



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Monday, June 30, 2008

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

POLITICS

1. RUZAN KHACHATRIAN: PACE APPRECIATED THE WILL OF ARMENIAN SOCIETY STRUGGLING FOR DEMOCRACY [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The authorities should realize that the fact that the Armenian delegation was not deprived of voting right as a result of discussion of the process of fulfilment of the Resolution No 1609 on Activities of Democratic Institutions in Armenia by the PACE on June 25 is greatly conditioned by the circumstance of not punishing the Armenian society struggling for democracy, Ruzan Khachatrian - member of the board of People's Party of Armenia (PPA) - expressed an opinion during the June 26 discussion within the framework of the Formation and Establishment of Political Culture in Armenia project implemented jointly by the National Press Club and the US National Democratic Institute (NDI). In the opinion of Artak Davtian - member of the National Assembly "Republican Party of Armenia" (RPA) faction, the only discussion participant who represented the authorities - the PACE appreciated not only the aspiration of the people but also the will of the authorities to take some steps.

Addressing today's subject "The Political Agenda of Dialog", A. Davtian said that the authorities are against any preconditions for dialog that are put forward by the opposition. According to him, the agenda of dialog is prompted by the main points of the resolution that the PACE adopted the day before. In this connection former member of the Supreme Council Aram Mailian made an appeal "not to Europeanize our agenda", saying that it should "proceed from our interests". Member of the National Democratic Union's ruling body Anahit Yeghoyan said that the dialog the authorities are calling for is impossible in a country where "a cult of force reigns".

R. Khachatrian and member of "New Times" party's board Hrachia Sargsian reasserted the position of the radical opposition, according to which a political dialog can be established if the arrested persons are immediately released and rallies are not banned, while the only way to ease the internal political tension caused by the presidential elections and postelection developments is to hold early elections. Otherwise, according to R. Khachatrian, during 4 months since the March 1 events "the dialogs about a dialog start to resemble foul language, for which at one time the RA Criminal Code had the respective article and quite a lot of oppositionists were convicted".

2. PACE DECIDES NOT TO DEPRIVE ARMENIA OF VOTING RIGHT [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Late June 25, the PACE made a decision not to deprive the Armenian delegation of its voting right. With 26 votes for, the Assembly passed a new resolution on fulfillment of the requirements of the resolution No 1609 by the Armenian authorities. By the new resolution, Armenia is given an additional time - until the January 2009 session.

As for the problem of the political prisoners, in his interview to Radio Liberty, the head of the Armenian delegation Davit Harutyunian said that the Armenian delegation made a number of specifications to this point, which allows to call to account the persons who actually participated in the acts of violence. "Special attention is paid to the cases where the only proof is the evidence given by policemen, and it is not confirmed by any other evidence, and our attention to such cases is called by the Assembly, saying that criminal prosecution based on one evidence is inadmissible," he said.

Besides, in the words of the head of the Armenian delegation, "there was a call to immediately consider all possible legal means: pardon, amnesty and some other means, for example, ending the criminal prosecution of those who did not commit violent crimes".

In connection with the problem of political prisoners, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights has to submit a report to the PACE Monitoring Committee by the autumn session.

As for the National Assembly ad hoc commission on examination of the March 1-2 events and their causes, the resolution contains a provision that "the commission's format cannot ensure impartiality". The local and international experts involved in the commission will not have deliberative votes, which was proposed beforehand.

"The major purpose is certainly trust, and the composition itself does not mean that it can act in an independent, transparent and reliable way, and some additional measures are necessary. In this connection the Assembly proposes that in adopting its working methods, the commission should try its



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best in order to take decisions coordinated by all the members, including those members who have a deliberative vote, and a voting should be used only as the last resort," D. Harutyunian said.

The resolution also calls on to give the right of deliberative vote to the ombudsman in the commission.

As regards A1+ television company, at the suggestion of the Armenian delegation, the requirement to give immediately air to this television company was removed from the draft resolution. "The PACE admitted that a law on licensing is in force in Armenia and called on to take all measures so that henceforth all tenders on distribution of television and radio licences, all processes of the National Television and Radio Commission will be open, transparent and fair," D. Harutyunian said.

As for the law on assemblies, the Assembly stated that the law that took effect today should be enforced properly and the authorities should not use inappropriate restrictions.

The PACE expresses its regret in the resolution that the opposition has not recognized the decision of the RA Constitutional Court on the presidential elections.

3. ROBERT NAZARIAN REAPPOINTED AS CHAIRMAN OF RA PUBLIC SERVICES REGULATORY COMMISSION [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

By the June 27 decree of Serge Sargsian, the President of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Nazarian has been appointed Chairman of the RA Public Services Regulatory Commission for a five-year term.

According to the information provided to Noyan Tapan by the RA President's Press Office, the decree will come into force since July 1, 2008.

4. HRANUSH HAKOBIAN APPOINTED CHAIRWOMAN OF STATE COMMITTEE OF DIASPORA RELATIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

By the June 27 decree of Serge Sargsian, the President of the Republic of Armenia, Hranush Hakobian has been appointed Chairwoman of the State Committee of Diaspora Relations under the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This information was provided to Noyan Tapan by the RA President's Press Office.

5. DIPLOMATIC OFFICE OF SWITZERLAND TO OPEN IN YEREVAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Switzerland intends to open a diplomatic office in Armenia, the Armenian foreign minister Edward Nalbandian announced at the June 27 joint press conference with the Swiss foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Rey. According to him, the opening of the diplomatic office in Yerevan will be the first step of founding a representative office.

