharge chambers on the pipes will ensure the water main's efficient operations.

"The Martakert main construction was technically a complicated task to carry out and the successful accomplishment of it by Armenia Fund fills me with pride today," said the Fund's deputy director Ararat Khghatyan. "During the 18 months of the work we all, workers and engineers included, appreciated the paramount importance of the task and never got discouraged when faced with unexpected challenges", added Khghatyan.

In addition to the Martakert water main, Armenia Fund has been in charge of a few other water supply projects in Nagorno-Karabakh: a 5.6 mi pipeline is already operating in the bordering Vaghuhas village, and a 3 mi pipeline along with a 4.4 mi internal network is underway in the Vank village.

53. HAYASTAN FUND TO ESTABLISH MILK COLLECTION STATION IN TAVUSH [ARMENPRESS, 02/12/08]

Hayastan All-Armenian Fund said it will establish a milk collection station in the village of Azatamut in Tavush province as part of its rural development program.

The press office of the Hayastan Fund told Armenpress the station will have a serious economic significance for rural communities of the province and will ensure steady income for farmers from several nearby villages.

The majority of farmers in this and other villages of the province has been engaged in animal husbandry for years and although cattle-breeding has sustained serious losses over the last 20 years (studies show that one family has 1 or 2 cows) the farmers are eager to have more animals.

54. NEW VISION TO COME TO LIFE IN KHASHTARAK SCHOOL PROJECT [ARMENPRESS, 02/13/08]

The Armenia Fund's Germany Affiliate "Armenien-Fonds Hayastan-Fonds" and the Association of Armenian Entrepreneurs in Germany "Armenischer Unternehmer Verein" have undertaken the complete renovation of the school in Khashtarak village (in the Tavush region) as part of the Armenia Fund (Hayastan All Armenian Fund) Rural Development Program.

The German community had made this commitment prior to the Armenia Fund 2007 Telethon, during which the Armenia Fund Executive Director Vahe Aghabegians had announced the generous German contribution.

The Armenia Fund has taken on the challenge of bringing comprehensive development to Armenia's border villages. The rehabilitation of infrastructure is the cornerstone of the initiative, coupled with targeted economic development assistance in order to help border village residents achieve a sustainable self-reliant life. The renovation of schools as vital elements of community infrastructure is a top priority for the Fund.

"Schools, together with all other aspects of infrastructure must be upgraded so that we can reduce or remove the gap between city and village," says Gilbert Momdjian, President of the Armenia Fund affiliate of Germany. "By undertaking the Khashtarak School renovation project, the Fund has set out to provide top-notch educational facilities in rural areas."

The Fund's Germany Affiliate and the Association of Entrepreneurs in Germany "Armenischer Unternehmer Verein" will see full scale remodeling of the Soviet-era building which is the largest school in the cluster and might serve as the magnet for all school-age children in the area. The result will be the transformation of a backward, crumbling structure into a modern educational center that will come complete with all the required facilities for conducting productive educational and extracurricular activities.

Gilbert Momdjian who has headed the Germany affiliate of the Armenia Fund for over fifteen years says that the community felt that a renovated school is possibly the most important expression of



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faith in a community's future. "This is what will make parents think twice about leaving a community," he noted. "This is why our community is ready to take on this nearly half-million dollar commitment. It is worth it."

"We see the revitalization of the village schools as a potent tool in breaching the isolation of the border communities. The creation of a favorable educational environment will allow the children to realize their potential to the fullest and receive knowledge that will be competitive in today's world," says Vahe Aghabegians, the Armenia Fund (Hayastan All Armenian Fund) Executive Director.

"We want the children in the border villages to see that the change is starting from them and they, in turn, are the ones who will bring change and a better life to their communities."

SPORTS

55. ROMAN AMOYAN WINNER IN IRAN INTERNATIONAL TRADITIONAL TOURNAMENT [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/11/08]

Greco-Roman Wrestling International Traditional Tournament was held in Iran. Roman Amoyan (55 kg, Yerevan) took the first place among 14 participants of Armenia. Sasun Ghambarian (60 kg, Yerevan) became the third prize-winner.

56. AVETIK GRIGORIAN, SIRANUSH ANDRIASIAN AND LILIT GALOYAN BECOME PRIZE WINNERS IN INTERNATIONAL CHESS TOURNAMENT OF IRAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

The traditional Fajr International Chess Tournament was held in the city of Urmia of Iran between February 3-10. In the struggle of 247 participants Avetik Grigorian received 9 out of 11 possible points and took second place. The first was Ghayem Maghami (Iran, 9.5 points).

In the struggle of 70 chess players of the woman tournament Lilit Galoyan, Siranush Andriasian, Nino Batsiashvili, and Sofiko Tereladze (Georgia) received 7 out of 9 possible points each and took from the first up to the fourth places correspondingly (with individual showings).

57. VARDAN KHOJAYAN RECOGNIZED AS WINNER OF "MOSCOW OPEN" "B" GROUP TOURNAMENT [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/12/08]

On February 10 the "Moscow Open" International Tournament finished in the capital of Russia and about 1200 chess players took part. Artyom Timofeev (Russia) received 7.5 out of 9 possible points in the "A" group tournament and was recognized as winner. Karen Asrian was the best among the Armenian delegates, who shared the 22nd-44th place with six points.

Vardan Khajoyan became an individual winner with 8.5 points in the "B" group. Tigran Gasparian received 7.5 points and shared the 3-8th place.

In the struggle of women Elina Danielian shared the 6-11th place with 6.5 points.

Produced by AGBU Armenian Representation

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