



NEWS BULLETIN

Embassy of the Republic of Armenia

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Presidential News

Yerevan, 1 December. President Robert Kocharian received a delegation headed by Habibullah Bitaraf, the Minister of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The delegation was in Armenia for the launching of the construction of the Armenian section of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline, as well as for the opening of the second line of the high voltage electricity transmission system of Agarak-Shinuhair. Cooperation in this sphere has been a success and an agreement for the construction of the third line was signed during the visit. President Kocharian underlined that Armenia is genuinely interested in strengthening bilateral relations with Iran and is ready to maintain the current pace of cooperation. The head of the Iranian delegation declared that the construction of the Iranian part of the pipeline would start in the coming months. Issues related to the construction of the Kajaran tunnel, import of fuel from Iran to Armenia, as well as the possibilities of using Iranian technology for the construction of electricity systems Armenia were also discussed.

Yerevan, 3 December. Strengthening of the Armenian-Russian friendly relations, promotion of cultural ties, enlarging the volumes of export and import was discussed during President Kocharian's meeting with a delegation headed by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

Yerevan, 15 December. President Kocharian received the Chairman of the Russian State Duma Boris Gryzlov who was in Yerevan on an official visit. The parties discussed development of the Armenian-Russian relations in political and economic spheres as well as issues related to harmonization of legislation and cooperation in international organizations.

Parliamentary News

St Petersburg 34, December. The National Assembly delegation headed by Speaker Artur Baghdassaryan participated in the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Council session in St. Petersburg. The Armenian delegation also took

part in meetings of the political, international cooperation, legal, defence and security committees of the IPA.

Yerevan, 3 December. Tigran Torossyan, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and Chairman of the NA Ad-hoc Committee on European integration, received a delegation headed by Oskars Kastens, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Latvian Saeima. Stressing that Armenia's final goal is to join the European Union, NA Deputy Speaker said that the Latvian experience could be useful for Armenia in that respect. Mr. Torossyan highlighted the necessity of regional integration, which could be a precondition for conflict settlement. He also noted that cooperation within the framework of "EU-New Neighbourhood" would be more beneficial. The Deputy Speaker informed the guests that it was envisaged to hold a referendum of constitutional reforms in June 2005.

Yerevan, 11 December. 26 excelling students of various higher educational institutions of Armenia received special certificates from National Assembly Speaker Artur Baghdassaryan. He announced that new education laws and reforms would be passed by the parliament in 2005 and Armenia would soon join the Bologna agreement, which would pave the way for European diploma recognition and academic mobility, providing for a number of positive changes for students.

Yerevan, 14-16 December. Issues of interstate and inter-parliamentary co-operation were discussed during the meeting of the NA Speaker Artur Baghdassaryan with the Russian Federation State Duma Chairman Boris Gryzlov. During a meeting with the Chairs of parliamentary standing committees and Heads of factions the efficiency of Armenia-Russia Inter-parliamentary Commission in elaborating of model laws, as well as implementation of joint projects in the sphere of science, education and culture, promotion of interregional relations and partnership at

international organizations was specially highlighted.

Yerevan, 24 December. The Armenian Parliament ratified the Government's decision to send Armenian specialists to take part in reconstruction works in Iraq. The Parliament voted for Armenia joining the Memorandum concluded between Poland and 19 other countries, including Armenia. Armenian specialists include three physicians (a cardiologist, a general practitioner and a psychiatrist), 10 sappers and 30 drivers. They are all volunteers. [They left for Iraq on January 18th.]