M. Calmy-Rey said that Armenia is of importance to Switzerland in terms of its geographic position as it is located at the crossroads of energy resources. Besides, Armenia has a large Diaspora, including in the Switzerland.

The Swiss foreign minister pointed out that the two countries cooperate successfully in such international organizations as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN. Armenia and Switzerland have a good legal and contractual basis for bilateral cooperation, in particular, the agreement on economic cooperation and the agreement on exclusion of double taxation. The Swiss Development Agency on issues of agriculture and humanitarian aid functions in Armenia.

M. Calmy-Rey stated that Switzerland has serious plans of cooperation with Armenia in the economic sphere.

E. Nalbandian in his turn said that Armenia attaches importance to strengthening its cooperation with Switzerland, and bilateral relations continue to develop quite dynamically. "Since Armenia's independence, Switzerland has provided its friendly support to Armenia in the development, reform and humanitarian directions," the Armenian foreign minister said. According to him, the positions of the two countries coincide in a number of international issues.

In the words of E. Nalbandian, during the meeting with his Swiss counterpart, the necessity to implement specific steps for promote economic relations and trade links between two countries was underlined. The sides spoke about the possibility to ease the visa regime between Armenia and Switzerland. The Nagorno Karabakh negotiation process and some problems related to strengthening stability and security in the region were also discussed with M. Calmy-Rey.



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6. TODAY TENSION IS CREATED BY AUTHORITIES, LEVON ZURABIAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

"We propose that the authorities release all the political prisoners by July 4, and if this happens, at the July 4 rally Levon Ter-Petrosian will come up with a program and proposals for dialog with the authorities and this program will aim to solve the deep political crisis," representative of the Center of the National Movement Levon Zurabian stated at the Pastark Club on June 27.

He said that by making this proposal, they want to eliminate "the tension reigning in our society and to pass from the atmosphere of confrontation to one of cooperation, in which we will be able to resolve this deep crisis by cooperating with the authorities". According to L. Zurabian, at present this is a serious opportunity to rectify the situation in the country and the authorities should use this opportunity. He said that today the tension is created by the authorities, and one proof of it is that the municipality has rejected the bid to hold the July 4 rally of the opposition in Liberty Square or near the Matenadaran and proposed holding it in the area adjacent to the republican stadium. L. Zurabian noted that this is unacceptable to them, especially as there is no law-envisaged ground for proposing that the rally be held in some other place.

As regards the rally to be held in Gyumri in the coming days, according to L. Zurabian, the national movement led by Levon Ter-Petrosian will use rallies as a means of communicating with the people and "naturally, upon maturation the program will include all the marzes".

7. IN PAST TWO MONTHS, SOCIAL-POLITICAL NGOs' REQUESTS TO ALLOCATE A HALL FOR HOLDING EVENTS WERE REJECTED 12 TIMES, NATALIA MARTIROSIAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

In the past two months, a number of Yerevan hotels and other organizations have rejected 12 times the requests of various social-political NGOs to be allocated a hall for holding discussions, the co-chairperson of the Armenian committee of the Helsinki Civil Assembly Natalia Martirosian stated at the June 27 press conference. According to her, among organizations to reject such requests were the following hotels: Ararat, Armenia Marriott, Congress, Ani Plaza, Erebuni, as well as the Business Center of the American University of Armenia, the Union of Writers, the Puppet-Show Theatre, and "Mkhitar Sebastatsi" educational complex.

In her words, the indicated organizations (often at the last moment) refused to allocate a hall or room, thus breaking a previously reached agreement. The security guards or management of the hotels had explained to them that a large number of foreign tourists had unexpectedly come or allegedly repairs had started at the halls. In some hotels, according to N. Martirosian, the employees had turned out to be more honest: they said that there was an instruction from the authorities not to give a hall to the given organization. "In fact, we are being moved from halls to streets, and the street struggle is being promoted in this way," she said.

8. ALL INITIATIVES TO CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING OF COOPERATION IN REGION WILL BE SUPPORTED BY NATO, JEAN-FRANCOIS BUREAU SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

"Any action to result in violence, pressure or military actions will never be welcomed by the NATO," the head of the NATO delegation to Armenia Jean-Francois Bureau stated at the event organized at the NATO Information Center on June 27.

In his words, thanks to correct interaction, it is possible to find common aspects of cooperation among the South Caucasian states. In response to the question about what position NATO takes on Azerbaijan's approach, according to which it never takes part in events held in Armenia, especially as Armenia usually accepts invitations to visit Azerbaijan, J.-F. Bureau said that there was a similar situation in the Balkan states in the 1990s but today the situation has changed there, and he underlined the necessity to seek common aspects of cooperation. "All those initiatives to contribute to the strengthening of cooperation in the region will be definitely welcomed. The goal of the NATO member states is to establish and keep peace and stability. I am convinced that any initiative aimed at this goal will be definitely supported by the NATO," the head of the delegation declared.

Speaking about the recent events in Armenia, J.-F. Bureau said that they are interested in Armenia's fulfillment of its commitments. As regards the friendly relations of Armenia and Russia, he noted that the NATO and its member states have different relations with Russia and "it is a problem of each country".



