



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Friday, February 20, 2009

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

POLITICS

1. RA PRESIDENT RECEIVES IMF MISSION [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

On February 18, RA President Serzh Sargsyan received the delegation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which included IMF Executive Director AI Baker, Deputy Director of the IMF Middle East and Central Asia Department Lorenzo Perez, head of IMF Armenian mission Mark Luis, and IMF Resident Representative in Armenia Nienke Oomes.

S. Sargsyan highly assessed Armenia's cooperation with IMF and thanked IMF for assisting Armenia. He reaffirmed the readiness of the authorities to take active and practical steps to mitigate the global financial-economic crisis consequences on country's economy.

According to the RA President's Press Office, issues regarding programs and prospects of Armenia's cooperation with IMF under the crisis were discussed during the conversation.

2. DELEGATION LED BY HOVIK ABRAHAMIAN TO LEAVE FOR KARABAKH ON TWO-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT [Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, 02/18/09]

A delegation led by RA National Assembly Speaker Hovik Abrahamian will leave for NKR on a two-day official visit on February 19.

RA NA Speaker will have a tete-a-tete conversation with NKR President Bako Sahakian on February 19 in Stepanakert, then the meeting will continue in an enlarged staff. A regular sitting of interparliamentary cooperation commission between RA and NKR National Assemblies will take place the same day. The sitting will be presided over by H. Abrahamian and NKR NA Speaker Ashot Ghulian.

On February 20, the delegation led by the NA Speaker will visit Stepanakert town memorial complex and fraternal cemetery. The same day the delegation will leave for Shoushi, where it will have a meeting with Artsakh diocese leader Archbishop Pargev Martirosian.

3. RA FOREIGN MINISTER EDWARD NALBANDIAN'S OFFICIAL VISIT TO POLAND AND CZECH REPUBLIC CONTINUES [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

On February 17, Polish President Lech Kaczynski received RA Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian, who was in Poland on an official visit. Referring to Armenian-Polish common features, L. Kaczynski said that friendship and mutual sympathy between the two peoples has a history of many centuries and is a good basis for development of mutually beneficial cooperation between the two states. Problems regarding ensuring peace and stability in the South Caucasian region were discussed at the meeting. E. Nalbandian presented the latest developments in the Nagorno Karabakh settlement negotiations process.

The interlocutors also discussed the process of normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations. In that context L. Kaczynski welcomed the steps taken by Armenia to normalize the relations.

According to the report of the RA Foreign Ministry Press and Information Department, the same day E. Nalbandian visited the parliament of Poland, where he had individual meetings with Polish Sejm Speaker Bronislaw Komorowski and Senate Chairman Bogdan Borusewicz.

E. Nalbandian attached importance to cooperation of Armenian and Polish parliaments considering it one of the guarantees of deepening the friendly relations between the two countries. B. Komorowski, in his turn, said that Poland pays much attention to the strengthening of stability and security in the South Caucasus and for that purpose attaches importance to peaceful settlement of regional problems and establishment of good-neighborly relations.

E. Nalbandian drew the attention of Polish Sejm Speaker to Azerbaijan's attempts to start arms race in the region and its bellicose policy, which not only hinder the Nagorno Karabakh settlement process, but also seriously endanger the regional security.

The EU Eastern Partnership proposal and cooperation to be carried out within that framework were discussed at the meeting with Senate Chairman Bogdan Borusewicz. Poland is one of the proposal's co-authors.



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E. Nalbandian also visited the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), where he met with Office Director Janez Lenarcic. The process of democratic reforms and steps undertaken in that sphere were discussed at the meeting.

The same day the RA Foreign Minister visited the RA Embassy in Poland, where he met with the representatives of the Armenian community of Warsaw.

Concluding his visit to Poland, the RA Foreign Minister left for Czech Republic.

4. PARUYR HAYRIKIAN AGAIN PROPOSES MARKING FEBRUARY 18 AS ARMENIAN PEOPLE'S LIBERTY DAY AT STATE LEVEL [Aravot, 02/18/09]

February 18 is a too symbolic day for the Armenian people: in 1920 on that day, when Armenia was under the Bolshevik dictatorship, the people revolted and liberated Yerevan. Paruyr Hayrikian, the Chairman of the National Self-Determination Union, said at the February 18 press conference. Thus, according to him, February 18 became a day symbolizing a victorious fight for freedom.

"It seemed there was no force that would be able to prevent the red terror of the Bolsheviks. However, on that day the Armenian people drew away Bolsheviks from Yerevan and released from prisons hundreds of intellectuals, national-state figures sentenced to death," P. Hayrikian said adding that it was the first victory over Bolshevik dictatorship.

P. Hayrikian said that years running they have proposed marking that day as Armenian people's Liberty Day at the state level. "The very years made us understand that for having Liberty Day society, especially the authorities should understand the price of liberty," the party leader said.

5. PARUYR HAYRIKIAN: ROBERT KOCHARIAN IS DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR MARCH 1 EVENTS [Aravot, 02/18/09]

Levon Ter-Petrosian is morally responsible for the 2008 March 1 events, while Robert Kocharian is directly responsible, as people were killed in the streets under R. Kocharian. Paruyr Hayrikian, the Chairman of the National Self-Determination Union, expressed such a confidence at the February 18 press conference. He considers inadmissible that the application of the Armenian National Congress to hold a rally on March 1 was rejected. According to him, "no policeman or mayor has a right to consider himself higher than the RA Constitution" and violate people's constitutional right. "If civil, political rights are limited in a country, it is the worst situation that can be in a country," P. Hayrikian said.

Touching upon the issue of amending Articles 225 and 300, RA Criminal Code, P. Hayrikian said that "it is gladdening that the authorities at least take a step that allegedly they look for a way out of the formed situation."