Governmental News

Sofia, 7 December. Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian addressed the 12th Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The two-day meeting was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on December 6-7 and addressed issues including the war against terrorism, the struggle to promote tolerance, structural and organizational reforms, as well as the organization's mission in promoting democratic values and practices around the world. At the conclusion of the Ministerial meeting, a Statement of the Ministerial Council on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict was adopted, the only consensus document on any of the conflicts within the OSCE area. As next year Belgium assumes the chairmanship, Minister Oskanian met with Dr. Karel de Gucht, Belgium's Minister of Foreign Affairs. They discussed bilateral issues, and Minister Oskanian expressed satisfaction that Belgium is Armenia's largest trading partner. Minister Oskanian briefed his counterpart on the present status of the NK conflict resolution within the OSCE Minsk Group framework, and on Armenia's relations with the EU. Minister Oskanian met also with EU Commissioner for External Relations, Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner to discuss Armenia's involvement in the European Neighbourhood Policy, Armenia's interest in deepening relations with EU institutions. Similar topics were on agenda in Minister Oskanian's meetings with other EU senior officials.

Brussels, 8 December. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian participated in NATO EAPC Foreign Ministerial meeting in Brussels. He met with ambassadors of EAPC-member countries, as well as representatives of European policy planning think tanks. Armenia-Turkey bilateral relations, as well as perspectives of Armenian-European integration were key issues of the

discussions. The minister stressed Armenia's intentions of further developing Armenia-EU bilateral ties within the frame of the EU New Neighbourhood Policy.

In his meeting with Mr. Olli Rehn, commissioner of the European Commission for Enlargement Minister Oskanian represented Armenian position on the upcoming talks of Turkey's accession to the EU.

The same evening Minister Oskanian delivered a speech on the current developments and perspectives in the South Caucasus at the Royal Institute of the International Relations of Belgium.

Brussels, 9 December . As a follow-up to their meeting in Sofia, the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in Brussels to discuss possible solutions for the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The meeting resulted in a decision to continue the "Prague format" negotiations.

On the same day Minister Oskanian met with Ambassador Talvitie, Special Representative of the EU on the South Caucasus. They discussed issues of cooperation between the EU and Armenia with respect to the New Neighbourhood policy, as well as the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

In his meeting with Robert F. Simmons, NATO's Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, Minister Oskanian discussed NATO-Armenia relations, focusing on the Individual Partnership Plan.

Vartan Oskanian also participated in NATO EAPC regular meeting of Foreign Ministers.

Yerevan, 6 December. Rouben Shougarian, Deputy Foreign Minister received Simon Smith, Head of Eastern Department of FCO UK, who was in Armenia within the framework of his regional visit.

During the meeting both sides stressed the importance of the enhancement of British-Armenian relations in all spheres. The parties further explored relations between South Caucasus and the European community. The discussion that evolved within the political framework of The Wider Europe and The New Neighbourhood policy explored issues related to increased level of interaction between the countries of the South Caucasus and European

Union and new opportunities offered by this new EU policy.

Issues related to Armenia - Turkey relations were raised against the background of imminent negotiations for Turkey's accession and Simon Smith was briefed on the current stage and perspectives of the peaceful settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Yerevan, 15 December. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia issued the following Statement on EU-Turkey accession talks: *“Armenia welcomes the December 15 vote of the European Parliament, which calls on the European Commission and the European Union Council to demand that Turkey recognizes the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide, and opens the border with Armenia without delay. As expected, the decision of the European Council to begin accession talks in 2005 has been announced. Armenia hopes that the recommendations of the European Parliament will be made part of the EU Turkey agenda.*

We have frequently stated that Turkey's membership in the European Union can be beneficial to Armenia and can have a positive impact on the region, if Turkey meets all criteria. In this regard, Armenia has asked the EU countries to take into consideration the fact that Turkey continues to unilaterally keep the Armenian border closed, to criminalize the use of the term genocide, and to place unacceptable pre-conditions before beginning the process of normalizing relations with Armenia.

The decision of the European Parliament demonstrates that the European community understands and shares Armenia's concerns regarding the present unacceptable state of Armenian-Turkish relations. This situation, with all implied uncertainties, is a serious threat to the development of the South Caucasus, as well as to European prospects.

We are convinced that if Turkey responds to the appeals of the European community, then it will be much easier to overcome all obstacles and secure stability and prosperity for our region. That would also be a strong signal that Turkey is ready to enter the European Union with a clean slate”.