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9. SWITZERLAND READY TO ASSIST WITH ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ARMENIA AND TURKEY [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, who are expected to arrive in Armenia on June 27, will then visit Nagorno Karabakh, the RA foreign minister Edward Nalbandian stated at a press conference on the same day. In his words, the matter does not concern new proposals: the negotiations are continuing based on the proposals made by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs in Madrid in November 2007. E. Nalbandian reminded that he and Azerbaijan's foreign minister stated this after the meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents in Saint Petersburg.

E. Naldandian said that the rumors published by some mass media outlets about failure of the president Serge Sargsian's visit to Moscow are not true. "The visit was splendid, and we reasserted our warm strategic, allied relations with Russia," he stated. In his words, the negotiations covered a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues. He said that in Russia the Armenian president received an exceptionally warm reception by the president D. Medvedev, the prime minister V. Putin, and the heads of two chambers of the Russian parliament.

In response to the question about S. Sargsian's statement on creation of an Armenian-Turkish commission of historians, E. Nalbandian replied that Armenia's position in Armenian-Turkish relations has not changed and the issue of the genocide remains on the agenda. "Armenia repeatedly stated and states today that we are prepared to establish relations with Turkey without any precondition and open the borders, and we are prepared to discuss all the issues which interest both sides - after the establishment of diplomatic relations and opening the borders," the Armenian foreign minister declared.

The Swiss foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Rey said that her country has always proposed and now it is ready to assist with establishment of bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey if the sides apply to Switzerland with such a request.

10. SWITZERLAND READY TO ASSIST WITH REFORMS IN ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The relations between Armenia and Switzerland are developing quite dynamically, a substantial and comprehensive agenda has been formed and a stable system of dialog created, to which the mutual visits at various levels in recent years have greatly contributed, the Armenian president Serge Sargsian stated when receiving the delegation headed by the Swiss foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Rey on June 27. He noted with satisfaction that Switzerland has been traditionally active in providing the technical and financial assistance for Armenia's development and reforms.

In the words of M. Calmy-Rey, her country has always been on Armenia's side and is ready to assist with the implementation of reforms in various spheres. She considered the legal and contractual basis between the two countries as a good foundation for using the existing potential to the maximum.

She underlined the active participation of the Swiss side in the project on development of Armenian rural areas. Noting that an office of the Swiss Development Agency functions in Yerevan, she announced that a decision was made to send a diplomatic representative to Armenia.

The sides were unanimous in the opinion that being small countries, Armenia and Switzerland should cooperate more intensively. The Swiss foreign minister attached special importance to cooperation within the framework of the Council of Europe.

The interlocutors discussed economic cooperation as well. It was mentioned that although the trade links are rapidly growing, they are not at a satisfactory level yet.

Considering economic development and poverty reduction as priorities, S. Sargsian said that Armenia anticipates support of friendly and partner states in solution of these problems.

According to the RA president's press service, S. Sargsian also spoke about the political and economic reforms being implemented in Armenia, regional problems, Armenian-Turkish relations and the process of settlement of the Karabakh problem.

11. PRESENTATION OF WEBSITE OF NATO INFORMATION CENTER IN ARMENIA TAKES PLACE ON JUNE 27 [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The presentation of the website of the Information Center on NATO in Armenia (www.natoinfo.am) took place on June 27. According to the head of the center Ara Tadevosian, henceforth the society will have the opportunity to follow all processes within the framework of Armenia's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO and to receive information on NATO-South Caucasus relations.



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Attaching importance to Armenia-NATO relations, NATO Assistant Secretary General on Public Diplomacy Jean-Francois Bureau said that these relations are being developed in the interests of Armenia and the Alliance. "The closer this cooperation, the greater the society's attention and attitude to us will be. The website will allow to become directly acquainted with the programs implemented," he stated.

The presentation of the book "Armenia-NATO: 10 Years of Progress" was also held at the center. The book is bilingual (Armenian and English) and was published on the initiative of NATO Public Diplomacy Division and Mediamax News Agency. According to A. Tadevosian, he intends to present this book abroad, especially in political circles. "It is also a chronicle of some part of Armenia's modern history," he said.

12. ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TO PAY OFFICIAL VISITS TO GERMANY AND FINLAND [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

At the invitation of the German foreign minister Franz-Walter Steinmeier, the foreign minister of the RA Edward Nalbandian on June 30 will go on a two-day official visit to Berlin. NT was informed by the RA MFA Press and Information Department that on June 2 E. Nalbandian will leave Berlin for Helsinki in order to pay a two-day visit to Finland at the invitation of the Finnish foreign minister Alexander Stubb.

13. ARMENIA ATTACHES IMPORTANCE TO STRENGTHENING ITS COOPERATION WITH SWITZERLAND [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Receiving on June 27 the delegation headed by the Swiss foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Ray who is on a two-day visit to Armenia, the foreign minister of the RA Edward Nalandian said that Armenia attaches great importance to its cooperation with Switzerland in various spheres. In his words, since Armenia's independence, Switzerland has contributed to the development and reforms in our country by providing technical and financial assistance. Noting that bilateral relations between the two countries are continuing to develop quite dynamically, E. Nalbandian stressed the necessity to take concrete steps on promotion of economic and trade relations.

The Swiss foreign minister in her turn expressed satisfaction with the level of the current political dialog, to which the mutual visits in recent years have greatly contributed.