6. ARMENIAN PRESIDENT RECEIVES DELEGATION OF ARMENIAN EVANGELIC CHURCH [ARMENPRESS, 02/19/09]

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan received today the delegation of the Spiritual Council of the Armenian Evangelic Church headed by the primate of the church Rene Levonian.

Presidential press service told Armenpress that during the meeting Serzh Sargsyan was presented the activity of the church during the recent years, the programs carried out and would-be carried out in Armenia.

Presenting the programs planned for 2009 by the church in Armenia and Artsakh the members of the delegation pointed out that the church is trying to gradually pass to the implementation of development programs as well.

The president of the country underscored the using of the all Armenian potential for the sake of Armenia and its people, highlighted the activity of all the Armenian organizations in the sphere of preserving the Armenian identity. "As people, the guarantee of our success is our unity and our strength is in our variety as well. In this variety our goal is one – prosperity and development of Armenia and Armenian people," the president pointed out.



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7. PRESIDENT OF ARMENIA RECEIVES EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE TO SOUTH CAUCASUS [ARMENPRESS, 02/19/09]

President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan received February 18 EU Special Representative to South Caucasus Peter Semneby.

Presidential press service told Armenpress that at the meeting present were ambassador of EU chairing country – Poland – Tomas Knothe, French ambassador to Armenia Serzh Smessow as well as head of the European Commission to Armenian Raul de Lutzenberger.

The president of the country underscored the further deepening of cooperation with EU, expressed hope that the program of actions for 2009-2011 approved at the session of the National Security Council gives an opportunity to move in that direction. During the meeting the interlocutors referred to the cooperation within the framework of “Eastern Partnership” initiative, Karabakh conflict regulation process, Armenian-Turkish dialogue as well as pace of reforms in Armenia.

Underscoring the starting “Eastern Partnership” regional cooperation element, President of Armenia expressed hope that EU will be continuative in ensuring the priorities included in the initiative.

Peter Semneby reconfirmed the intention of EU High Commissioner on Foreign Policy and Security Issues Javier Solana to visit Armenia in near future according to the agreement reached during the visit of Serzh Sargsyan to Brussels.

8. PETER SEMNEBY: EUROPEAN UNION WILL ASSIST NORMALIZATION OF ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

On February 19, RA Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian met with EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby. During the meeting they touched upon the consequences of the world financial and economic crisis, its impact on the RA economy and government's coming programs, as well as on country's home political situation in consideration that social tension usually considerably increases as a result of the crisis. The interlocutors also spoke about the process aimed at normalization of relations between Turkey and RA, about relations with the other regional neighbors.

T. Sargsian presented RA government's anticrisis strategy under the formed situation, the results of the negotiations with international financial organizations, including WB and IMF. He expressed the hope that cooperation with European structures will help to overcome the negative impacts of the world financial-economic crisis.

P. Semneby emphasized that RA like other countries involved in the European Neighborhood Policy remains in the focus of EU attention. As to the home political situation in RA, he said that EU is interested in Armenia's having a stable situation, in overcoming of the March 1 events' consequences, in the steps taken in that direction being open and transparent. In connection with the relations with Turkey P. Semneby said that for EU both Turkey and Armenia are important partners, and today and in the future EU will assist normalization of those relations.

According to the RA government Information and Public Relations Department, Raul de Luzenberger, the head of the European Commission delegation in Armenia, Tomasz Knothe, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Poland to RA, Serge Smessow, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to RA, advisors of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus took part in the meeting.

9. ARMENIA IS INTERESTED IN PROMOTING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WITH EU [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

Artur Baghdasarian, the RA National Security Council Secretary, the Chairman of the Interdepartmental Commission on coordination of Armenia's cooperation with European structures, on February 19 received EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby and European Commission Trade Office Director Eva Sinovich.

Attaching importance to EU officials' high-level visits to Armenia, A. Baghdasarian gave assurance that the practical agreements achieved will promote further development of the Armenia-EU relations.

The interlocutors spoke about the conception of the Eastern Partnership to be carried out within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, about the importance of development of political dialogue within the framework of the new initiative, development of free trade in the economic sphere. E. Sinovich said that this initiative is a new set of instruments that will give a possibility to further develop both EU-RA and many-sided relations.



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A. Baghdasarian highly assessed the new initiative and attached importance to signing of a free trade development agreement. He said that Armenia is interested in promotion of political and economic partnership with EU and in this respect expects EU's assistance, as deepening of political and economic cooperation is also an important stability factor for the region.

According to the RA National Security Council Press Office, issues regarding the Armenia-EU 2009-2011 actions plan were also discussed at the meeting. In this context P. Semneby attached importance to elaboration and implementation of human rights national programs.

10. POLICE DISPERSE ACTION OF PROTEST ORGANIZED IN FRONT OF RA CEC [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

The Police dispersed the action of protest organized in front of the RA Central Electoral Commission building by the Special Regiment youth organization on February 19. As Noyan Tapan correspondent was informed by the organization members, on the occasion of the anniversary of the 2008 presidential elections they had decided to hold an action of protest reminding that the elections were held with all-round falsifications. However, some hours before the announced hour of the action, 14:00, over a dozen of police cars had blocked the entrance to the park in front of CEC and police special forces in red berets prohibited 30 demonstrators to enter the territory, then pushed them driving them away to the Armenian National Congress building in the vicinity.

Action participant Aram Manukian, a Board member of the Armenian National Movement party, said in his interview to journalists that the police forces in red berets were especially rude to girls, as well as tore the RA tricolor, while the action had been organized within the framework of the law. "It is merely a manifestation of fear, the authorities are just terrified, as they know that many people will take part in our rally to be held on March 1," A. Manukian said. According to another oppositionist, Matenadaran Deputy Director Arshak Banuchian, "the policemen executing orders today will become victims of the system established by their masters tomorrow." In his affirmation, the acts of violence will contribute to the March 1 rally's being very crowded.