Other News

The Hague, 21 December. On December, 21, Dutch Parliament has unanimously adopted a

motion concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The motion was introduced during the debate on the outcome of the European Summit in connection with the start of accession negotiations with Turkey. In the motion adopted by the Parliament, the government is asked "to bring up the recognition of the Armenian Genocide continuously and expressly in the dialogue with Turkey". The motion was introduced by the Chairman of Christian Union fraction Mr. Rouvoet and supported by all other political parties in the Parliament.

Mosul, Iraq, 8 December. After an explosion in two mosques in Iraq on the 5th of December, two Christian religious buildings – Armenian and Chaldean churches in Mosul (northern Iraq) were attacked. The militants had stated before that for every mosque blown up, one church would be destroyed. On 7th December in the afternoon, unidentified gunmen stormed into the city's newly constructed Armenian church, gathered those present, and forced everybody out the church, announcing their intentions to destroy it. The militants then parked a transport loaded with explosives next to the church. The subsequent explosion did a great deal of irreparable damage to the Armenian church.

A similar scenario played out with the attack on the Chaldean church. The only difference was that the explosion was followed by intense fire directed not only at the building, but at all the furnishings inside as well. Neither attack resulted in casualties. On the 8th of December, gunmen appeared at a nearby Armenian church in order to plunder all that had remained inside. It is believed that the attacks were of anti-Christian, rather than specifically anti-Armenian nature.

23 December. Ambassador Vladimir Kazimirov, the personal representative of the Russian president on Karabakh issue in 1992-96, sent a letter to David Atkinson, the PACE reporter on the Karabakh issue and expressed his indignation with the emphasized pro-Azerbaijani nature of the report. Kazimirov mentioned several factual inaccuracies in the report and stated:

“The most important international documents on Karabakh resolution have been prepared on a balanced basis in order to facilitate compromises from all parties. None of these have been so much biased towards Azerbaijan as your project”.

The former mediator in the Karabakh issue, who is well acquainted with the Karabakh conflict, having visited the region 47 times during his office, reminds Atkinson that in his as well as in the preceding reports little attention is paid to the prehistory of the conflict, the military actions in 1992-94 and the process of resolution.

“Many problems connected with the Karabakh conflict occurred by the fault of the parties to the conflict, whereas in your project only the Armenian side was blamed. I do not want to justify the Armenians at all but it is necessary to give an unbiased assessment of all the parties. Moreover, it was Azerbaijan to support the settlement of the conflict by force and to refuse the steps directed at easing tensions,” he writes. Kazimirov emphasizes that in the UN resolutions and OSCE documents Nagorno Karabakh is recognized as a party to the conflict. *“In your report this problem is evaded, Armenia and Azerbaijan are recognized as conflict parties which favours Baku’s interests.”*

Kazimirov is surprised that the Davis-Atkinson report makes reference to the four resolutions of the UN Security Council but only the demand of withdrawal of Armenian forces is stressed. *“Before May 1994, the Azerbaijani authorities who neglected the main requirements of the four resolutions and betted on the settlement of the conflict through force, have broken the ceasefire for a number of times. Azerbaijan accepted the ceasefire not because it honoured the resolutions of the UN Council for Security but because of their utter defeat in the war and the threat of losing power. There were enough problems with Armenians also, but Armenians were more flexible and constructive,”* Kazimirov mentions.

The former Russian diplomat admits that Armenians did not withdraw their forces and insisted on the package resolution. But *“in fact, the Azerbaijani government did not honour any requirement of the four resolutions of the UN Security Council. Neither does it honour them presently. Moreover, it demands that Turkey maintain the blockade of Armenia, regularly threatens to settle the conflict through force, encourages the anti-Armenian hysteria in Azerbaijan, but there is not a word on this [in Atkinson’s report]”*.

Finally, Kazimirov reminds that Armenians control only 5 regions completely and 2 partially, and not 8 regions as Atkinson mentions. The former Russian mediator mentions that Azerbaijan has also occupied Armenian territories, such as Artsvashen. At the end of the letter Kazimirov states that such

an prestigious organization as the PACE must have a balanced approach to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

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