According to a press release submitted to NT by the RA MFA Press and Information Department, the sides confirmed that the positions of the two countries coincide on a number of international issues and pointed out the efficiency of their cooperation in international organizations.

The ministers spoke about the possibility to ease the visa regime between Armenia and Switzerland. M. Calmy-Ray announced the Swiss side's intention to appoint a resident diplomatic representative to Yerevan soon.

The sides also discussed the Nagorno Karabakh negotiation process and Armenian-Turkish relations.

14. YEREVAN-PRISTINA TELEVISION BRIDGE ORGANIZED AT RA MFA [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

During a regular "NATO Week" held in Armenia within the framework of Armenia's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO, the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) organized for the second time a Yerevan-Pristina television bridge for Armenian peacekeepers in Kosovo and their families.

NT was informed by the RA MFA Press and Information Department that the embassies of Greece and the United States in Armenia greatly supported in the organization of the TV bridge on June 27.

At the beginning of the TV bridge, the RA foreign minister Edward Nalbandian's welcoming speech to Armenian peacekeepers was demonstrated. Then NATO Assistant Secretary General on Public Diplomacy Jean-Francois Bureau and the US Charge D'Affaires in Armenia Joseph Pennington made speeches of welcome, thanking the peacekeepers and wishing them success in their further peacekeeping mission. They positively assessed the RA National Assembly's May 12, 2008 decision to double the number of peacekeepers, saying that it will contribute to strengthening Armenia-NATO cooperation.



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15. BELLICOSE STATEMENTS COMPLICATE NEGOTIATION PROCESS, ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Receiving the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs Bernard Fassier (France), Matthew Bryza (US) and Yuri Merzlyakov (Russia), and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Andrzej Kasprzyk on June 27, the RA foreign minister Edward Nalbandian spoke about Armenia's approaches to the proposals that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs presented in Madrid in November 2007. He underlined that the bellicose statements made by Azerbaijani leaders complicate the creation of an atmosphere of trust during negotiation process and progress in negotiations.

NT was informed by the RA MFA Press and Information Department that the co-chairs informed E. Nalbandian about the results of their meetings with Azerbaijan's president and foreign minister in Baku, stressing the necessity to solve the Karabakh problem only in a peaceful way. They assured the RA foreign minister that they will continue efforts on bringing the sides' positions closer - based on the Madrid proposals.

16. NATO TO HAVE NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TO AZERBAIJAN'S RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES AGAINST ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Georgia may become a NATO member within the next few years, which will change the security system parameters in the region, the head of Armenian mission to NATO Samvel Mkrтчian said at the June 28 press conference. In his words, Armenia's goal is to follow these developments and decide how to ensure the national security of our country in the best way under these conditions. "It is obvious that it should also be done by further extension of our cooperation with NATO," S. Mkrтчian stated. As for the issue of Armenia's joining NATO, no such problem is now being discussed because the current security system ensures Armenia's national security.

S. Mkrтчian said that a meeting of foreign ministers of NATO states will be held in Brussels in December 2008, during which the issue of providing action plans on Georgia's and Ukraine's joining NATO will be discussed. In case of a positive decision, it will take these countries several years to bring their standards into line with those required by NATO and to receive the right of membership.

Speaking about the response to be expected from NATO in case of possible resumption of Azerbaijan's hostilities against Armenia, S. Mkrтчian noted that by NATO principles, the use of military force is considered an extreme measure that is used when all other measures are exhausted. If Azerbaijan resorts to such actions, NATO will have a negative attitude to it.

17. NATO APPRECIATES DOUBLING NUMBER OF ARMENIAN PEACEKEEPERS IN KOSOVO [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The second stage of Armenia's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO is over, and now a program on a new two-year stage is being worked out, the head of Armenian mission to NATO Samvel Mkrтчian announced at the June 28 press conference. According to him, the "NATO Week" organized within the framework of IPAP went successfully: it included more events than the previous year's "NATO Week".

The purpose of "NATO Week" was to make the population better informed on Armenia's cooperation with NATO and the goals of the Alliance. S. Mkrтчian said that during "NATO Week" cooperation not only in political and military, but also in scientific, environmental protection and other spheres was presented.

In the opinion of the head of Armenian mission to NATO, "Cooperative Longbow/Lancer and Bold Lynx 2008" exercises will be the best manifestation of NATO's military cooperation with Armenia. These exercises to be held in Armenia with the participation of more than a thousand militaries will become the biggest ones in the region.

S. Mkrтчian said that NATO appreciates doubling the number of Armenian peacekeepers in Kosovo. In his words, Armenia is turning from a consumer into the introducer of the global security system. It is necessary to overcome jointly the challenges facing the international community, and Armenia will continue making its contribution to this cause and implementing reforms in security and defence sectors.

Armenia is now forming a peacekeeping brigade which will increase the peacekeeping possibilities of the country. The brigade will be in line with international standards and cooperate with sub-units of the armed forces of NATO member states. As for Afghanistan, Armenia will send some military



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doctors and field-engineers there. Negotiations are currently underway with the aim of including Armenian peacekeepers in the military unit of some country or another.

18. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD GAGIK MELIKIAN TO BECOME NEW MEMBER OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY "RPA" FACTION [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The NA deputy powers of Hranush Hakobian, who has been appointed chairwoman of the State Committee for Relations with the Diaspora of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will be terminated ahead of time. She was elected a National Assembly deputy by the proportional electoral system - on the electoral list of the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) on May 12, 2007, so her deputy mandate will be given to the next candidate on this list.