11. OSCE MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS RELEASE A JOINT STATEMENT [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Ambassadors Bernard Fassier of France, Yury Merzlyakov of Russia, and Matthew Bryza of the United States, released statement February 19 in which they underscore the non-use of force as a core element of any just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

The statement says "The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group stress that, despite two reports circulated at the request of the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations on December 24 and 29, 2008, there is no military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Co-Chairs further underscore the non-use of force as a core element of any just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

Presidents Ilham Aliyev and Serge Sargsyan described their most recent meeting, in Zurich on January 28, 2009, as useful and constructive, despite two Azerbaijani reports circulated in the United Nations General Assembly one month earlier. At the conclusion of their Zurich meeting, the Presidents reiterated their commitment to the Minsk Group peace process, and asked the Co-Chairs to intensify their efforts to help the parties bridge their remaining differences with regard to the Basic Principles.

In subsequent public statements, both Presidents underscored their enduring commitment to the Minsk Group's mediation effort. Therefore, the Minsk Group's Co-Chairs will visit the region before the end of February to help the parties to accelerate their efforts to finalize the Basic Principles.

The Minsk Group Co-Chairs will not allow the peace process to be subverted by legalistic or historical discussions, though they will remain sensitive to historical concerns expressed by the parties to the conflict, all of which must be addressed in due course. The Co-Chairs further believe the above-mentioned reports should have no bearing on negotiations within the Minsk Group in pursuit of a peaceful and political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, to which both Presidents committed themselves in their Moscow Declaration of November 2, 2009."



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12. DELEGATION HEADED BY GEORGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER GRIGOL VASHADZE TO ARRIVE IN ARMENIA [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

Delegation headed by Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze will pay a two-day working visit to Armenia today - February 20.

Media relations division of the Armenian Foreign Ministry told Armenpress that during the visit G. Vashadze will meet with the Armenian President Serzh Sargsian, Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian.

The meeting of E. Nalbandian and G. Vashadze will take place today. Shortly after the meeting their joint press conference will take place in the hall of the foreign ministry.

Delegation headed by Georgian Foreign Minister will also visit the memorial complex to the Great Genocide on February 21.

13. ELECTION OF COUNCIL OF ELDERS OF YEREVAN TO BE HELD MAY 31 THIS YEAR [Azg, 02/20/09]

Election of council of elders of Yerevan will be held May 31 this year. The decision was made during February 19 session of the government.

Presenting the draft of this decision Armenian Territorial Governance Deputy Minister Vache Terterian noted that the decision is being adopted according to the law on "Self Governance of Yerevan". Nearly 183 million drams are intended to be provided for organization of the elections: the issue must be agreed with Armenian Ministry of Finance.

According to the newly adopted "Self Governance of Yerevan" law, creation of 65-member council of elders is intended and the office of mayor of Yerevan becomes elective. He is elected by the mentioned council from its membership.

14. PRESIDENT SERZH SARGSYAN CONDUCTED A WORKING VISIT TO LORI PROVINCE [Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, 02/20/09]

The President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan paid February 19 a working visit to the Armenian province of Lori.

Presidential press service told Armenpress that he visited Tashir textile factory and Tashir Milk company. In the framework of the visit and on the occasion of the All-Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanian's 140th birth anniversary, President Serzh Sargsyan visited the birthplace of the poet, Dsegh village. The President of Armenia laid flowers on the tomb of the great poet and toured his home-museum.

Serzh Sargsyan visited also Gloria textile factory in Vanadzor. On the occasion of Vardanants Day celebration, President Sargsyan visited Vanadzor's Saint Grigor Narekatsi Church. He also stopped at the secondary school n. 1, where he participated at the unveiling ceremony of the memorial of the Armenian Catholicos Vazgen II. The President of Armenia concluded his visit by attending the opening ceremony of Vanadzor's specialized chess school for juniors.

BUSINESS

15. ACADEMICIAN AGHANBEGIAN CALLS ON TO CURB INFLATION [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

Overcoming the global financial and economic crisis is a difficult and long process, and any factors to promote growth of the global economy are not visible so far, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Abel Aghanbегian expressed an opinion at a round table on anti-crisis management. According to him, the crisis is likely to enter a stage of stagnation (the absence of economic growth), and a painful stagflation - inflation under conditions of the absence of economic growth awaits those countries that will not curb inflation in 2009-2010. A. Aghanbегian attached importance to conducting a correct policy on the Armenian dram with respect to foreign currencies in conditions of curbing the inflation.

In his words, the crisis has invaded Russia in 5 directions and left quite a serious impact on its economy. In particular, the turnover on the Russian stock exchange has declined 4 times, and a liquidity crisis has begun as the conditions of credit provision to companies have worsened.



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Besides, as a result of the expected fall in prices of oil, metals and gas, Russia's exports will decline by about 100 billion USD, while the state budget will have a deficit of 1.5-2% of GDP instead of the previous surplus of 6% of GDP.

In parallel with the fall in prices of exported goods, the foreign demand has declined as well, followed by a decline in the absolute volumes of industrial production, construction and investments. 50% appreciation of the dollar against the Russian ruble has encouraged the local production. At the same time the foreign reserves of the country have decreased from 597 billion USD to 300 billion USD as the Central Bank of Russia has allocated considerable resources to control the panic moods caused by the dollar's appreciation.

Academician Aghanbegian said that some crisis phenomena are more deeply perceived in Russia than in the US, big European countries and China.

Deputies of the RA National Assembly, experts, and representatives of the business community took part in the discussion on the subject "Anti-Crisis Management in Current Conditions. Problems and Solutions" organized by the Higher School of Corporate Management of the Republic of Armenia.

According to analyst Vahram Ghushchian, the crisis in Russia may have a considerable impact on Armenia because remittances of the annual amount of 1.4 billion USD from Russia to Armenia may decline.

He underlined the importance of implementing the North-South railway-motor way construction project in terms of job creation.

The Executive Director of the Republican Union of Employers Gagik Makarian spoke about the necessity of measures for business development and improvement of the business environment. In particular, he proposed taking steps to create a united business database, ensure the accessibility of financial resources, reduce bureaucratism and red tape, and increase state assistance.

In the opinion of G. Makarian, the reduction of the current 20% rate of VAT and the social payments for salaries of up to 100 thousand drams will help improve the competitiveness of Armenian producers, keep the current jobs and create new ones.

16. EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S EXPERTS TEAM COMES ON A THREE-DAY VISIT TO ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

A European Commission's team composed of 23 experts and led by Ms Eva Synowiec from the Commission's Directorate General for Trade comes on a three-day visit to Armenia on February 17. According to the press service of the RA ministry of economy, the purpose of the visit is to map out a preparatory process for future possible negotiations of a free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union (EU) and Armenia.

During the visit the European experts will have meetings with representatives of the following Armenian ministries: the ministry of economy, the ministry of justice, the ministry of health, the ministry of nature protection, the ministry of agriculture, the ministry of finance, the ministry of labor and social issues, as well as the State Revenue Committee, the Central Bank of Armenia, the State Commission for Protection of Economic Competition, the Public Services Regulatory Commission, and some departments.

Issues related to technical obstacles to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, the right of intellectual property, state procurement, protection of economic competition, sustainable development (labor and social issues, environmental protection), etc. will be discussed at the meetings. Discussions in 12 expert groups are envisaged.

A sitting dedicated to the fact-finding mission of the EU will be held on February 18, during which the main goals of the fact-finding mission on EU-Armenian FTA will be presented, while the results of the work done will be finalized at the February 19 sitting.

Reference: with the aim of examining the opportunity of signing a EU-Armenia FTA, the CASE independent organization (Poland) has conducted a feasibility study, based on the results of which CASE published a report in May 2008 and submitted it to the respective ministries and departments of Armenia for discussion. As a result, a package of considerations of the Armenian government has been presented to the European side.

After studying the package, the European side proposed discussing with Armenia the opportunities of signing a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement, which presupposes implementation of institutional and legislative reforms in Armenia.



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17. STATE CREDIT OF 3.1 BILLION DRAMS TO BE PROVIDED TO ZANGEZUR COPPER-MOLYBDENUM ENTERPRISE [Azg, 02/20/09]

State credit of 3.1 billion drams will be provided to Zangezur copper-molybdenum enterprise by the Armenian government.

During today's session of the government Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian noted that the support will help the enterprise to work in its full capacity. As a result of the support another 50 satellite enterprises with their 2000 workers will be guaranteed that they will preserve their working places.

The productivity of the enterprise will increase by at least 30%, as within the frameworks of this support new equipments are intended to be imported which will also improve the productive quality.

Prime minister noted that it will create a much more favorable social environment in Syunik. According to T. Sargsian this is an unprecedented function implemented by the government which entirely has an anti-crisis nature.

18. ACCORDING TO PRIME MINISTER OF RA, DEVELOPMENT OF MORTGAGE MARKET REPRESENTS FIRST NECESSARY MEASURE IN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

The Armenian prime minister Tigran Sargsyan conducted a consultation with representatives of private construction companies on February 18. The ministers of urban development and finance, Yerevan's mayor, the chairman of the State Revenue Committee took part in the consultation. According to the press service of the government, the opportunities and prospects of investment making under conditions of the global financial and economic crisis, issues related to the state-private sector cooperation in this situation were discussed during the consultation.

Speaking about the purpose of the consultation, the prime minister said that the construction sector was one of the main driving forces of Armenia's economic growth in the past ten years. Construction work was mostly done with private investments, with their considerable part being provided by foreign partners.

T. Sargsyan proposed that the developers and investors participating in the consultation should express their opinions about state assistance in the current situation in order to ensure some activity in construction sector and reduce the impact of the global crisis on our market by joint efforts.

The representatives of the private sector presented their worries and problems conditioned by the impact of the global crisis. These problems were mainly related to the policy of credit provision, the unrealistic and exaggerated forecasts and expectations regarding a sharp fall in apartment prices in the market in the near future. Such forecasts have a negative effect on the sector.

Summarizing the consultation, the prime minister underlined that the first necessary measure is to develop the mortgage market which will allow to solve the problems indicated by developers. The second measure is continuing and completing the construction work envisaged by state programs, including construction in the earthquake zone.

19. GOVERNMENT DENIES RUMOR ABOUT BANKS BEING WARNED OF CHANGE IN ARMENIAN DRAM'S EXCHANGE RATE [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

Both the Armenian government and the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) on February 18 denied the press rumors that the government and CBA have warned the banks about a change in the exchange rate of the Armenian dram against the dollar soon. NT correspondent was informed by the press service of the government that there could not even be such a warning to banks by the government. In the words of spokeswoman for CBA Zaruhi Barseghian, this is false information and has a political implication.

It is noteworthy that in the February 18 issue of Armenian Time daily, it was written: "The Armenian government and the CBA have informed and warned all the banks operating in Armenia that the exchange rate of the dram against the dollar will rise up to 420-450 drams in the next two months. The aim of this warning is that the banks will take it into account when making their plans for the near future and thus avoid unexpected situations. The problem is that the CBA is not able to keep the dram's exchange rate any more. Only during two days of this week, the CBA carried out an intervention of more than 20 million dollars".