NT was informed by the RPA office that in all likelihood Gagik Melikian will become the new member of the "RPA" faction. He was a deputy of the National Assembly of the previous two convocations (in 1999-2003 and 2003-2007), and in 2003-2007 he was also the secretary of "RPA" faction.

It is noteworthy that with the termination of deputy powers of Hranush Hakobian, the post of chairman of the NA Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Issues will become vacant. The election of chairmen of this standing committee and the NA Standing Committee on Social Issues will be held at the autumn session of the NA to start in September.

19. JULY 4 RALLY WILL BE HELD EITHER IN LIBERTY SQUARE OR NEAR MATENADARAN, LYUDMILA SARGSIAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The initiative to hold a rally in Gyumri on July 4 came from Gyumri residents: a necessity to organize a rally there arose long ago: the citizens have some complaints and want to present their demands to authorities, the chairwoman of the Social Democratic Hunchak Party Lyudmila Sargsian said at the June 28 press conference. In her words, nothing extraordinary is expected at the rally, even though the authorities are making attempts to frighten people by saying that there will be disorder.

"The authorities are trying to keep the people away from rallies and in this way to establish that the National Movement is weakening. However, the March 1 events did not frighten us, we saw once again that we must struggle for our own rights," she stated. According to her, the March 1 events were organized in advance, as a result of which the authorities made an attempt to put pressure on the Constitutional Court and ratify the usurpation of power. In her words, a lot of people are now in prison on charges of power usurpation, whereas Robert Kocharian, Serge Sargsian and Gagik Harutyunian should have been in the dock instead of them.

L. Sargsian did not rule out that rallies will soon be organized in other marzes as well, because "today the authorities do not have a people, while the people does not have authorities".

As for the rally to be held by the National Movement on July 4, L. Sargsian stated that it will take place just as the June 20 rally did take place. She said that after that rally the authorities should have been conscious by not proposing some other place for the rally. She expressed a hope that the rally will be held in Liberty Square. If it turns out that "Little Resident of Yerevan" event is going to be there again (only armed policemen actually participated in it), then the rally will be held near the Matenadaran.

20. FOREIGN MINISTER EDWARD NALBANDIAN DISCUSSES NAGORNO-KARABAKH WITH OSCE MINSK GROUP COCHAIRMEN [ARMENPRESS, 06/28/08]

Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian received June 27 the OSCE Minsk Group cochairmen Mathew Bryza (USA), Bernard Fassier (France), Yuri Merzlyakov (Russia) and the OSCE chairman-in-office's personal representative, ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk.

The press division of the Armenian Foreign Ministry told Armenpress that during the conversation Minister Nalbandian presented to the cochairmen Armenia's approaches towards a package of proposals submitted to Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2007 November in Madrid, stressing also that the war rhetoric of Azerbaijani leadership is complicating the process of establishing the atmosphere of trust in the talks and achieving progress.

The cochairmen presented to Nalbandian the results of their earlier meetings in Baku with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Foreign Minister Elmar Mamedyarov, highlighting the absolute necessity of the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

They assured of their continued efforts to narrow the sides' positions on the basis of Madrid proposals.



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21. DEFENSE MINISTER SEYRAN OHANIAN COMMISSIONS 247 GRADUATES OF VAZGEN SARKISIAN MILITARY ACADEMY [ARMENPRESS, 06/28/08]

Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian commissioned today 247 graduates of Vazgen Sargsian military academy to different military units.

Congratulating the graduates the minister said all Armenians take pride in them because the Armenian armed forces are receiving today highly qualified and professional army officers.

“By joining our army your first duty is to keep its honor high and become the guarantee of the country, of your parents and friends’ security,” the minister said.

Father Vrtanes Abrahamian, head of army chaplains, conveyed the blessing of His Holiness, Karekin II, to the graduates wishing them success.

The minister helped the graduates draw lots to find out the place of their service. Ten graduates who finished the academy with honors, three parentless and 2 graduates, sons of killed Nagorno-Karabakh war fighters, were allowed to choose freely where they would like to serve.

The minister awarded also all with one-time financial support.

22. DEFENSE MINISTER HAS NO NEW INFORMATION ABOUT FOUR ARMENIAN CITIZENS CAPTURED BY AZERI TROOPS [ARMENPRESS, 06/28/08]

Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian said today he did not have new information about four Armenian citizens who were captured by Azeri troops in April after they lost their way and crossed into its Nakhichevan exclave.

Speaking to journalists after the graduation ceremony at Vazgen Sargsian military academy, the minister said the Armenian authorities continue efforts to bring the four back. He said that their condition is well.

The four Armenian civilians, all young men, residents of Gavar town and nearby Noradus village, went in April to see their friend serving in a unit near the village of Khachik in Vayots Dzor province that borders Nakhichevan. After a brawl with other soldiers they tried to escape the scene, lost their way, as it was night and crossed into Nakhichevan where they were captured.

Asked to comment on a military parade in Baku, Azerbaijan last week, designed to show its military potential, the minister said it is not bigger than that of Armenia.

“Of course, Azerbaijan has new arms and military hardware, but they are not as new as portrayed and I would like to assure Armenians that we have potential and resource to rebuff any Azeri offensive,” he said.