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20. SIGNING FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH EU IS IMPORTANT FOR ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

The RA Minister of Economy Nerses Yeritsian on February 18 received the delegation led by Eva Synowiec, Director of the European Commission's Directorate General for Trade. The delegation is on a three-day visit to Armenia to carry out a fact-finding mission. The purpose is to prepare future negotiation activity for signing an Armenia-EU free trade agreement.

NT was informed by the press service of the ministry that N. Yeritsian underlined the importance of signing a free trade agreement with the EU for Armenia. In his words, Armenia is prepared for institutional reforms and capacity building. He stated that the free trade agreement may become a pledge of successful reforms in Armenia and contribute to the country's integration with the EU.

E. Synowiec in her turn said that after completing its work in Yerevan, the fact-finding team will prepare a summary report and submit it to the European Commission for discussion, after which the further steps will be developed.

21. ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT PREPARED TO COOPERATE CLOSELY WITH EUROPEAN COMMISSION [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

During the December 18 meeting of Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan and the delegation led by Director of the European Commission's Directorate General for Trade Eva Synowiec, the sides discussed issues related to Armenia's cooperation with the EU within the framework of the free trade regime, the process of the work on signing a free trade agreement, as well as issues of extending the cooperation by the Eastern Partnership concept to be implemented under the European Neighborhood Policy.

According to the press service of the government, both sides attached special importance to signing a EU-Armenia free trade agreement (FTA).

E. Synowiec said that thanks to Eastern Partnership, a long and extensive cooperation with Armenia and the other countries involved in the Partnership is envisaged. In her words, the aim of their fact-finding mission is to become acquainted with the current situation in Armenia and map out a preparatory process for negotiations of a FTA.

T. Sargsyan expressed a hope that this process will be successfully completed, which may give impetus to reforms in Armenia. At the request of the guests, he presented the RA government's anti-crisis strategy, priorities and programs (by sectors) which are based on identification and use of Armenia's relative advantages in these sectors. He stated that the Armenian government is prepared to cooperate closely with the European Commission.

22. PURCHASER OF "BJNI" PLANT PAYS FULL VALUE OF LOT [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

On February 19 - the third day after the end of the compulsory electronic re-auction of the property and property rights of "Bjni" Mineral Water Plant company, the purchaser paid the full value of the lot, NT was informed by the National Service for Compulsory Enforcement of Court Acts (NSCECA). The name of the purchaser was not given.

In addition to 222 million 68 thousand drams paid as a prepayment on February 16, 4 billion 219 million 432 thousand drams was paid to NSCECA.

To recap, one bid was filed during the auction held on February 5-16. The sale price of the lot made 4 billion 441.5 million drams. Under Article 35.2 Point 6 of the RA Law on Public Bargaining, the participant who won at the auction was obliged to transfer the purchase price of the lot to NSCECA's deposit account or cashbox or to pay the purchase price of the lot minus the prepayment within 3 bank days.

23. ASSISTANCE OF 125 MILLION DRAMS PROVIDED TO SORSIO INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMPANY [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

At the February 19 sitting, the Armenian government made a decision to provide assistance of 125 million drams (403.8 million USD) to Sorsio company (IT sector) within the framework of programs aimed at developing the Armenian economy. The minister of economy Nerses Yeritsian announced that the investment program submitted by the company has been approved by the operative staff set up at the government with the aim of discussing programs on support for the private sector.



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The minister said that the company currently has 50 employees, pays taxes of 39 million drams a year, and its turnover makes 125 million drams. As a result of the assistance, it is envisaged increasing the number of jobs to 200, that of customers - from current 1,000 to 80 thousand within 5 years, and the revenues are expected to grow 120-fold.

The prime minister Tigran Sargsian underlined that the government support will allow the company to increase its exports to 60 million USD. Sorsio's production is mainly sold abroad so it plans to open a representative office in Silicon Valley. "Despite the global economic crisis, this company managed to find its place in the market, and now we help it emerge as a winner under conditions of the crisis when many are unable to withstand competition in the IT sector," the prime minister said.

24. ASHOT SHAHNAZARIAN: ARMENIA HAS BEEN STRIVING FOR FREE TRADE AGREEMENT FOR A LONG TIME [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

During the February 19 meeting with the European Commission's fact-finding group, the Chairman of the RA State Commission for Protection of Economic Competition Ashot Shahnazarian stated that "Armenia has been striving for a free trade agreement for a long time".

A free trade agreement envisages entrance of Armenian goods into markets of EU member states without customs duties (and vice versa), which is of vital importance for export promotion and the growth of investments. At the same time, ensuring free economic competition is one of the most important conditions for free trade.

At the request of the group's members, A. Shahnazarian spoke about the challenges existing the field of competition. First, there are legislative shortcomings, due to which the opinions of the Commission's experts may become a subject of double comment or discussion by other state bodies. Secondly, there are disparities in penalties envisaged by the laws on competitive and administrative offences: the first one envisages a concrete penalty for a concrete violation in order to avoid corruption risks, while the other one uses the principle of proportionality when the penalty should fit the offence. Some corruption risks arise here, and a society, all bodies of which comprehend unambiguously the essence of the law of competition, is necessary. According to the Commission's head, such problems also exist in the financial market and issues related to state assistance.

A. Shahnazarian pointed out that the Commission jointly with the Armenian government implements programs that will ensure Armenia's real integration with the EU in legislative and economic spheres under the European Neighborhood Policy.

As regards the conditions of a free trade agreement, the members of the fact-finding group underlined the important role of the body for protection of competition as well as the necessity of EU's assistance for solution of the problems raised by the Commission.

According to the press service of the State Commission for Protection of Economic Competition, the fact-finding group is expected to present a report on Armenia's progress to the RA government in late April. Issues of economic competition will also be addressed in the report.

25. T. SARGSIAN TO TAKE PART IN "BRIDGE 2009" SIXTH INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM IN TSAKHKADZOR [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian will take part in "Bridge 2009" sixth international economic forum February 21 in Tsakhkadzor the main theme of which is "Prospects of International Economic Cooperation - Issues and Solutions".

Public relations department of the Armenian government told Armenpress that other high ranking officials and delegations representing different spheres of economy from Armenia and abroad are invited to the forum.

26. PRODUCTION OF "BJNI" FACTORY OF MINERAL WATERS TO RESTART IN LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

Production of "Bjni" factory of mineral waters will restart late February or early March. From Monday of the coming week the factory will start acquiring raw materials, the head of the Armenian Football Federation Ruben Hayrapetian who has bought "Bjni" factory of mineral waters during the auction said today at a press conference. He noted that if the factory of mineral waters used to have certain problems with the law the issues must be solved through the judicial order.

"If a forensic decision is made, I'm obliged to do it", - he said.



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Referring to various news circulating in press during the latest times R. Hayrapetian stressed that nothing and no one forced him to buy this business.

"They even try to inform that I had no money for that. How did it happen? Chief editor of "Armenian Times" ("Haykakan Zhamanak") newspaper can have a house costing 2 million USD, but Ruben Hayrapetian, who has worked during his whole life and was in different businesses cannot have money to buy "Bjni",- he noted considering the information funny.

The businessman pointed out that all this should not become a reason for political speculations: the time will show whether the motives of all this were political or economic.

According to R. Hayrapetian there is a need for investments in this factory, also new industrial streams are needed.

Works and investments which will be implemented in "Bjni" will be presented later when the process of hand and reception of the factory will be finished.

It is also early to speak whether the label of the mineral water bottle will be changed or. But according to him the staff of the factory will by all means be preserved: in this circumstance the year's experience and skills of the specialists are assessed.

DIASPORA

27. YOUNG ARFD MEMBERS OF GREECE ORGANIZE ACTION OF PROTEST ON OCCASION OF AZERI PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO GREECE [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

Azeri President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Greece was accompanied by an action of protest organized by the ARFD Youth Union of Greece. According to the Azat Or (Free Day) newspaper, Azeri President's peace was broken, when the action of protest participants voiced "Karabakh is ours!" at the moment he entered Greece Chamber of Commerce.

An hour before the meeting of Greek and Azeri businessmen young ARFD members, who had gathered in front of the Chamber of Commerce, hoisted the state flags of Armenia, Greece, and Artsakh, as well as a placard with the inscription "Aliyev, stop the aggression, Karabakh is already independent."

According to the Azat Or, Azeri President's smile froze on his face, when coming out of the armored car he looked at the crowd gathered on the opposite pavement and heard the voice of fair complaint and request of the Armenians.

"The Azeri bodyguards responsible for Azeri President's security rudely treated representatives of Armenians exercising their democratic right of action of protest and demonstration hindering the entrance of Azat Or's editor and Armenian photographer photographing the gathering to the meeting hall. And Greek Police forces surrounded their compatriots expressing their complaint on the pavement in front of the meeting building," the newspaper reported.

In spite of policemen's attempt to repulse the demonstrators the latter refused to leave and met with applause President of Greece Karolos Papoulias, who arrived a little later.

During the meeting with Greek businessmen the Azeri President once more used the chance to voice anti-Armenian statements again touching upon "issues of seizing Azerbaijan's lands by Armenia and issues of refugees."

28. ARMENIAN BOY INCLUDED IN IRAN'S NATIONAL YOUTH FOOTBALL TEAM [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/19/09]

Armenian Iranian Tomik Davtian has been included in Iran's national youth football team. As Alik daily reported, he is the first Armenian boy to enter the youth team of Iran.

The 12-year-old Tomik is a second grader at "Nairi" school. He started attending football courses at the age of 5. He wants to continue his career in this field and become a famous football player.

ARTS

29. "GENOCIDE WITHOUT COMMENTS" DOCUMENTARY FILM TO BE FOLLOWED BY A FILM DEDICATED TO THE 1909 ADANA MASSACRES [ARMENPRESS, 02/19/09]

Authors of "Genocide without comments" documentary film intend to shoot a new film dedicated to the 1909 Adana massacres.

Director Alexander Sardur told Armenpress that refer to the Adana massacres is important because it was a prerequisite for the Armenian Great Genocide. According to him, the Armenian



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Genocide is not regarded as so saying that allegedly it was a consequence of the war and there was no war in 1909. A. Sardur informed that in this film only documentary materials will be used as well and the structure of the film will be dictated by the materials which will be used.

Referring to "Genocide without comments" documentary film A. Sardur noted that the accusation that Armenians do not present the Genocide objectively and perform with emotional approaches which sounded in Germany served as an occasion for the film.

The film is based on the archive documents of the German Foreign Ministry which are connected with the Armenian Genocide. There are no Armenians in the film, but only Germans and the main performer is a journalist, German by nationality Wolfgang Gust, who conducted quite an extended activity in the German archives in the direction of finding out and study of materials concerning the Armenian Genocide and published "Armenian Genocide: 1915-1916" book.

A. Sardur noted that they have added no comments but have reproduced V. Gust's history and explanations on the historical facts which have by now been unknown.

"The film is first of all addressed to the whole world and then to the Armenians", - A. Sardur noted.

Vardan Pap is the scenarist of the film, director and producer – A. Sardur.