23. ARMENIAN NA SPEAKER CONGRATULATES SERZH SARGSIAN ON HIS 54TH BIRTHDAY ANNIVERSARY [ARMENPRESS, 06/30/08]

Chairman of the National Assembly Tigran Torosian congratulated the Armenian President Serzh Sargsian on his 54-th birthday wishing him happiness and success in his activity directed towards peace and welfare of Armenia, public relations service of the NA told Armenpress.

24. TIGRAN SARGSIAN CONGRATULATES PRESIDENT ON HIS BIRTHDAY [ARMENPRESS, 06/30/08]

Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian congratulated Armenian President Serzh Sargsian on his 54-th birthday today and wished him success in the high and responsible work of the leader of the country, governmental press service told Armenpress.

25. KARABAKH PRESIDENT MEETS WITH THE OSCE MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS [ARMENPRESS, 06/30/08]

The President of Nagorno Karabakh Bako Sahakian met with the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group Matthew Bryza (USA), Yuri Merzlyakov (Russia) and Bernard Fassier (France) on June 28 in Stepanakert.

Karabakh Foreign Ministry reported that at the meeting the sides discussed a wide-range of issues on the regulation of Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Bako Sahakian pointed out that the final regulation of the conflict is possible only with the participation of NK in the negotiations. The leader of the country noted that anti-Armenian propaganda and military rhetoric in Azerbaijan do not promote the creation of



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atmosphere of mutual trust between the parties but also have impact on the negotiation process and preservation of peace and stability in the region. It may be witnessed by the military activities of the armed forces of Azerbaijan on the 4-th of March in Martakert region.

The president of NK once again pointed out that official Stepanakert supports exclusively peaceful regulation of the Karabakh conflict and establishment of a direct dialogue with Baku.

Bako Sahakian stated that Karabakh conflict should be regulated within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group, and Azerbaijan's attempts to move the issue to other instances do not contribute to the regulation of the conflict.

The co-chairs shared the point of view of the Karabakh president and expressed their readiness to support the peaceful regulation of the conflict, noting that the participation of Nagorno Karabakh in the negotiation process is a matter of time.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nagorno Karabakh Georgi Petrosian as well as the personal representative of the OSCE chairman-in-office Andrzej Kasprzyk were present at the meeting.

BUSINESS

26. 12-MONTH INFLATION MAKES 9.6% IN ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The consumer price index made 109.6% in Armenia in June 2008 on May 2007, including the index of food commodity prices (including alcoholic drinks and cigarettes) - 110.1%, of nonfood commodity prices - 106%, of service tariffs - 110.5%. The same indices in January-June 2008 on January-June 2007 made 109%, 111.1%, 104.8% and 107.1% respectively.

According to the RA National Statistical Service, the consumer price index made 106.8% in June 2008 on December 2007, including the index of food commodity prices (including alcoholic drinks and cigarettes) - 106.7%, of nonfood commodity prices - 104.2%, of service tariffs - 108.5%. The average monthly growth of consumer prices made 1.1% in January-June 2008, exceeding by 0.5% the respective index of the same period of 2007.

A 0.5% fall in prices was registered in the country's consumer market in June on May 2008, including a 1.3% fall in food commodity prices (including alcoholic drinks and cigarettes), a 1.3% growth in nonfood commodity prices, and a 0.1% growth in service tariffs.

27. NONFOOD COMMODITY PRICES GROW BY 1.3% IN ARMENIA IN JUNE [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

1.3% inflation in Armenia's nonfood commodity market in June on May 2008 was somewhat influenced by the growth in prices of gasoline (6.2%) and diesel fuel (12.3%).

According to the RA National Statistical Service, prices of carpets, kitchen utensils, stationery, footwear, medicines, clothing, fabrics, furniture, detergents, and building materials increased by 0.1-2.4% in June on May 2008, while prices of jewelry, fuel, horticultural items, domestic electric appliances, textiles and cultural goods fell by 0.1-2.4%.

28. GASOLINE PRICE GROWS BY 6.2%, DIESEL FUEL PRICE BY 12.3% IN ARMENIA IN JUNE 2008 [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The price of gasoline grew by 6.2%, that of diesel fuel by 12.3% in Armenia in June on May 2008.

According to the RA National Statistical Service, the growth in gasoline and diesel fuel prices made 16% and 30% respectively in June 2008 on December 2007. The growth made 16.7% and 48.7% respectively in June 2008 on June 2007.

29. TARIFFS OF SERVICES GROW BY 0.1% IN ARMENIA IN JUNE 2008 [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The 0.1% growth in tariffs of services provided in Armenia in June 2008 was mostly due to 0.1-2.5% growth in tariffs of personal, public catering, medical and cultural services.

According to the RA National Statistical Service, the tariffs of transport services fell by 0.3% in the indicated period, while tariffs of housing, municipal, legal, banking, communication, educational and recreational services remained at the level of the previous month.



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30. EXCHANGE RATE OF ARMENIAN DRAM RISES BY 0.3% AGAINST US DOLLAR IN JUNE 2008 AS COMPARED WITH DECEMBER 2007 [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The rise in consumer prices in Armenia and in the settlement exchange rate of the Armenian dram against the US dollar made 6.8% and 0.3% respectively in June 2008 on December 2007. In the same period of last year, there was a 3.9% growth in consumer prices in parallel with 5.4% fall in the exchange rate of the dram.

According to the RA National Statistical Service, a 0.5% fall in consumer prices was accompanied by a 0.7% decline in the exchange rate of the Armenian dram against the US dollar (the dram appreciated) in June on May 2008.

The average settlement exchange rate of the dram against the dollar made 305.13 drams in June 2008, which is lower by 11.5% than the index of June 2007 (344.8 drams).

DIASPORA

31. "ARMENIA IS MY FAMILY," FRENCH ARMENIAN PIANIST VAHAN MARTIROSIAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Vahan Martirosian is one of the many talented Armenian musicians, who live abroad, for all that they often visit Armenia, including on creative occasions.

A. Martirosian said in his interview to Noyan Tapan correspondent that after 15 years' interval he first returned to Yerevan in March, 2007 and after that he constantly comes to Armenia on tours.

The Composers Department pupil of Yerevan Komitas Conservatory leaving for Paris in 1992 continued his studies there at the Piano Department. The results are excellent, the young pianist started to perform on tours on well-known stages of France and other countries. At present Martirosian has 60 concerts annually and stays in Paris for only two months.

While his first concert took place with Yerevan Chamber Orchestra when he was seven. "Armenia is just my family, my childhood, for me Armenia is everything, including source of nostalgia and love. I cannot say that homeland plays a great part in the creative aspect, as the source of creation is the whole world and life," the musician said.

Vahan remembers his impressions when after the 15-year interval he first came to Armenia. Everything had been changed, first of all the spectators he was familiar with. "The people who were formerly present at the hall were no longer there, and my father, my two grandmothers and grandfathers were among them. And I had a feeling at that time as if time had stopped: I had fallen asleep and awoke in 15 years," Vahan remembers with sadness and tenderness.

As he evaluated, Yerevan has again awoke and breathes after the years of darkness and cold. It seems to be filled with European spirit. "And especially the girls have become beautiful. At my time there were beautiful girls, but they were not so many.

Vahan Martirosian has last performed in the homeland in April, during the days of world-famous Polish composer and conductor Krzysztof Penderecki.

Pianist's concert program is various, in his opinion, he learns new approaches and new technique with every new piece. "I constantly look for a new thing, it is my nature. If you wish to develop, you should constantly have changes: any composer has a language of his own, his approaches and his material: that variety promotes any development and enrichment," Vahan Martirosian is convinced.

And along with it, Armenian music, certainly, has a special role for the musician. "I love Armenian composers of all times. I have no special favorite composer, as it is like maternal love: how can a mother love one child less than the other one? All they are my teachers and will accompany me during all my life," Vahan emphasized.

ARTS

32. BIDS OF 454 FILMS RECEIVED FOR PARTICIPATION IN GOLDEN APRICOT 5th INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The number of film bids received for participation in the Golden Apricot (Voske Tsiran) 5th International Film Festival to be held on July 13-20 in Yerevan was unprecedentedly big, 454 films, 165 out of which were selected. As cinema critic Mikayel Stamboltsian, the festival programs' director, said at the June 26 press conference, the big number of films created rather a complicated situation, but "hard professional work was done and the best ones were selected."



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According to M. Stamboltsian, the festival's contest programs have been kept unchanged, Fiction Films, Documentary Films, and Armenian Panorama. In total, 53 films will be presented in these three contest programs.

This year, according to M. Stamboltsian, there are also many extra-contest programs: Yerevan premiere, retrospective shows, tribute of respect, European panorama, documentary world, Arab nights, Armenian information program, Directors Without Borders program.

Especially this year's retrospective shows extra-contest program is noteworthy, as festival organizers have included film of great Persian director Dariush Mehrjui, President of European Film Academy, renowned German director Wim Wenders, and renowned French director Catherine Breillat in it.

On the occasion of William Saroyan's 100th anniversary, this year Golden Apricot will present films shot on the basis of Saroyan's works in Armenia and abroad.

33. PRESIDENT SERZH SARGSIAN VISITS RECONSTRUCTED HOUSE OF ARTISTS [ARMENPRESS, 06/28/08]

President Serzh Sargsian visited today the House of Artists in central Yerevan, took a stroll inside it and watched a jubilee exhibition of about 500 paintings by Armenian artists.

The president was with Culture Minister Hasmik Poghosian and chairman of the Union of Armenian Artists Karen Aghamian. The exhibition features 500 works, one by a painter.

"This is an interesting exposition to assess what we have, what is good and what is not. Programs are big and many, there is also the enthusiasm," the chairman of the Union said.

Karen Aghamian said the reconstructed building is good. It has modern heating and illumination systems, new exposition halls, which are unique in the region by their size and technical equipment.

The reconstruction took 2 years. The old building was pulled down and a new one was erected on its place. The company that funded the project was allowed to build three floors above the House of Artists, but on condition that they are not seen from Abovian street.

The exposition's space has been doubled from 630 square meters to 1,020.

SOCIAL

34. RA MERITED ARTIST HOVHANNES BABAKHANIAN LIKES TO BE DARING ON STAGE [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

RA Merited Artist, laureate of international contests Hovhannes Babakhanian will turn 40 on July 1. It is the 25th year the talented artist is on the stage. The actor is not going to mark none of these jubilees, as he does not like official and solemn events connected with his personality. Hovhannes Babakhanian said at the June 27 meeting with journalists.

The talented artist is guided by Christian commandments and is very strict to himself on the stage, extremely responsible to the spectator, and does not accept compromises in the art.