RELIGION

30. STEPS ARE UNDERTAKEN FOR RENOVATION OF TATEV MONASTIC COMPLEX AND CONSTRUCTION OF A CABLE WAY IN THIS AREA [Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, 02/19/09]

Representatives of the private sphere also take part in the implementation of programs of Council of National Competency (CNC). During today's session of the government referring to the CNC works Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian noted that already there are agreements with private representatives on the programs which will be implemented by the council.

The prime minister singled out the program of renovation of Tatev monastic complex for which nearly 20 million dollars are needed. The area of location of the temple is intended to be made a tourism center by constructing a cable way there: the works will kick off this year. According to the prime minister the complex and big program will be realized with the means of investors but a state support is also needed.

A small cluster is also intended to be established near the temple for which on the task of the prime minister a working group will be established headed by the Armenian Urban Ministry. The group will coordinate the renovation and construction works of Tatev temple and the cable way cooperating with the Syunik governor's office.

The last will solve the land providing issue and the Armenian Energy and Natural Resources Ministry must provide electricity for the objects and cable way which will be constructed.

T. Sargsian emphasized that it will be the longest cable way in Armenia and will be constructed by the Austrians.

31. ARCHBISHOP NERSES BOZABALIAN ATTACKED [Azg, 02/20/09]

On February 18, Holy See congregate Archbishop Nerses Bozabalian has been attacked in his room in St. Etchmiadzin. An employee of the congregation house reached out for Archbishop's cry for help and found the latter lying unconscious on the ground. The attacker had entered the room for robbery.

The emergency car took the Archbishop to Etchmiadzin first and then to Nairi Medical center in Yerevan. No traces of violence were found on Archbishop's body. The attacker is under arrest.

Holy See of Etchmiadzin applied to its pious sons to pray for quick recovery of Archbishop Bozabalian.

SOCIAL

32. A LABOR FAIR IN GAVAR [ARMENPRESS, 02/19/09]

A labor fair will be held February 26 in Gavar town of Gegharkunik province.

Organizer of the fair, head of the "Community Council of Women" NGO which functions as a migration resource center Anahit Gevorkian told Armenpress that according to the initial information nearly 25 companies – banks, taxi services, educational establishments, companies which provide credits



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and others will take part in the event. The Gegharkunik governor's office, Employment center and Trade industrial chamber support the organization of the labor fair.

Such labor fair has also been organized in Martuni in late January, as a result of which 17 people have been employed. Great number of vacancies has been offered by "Arev 1" bread factory where 10 people have been employed.

According to A. Gevorkian primarily meetings have been organized with the residents for presenting demands, issues of the labor market, skills to introduce oneself to the employer and methods of writing a resume.

33. LAST YEAR 130 STUDENTS LEFT FOR ABROAD TO STUDY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORKS OF INTER-STATE AGREEMENTS [ARMENPRESS, 02/19/09]

Last year within the frameworks of inter-state agreements 130 students left from Armenia for abroad to study in the universities as well as to get master's and post graduate degrees there.

Head of the International cooperation and relation department of Armenian Education and Science Ministry Vahe Grigorian told Armenpress that great number of students left for Russia – 79 people, Syria – 29, China – 7, as well as Bulgaria, Romania, Egypt and Slovakia.

Medicine, economics, law and international affairs are professions of great demand.

At present the Education and Science Ministry conducts negotiations with Poland, Cyprus and Iran to sign an inter-state agreement. The time of agreement with Bulgaria expires and V. Grigorian assured that it is intended to be prolonged.

Within the frameworks of inter-state agreements there are also many students who arrived in Armenia from other states. 50 students came to Armenia mostly from Syria, China and Russia who mainly study in the Armenian state engineering, Yerevan State, Armenian-Russian Slavonic Universities and Medical university after M. Heratsi.

34. ARMENIAN PRESIDENT DELIVERS SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF 140TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF HOVHANNES TUMANIAN [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

Within the framework of his visit to the Armenian province of Lori February 19 President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan on the occasion of the All-Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanian's 140th birth anniversary visited the birthplace of the poet, Dsegh village. The President of Armenia laid flowers on the tomb of the great poet and toured his home-museum. The president also delivered a speech on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Tumanian. The speech runs as follows:

"Dear Compatriots,

Today we celebrate the 140th birth anniversary of, as we all love to say, the All-Armenian poet. Jubilees of our greats are not only an exceptional occasion to remember them and pay tribute but also to reckon over their works and accomplishments, to find a new meaning in their patriotic ideas and legacy.

In this regard, Hovhannes Toumanian is an extraordinary phenomenon in our literature as well as in our social and political life.

I strongly believe that each generation of Armenians must not only read Toumanian and enjoy his literary genius but also learn from a man whose life is an example of the unconditional dedication to his own country and his own people, the example of sharing the pains of his country and of his people, and the example of finding cure for that pain. Such examples are contagious and every generation, particularly those Armenians growing now in Armenia and in the Diaspora, do need that kind of example.

Today is also Vardanants Day, and it is an interesting coincidence. I congratulate all of us on this occasion. Vardan's and his army's heroism and demeanor have also been encouraging our rising generations as a vivid example of placing national identity and freedom higher than life itself. Vardan and his army and their followers, Hovhannes Toumanian and his followers are the moral, spiritual and may be also political values of the modern as well as the future Armenia. The higher standards simply do not exist.

Toumanian shows us vigorous patriotism on one hand and pronounced respect toward other nations and their values on the other. On one hand we observe courage, personal valor, composure which excludes panic in the most extreme situations, and self-possession and love for peace on the other. It is not a coincidence that on different issues – literary, cultural, or political - whenever there was a need for an envoy or a negotiator, the Poet was the choice. He was revered by everyone and the main reason for that was his ability to conduct a dialogue with great wisdom and insight, whether his interlocutor was a Georgian intellectual, a Russian tsar's official, a Moslem herdsman, a Bolshevik revolutionist, a member of the Armenian Government, or a simple Lori villager.