"I do not wish people to say when speaking about me: "he is not bad as an Armenian actor." I do not wish it. I like to be daring to my name, to my spectator," the actor said.

Artist Hovhannes Babakhanian does not stop surprising his spectator: he continues acting in other branches of art. He successfully plays at the theater and sings and paints as much successfully. The actor has graduated from Yerevan Art and Theater Institute, Moscow Academy of Art, Opera Song Department of Yerevan Conservatory. These three art trends, according to the artist, do not complete but continue one another.

The actor often plays Jesus Christ's role in the theater and cinema. According to him, these roles are very binding for him. "The role of Jesus is not just a role. One should live, feel it and then convey it to the hall. Harmony between actor's inner world and belief is important in this respect. I try to believe till the end and completely. Otherwise it is not possible to carry it out," the actor is convinced.

H. Babakhanian also has another hobby, tailoring. Few people know that he has been the fashion designer of Dramatic Theater's costumes for already ten years.

The actor does not at all agree to the opinion that the theater has died. According to him, the expression "the theater is dead" is insulting for the very theatrical figures. He is convinced that "those making an attempt upon theater's life are the very professional killers who are inside the theater." According to him, the theater was born with the mankind and will live for ever as mankind.



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35. PREVAILING PART OF ARMENIA'S POPULATION PREFERS TO LIVE IN HOMELAND [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

Only 23% Armenia's population see their future beyond country's boundaries. According to Radio Liberty, the evidence of it is the results of the survey conducted by the Gallup research center. Armenia is inferior to its South Caucasian neighbors with that index. According to the data of the same survey, 28% Azerbaijan's population and 26% Georgia's population don't mind emigrating.

Moldova is the leader with that index among CIS countries. 31% its population wish to leave the country. That index is almost two-fold lower in Russia, nearly 17%.

As a result of the surveys Gallup's specialists revealed a number of regularities connected with private transfers. They refute the wide-spread opinion that funds sent by people to their relatives from abroad reduce emigration. "Indeed private transfers have become a unique stimulus for emigrating people. People receiving money from their relatives living abroad gradually begin to think that the only way of living a well-off life is emigrating," Gallup experts emphasize.

According to the latest data published by UN, more than 200 million world's population lives not in the country it was born. The annual volume of money they transfer to their relatives is over 300bn USD.

36. COMMISSION COORDINATING THE WORKS OF PUBLIC COUNCIL READY TO START PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS [ARMENPRESS, 06/28/08]

The task group which has been created to coordinate the works on the formation of the Public Chamber stated yesterday that it is ready to start public discussions over the principles of the formation of the establishment, its goals and functions to hear and take into consideration the opinions of wide circle of the public.

It was decided that the members of the task group conduct meetings in 11 directions – with parties, non-governmental organizations, creative, art unions, higher educational establishments, Diaspora and religious organizations, ethnic minorities, representatives of National Academy of Sciences, individuals.

Meetings will also be held in provinces. The task group also developed the schedule of the meetings.

The president has signed on June 13 a decree on creating Public Council which will have a status of a consulting body. The commission must form task groups which will participate in the process of formation of the Public Council.

The commission will conduct its next session on July 4.

37. ROUND TABLE TO DISCUSS BILL ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE [ARMENPRESS, 06/28/08]

The Center for Women's Rights non-governmental organization plans to hold on July 2 a round table to look into the situation with domestic violence in Armenia with the focus on violence against women.

During the roundtable the organization will hold also debates on a draft law on Domestic Violence. The roundtable is expected to be attended by representatives of the Armenian labor and social affairs and health ministries, police, non-governmental and international organizations, including experts from Prague, London and Warsaw.

Susanna Vardanian, chairwoman of the Center for Women's Rights, told Armenpress that the bill includes many suggestions and proposals of the police, social and health ministries and other organizations. She said the bill is to fix what must be done to protect women subjected to domestic violence.

SPORTS

38. ARTHUR ABRAHAM INTENDS TO SET UP HIS INFORMATION CENTER IN ARMENIA TO AVOID MISINFORMATION ABOUT HIS PERSON [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

The current IBF middleweight world champion Arthur Abraham intends to set up his information center in Armenia. He told NT correspondent about it on June 28, explaining that in this way it will be possible to avoid misinformation about his person.

As for the information spread by Armenian mass media that he allegedly raped a hotel maid, A. Abraham called it "obviously false information". In his words, the Armenian mass media spread this



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misinformation as a result of incorrect translation, without considering it necessary to clarify this information by asking him. "We do our best to raise the prestige of our country abroad, but, unfortunately, our Armenian mass media does its best to discredit us in homeland," A. Abraham said.

According to him, on June 30 he will receive a new belt instead of his stolen championship belt.

39. 25 ARMENIANS PREPARE FOR BEIJING OLYMPICS 2008 [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/28/08]

25 Armenian sportsmen and sportswomen will take part in Beijing 2008 Olympics on August 8-24. During the preparation period, the boxers, free-style and Greco-Roman wrestlers and weightlifters are training in the Tsakhkadzor olympic sports complex, while the swimmers and athletes are undergoing training in Yerevan and Gyumri. Norayr Bakhtamian, a 4th prize winner at the previous Olympics in Athens, is training at "Mytishche" olympic shooting-range near Moscow and will compete in the open championship of the Russian Federation on July 1-10. The Armenian judoists have been invited to participate in the instructive training gathering of representatives of more than 20 countries in Spain on June 27-July 7.

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