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A look back into the depth of times reveals today that due to his political open-mindedness, Toumanian was standing out among his contemporaries. His confidence in our peoples' inner abilities and in Armenia's future was boundless and unwavering. His shining optimism was a source of vital strength for those who had weakened in their faith, and those whose hope had diminished. In 1915, and I invite your attention to that date, in 1915 at the most tragic time for the Armenian people, he was referring to this country as

The Land of Hope!

The Land of Light!

He stands in striking contrast with those who live and act today, and who are hundred times smaller than Toumanian, the so-called politicians who will lose no chance to damn their own young Republic, their own state.

Along with his contemporaries, Toumanian had lived also through the tragedy of the intellectual with no state, when at times he was forced to single-handedly to carry out the work of government structures and entire ministries. Certainly, it was not the most efficient way of serving the needs of the nation but the destiny left no choice for Toumanian and his contemporaries. The most efficient and the highest mode of organizing people is the establishment of the state and today it is the Armenian state that has taken over that mission and the resolution of all existing problems.

Dear Compatriots,

One year ago on this day, February 19, I was elected President of Armenia. My presence here today is symbolic. I consider it to be my duty to work and to make the entire state machine work in a way so that we all together can bring the day when we will call the Armenia of Hovhanness Toumanian's dream and our dream

My New Motherland!

The Great Motherland!"

35. 12 HIV INFECTION CASES REGISTERED IN ARMENIA DURING JANUARY [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

From 1988 to February 1, 2009 686 cases of HIV infection have been registered in the republic.

Head of the Health Ministry's AIDS prevention Republican Center's department of epidemic oversight Armenian Arshak Papoyan told Armenpress that 12 of the cases were registered in January this year, 136 – in 2008.

According to him, in the overall amount of HIV infected representatives of male sex overwhelm – 512 (74.6%) among females 174 cases of infection have been registered (25.4%) among children – 13 cases (1.9%). 59% of the infected are people of 25-39 age category.

Heterosexual way is the main way of transfer of the infection in Armenia (49.1%) and infection through intravenous injection of drugs (43.1%). In Armenia cases of transfer of the disease from mother to the child, blood and homosexual ways have also been registered.

According to A. Papoyan among 305 of HIV infected (66 women, 6 children) AIDS has been diagnosed, among 83 of which – during 2008.

From the beginning of the epidemic 164 cases of death of HIV/AIDS infected have been registered. There are 27 women and 3 children among the death.

All the people who have been infected through intravenous injection of drugs were men majority of them having temporarily inhabited in Russia and Ukraine and have probably been infected with HIV there.

Besides that majority of HIV infected men (58.4%) use drugs through intravenous injection and nearly all the women have been infected through the heterosexual way (98.8%).

Majority of cases of HIV infection have been registered in Yerevan – 314, which is 45.5% of all the registered cases, then comes Shirak province – 10.5%.

36. 2009 ANNOUNCED YEAR OF THE YOUTH IN CIS [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

2009 has been announced a year of the Youth in CIS countries. Head of the youth policy department of Armenian Sport and Youth Affairs Ministry Arsen Soghomonian told Armenpress that a number of events are intended during the year.

In summer a republican youth conference will be held on "Youth, reality, prospects" where a number of issues the youth is concerned with will be discussed.

Before the conference a working group will be established in which heads of youth and different non-governmental organizations will be involved, and an attempt will be made to clarify the main themes



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to be discussed. Within the frameworks of the conference a contest of program grants will also be announced this year and the best youth programs will be financed.

In collaboration with CIS states a youth inter-cultural festival will be organized in Armenia in September which aims at supporting inter-cultural dialogue and teaching, preservation of cultural variety, participation of youth in this process as well as development of cooperation. Youth delegations from CIS as well as many European countries will take part in the festival.

37. WOLVES KEEPING THE RESIDENTS OF KAPAN NEW ASTGHABERD VILLAGE IN HORROR [ARMENPRESS, 02/20/09]

From November 2008 by now nearly 35 domestic animals have become share for wolves in the New Astghaberd community of Kapan region.

Head of the village Surik Tevanian told Armenpress that at night they enter the village with packs and keep the villagers in horror. With an aim to provide security of people the head of the village decided to install night lightening in the village.

The Tetev branch of "ArmElnet" company supports them in this issue which has already provided cable. The Syunik regional nature protection inspection also supports the New Astghaberd community in the fight against the wolves and from time to time organizes wolf hunting together with workers of hunters' union and police, though these works by now had no results in New Astghaberd.

SPORTS

38. SECOND TOUR'S COMPETITIONS TAKE PLACE IN INTERNATIONAL BOXING TOURNAMENT IN YEREVAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

The Russia-Georgia and Armenia-Kazakhstan competitions held in the International Boxing Team Tournament at Karen Demirchian Sports and Cultural Complex on February 17 finished with the score of 24:14 and 22:17, respectively.

The Georgia-Kazakhstan, Armenia-Russia competitions are scheduled for February 18.

39. ALBERT AZARIAN'S 80TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY MARKED IN YEREVAN [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/18/09]

A festive event dedicated to the 80th birth anniversary of Armenia's best sportsman of the 20th century Albert Azarian took place on February 17 at Yerevan A. Spendiarian State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. Exclusive recordings of Azarian's performances were shown during the event.

RA Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs Armen Grigorian, Yerevan Deputy Mayor Kamo Areyan congratulated A. Azarian. Gagik Tsarukian, the Chairman of the National Olympic Committee of Armenia, awarded A. Azarian Trdat III Arshakuni medal and a car.

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