



NEWS BULLETIN

Embassy of the Republic of Armenia

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Presidential News

Yerevan, 3 February. President Robert Kocharyan expressed his condolences to President Mikhail Sahakashvili on the death of the Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania. He particularly stated that “Zurab Zhvania had a great contribution to the establishment of statehood and strengthening of democracy in neighbouring Georgia. His input in deepening centuries-long friendship of our peoples is invaluable”.

Yerevan, 15 February. President Robert Kocharyan expressed his condolences to the President of the Lebanese Republic Emile Lahud on the assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri.

The president called Hariri “a prominent political figure whose contribution to the strengthening of the Lebanese statehood and input in the deepening of the Armenian-Lebanese relations is immeasurable”.

President Kocharyan called the former PM’s murder “a brutal challenge not only against Lebanon but also against all the peoples of the region”.

Yerevan, 15 February. Armenia will build a second highway leading to Iran, which will allow a sizable increase in cargo traffic between the two neighboring countries, announced President Robert Kocharyan’s office.

A statement by the presidential press service said the construction works will start in April and finish next year. It said the Armenian government will spend 6.6 billion drams (\$14 million) for that purpose this year.

The new road will stretch from Syunik’s administrative capital, Kapan to Meghri, a small town on the Iranian border. The two towns are already connected by a 50-kilometer highway that runs through the Kajaran mountain pass, the highest in Armenia. It is narrow and often impassable in winter months, and affects negatively Armenian-Iranian trade volumes.

The new road will be shorter, run at a lower altitude and will allow the passage of heavier transport.

Yerevan, 17 February. President Robert Kocharyan received Sergei Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation who arrived in Yerevan on an official visit.

Minister Lavrov briefed President Kocharyan about President Vladimir Putin’s upcoming visit to Armenia. Events dedicated to the Year of Russia in the Armenia will launch at that time.

President Robert Kocharyan expressed his satisfaction with the level of Armenian-Russian relations, and the two sides also spoke about the activities of the Armenian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission. Sergei Lavrov informed the President that the Russian side is willing to speedily solve issues pertaining to the activation of the Armenian enterprises under Russian management.

Among topics discussed at the meeting were also issues related to regional cooperation, in particular development of the regional transportation routes, and possibilities for expansion of multilateral economic cooperation.

The parties spoke also about the present stage of the NK peace process and its possible developments and also discussed issues related to the bilateral and multilateral cooperation in international structures.

Yerevan, 23 February. President Robert Kocharyan received Renato Bruzzo, the famous Italian opera singer.

The singer will perform a concert in Yerevan in the framework of the Armenian Genocide commemoration events.

Yerevan, 24 February. President Kocharyan received Roger Robinson, the Head of the World Bank Yerevan Office.

Mr. Robinson noted that at the beginning of 2005 revenue collection planned by the budget has been conducted on a high level, and expressed satisfaction over the transfer of social payments collection to the Tax Administration, noting that it increased the effectiveness of the process.

Joint programs realized by the World Bank and the Government of Armenia, especially in the areas of water supply and heating were discussed at the meeting.

Roger Robinson noted with satisfaction the process of new buildings construction for the courts, which is being conducted through the support of the World Bank, noting that three such buildings have already been completed in Yerevan.

The two sides spoke also about the perspectives of cooperation particularly in the areas of energy and civil aviation.

Yerevan, 24 February. President Kocharyan received the Special Representative of the Secretary General of NATO for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Robert Simmons.

Among the topics discussed was the Armenia-NATO cooperation and prospects for the development of the bilateral ties.

Two sides spoke also about the regional issues and the NK peace process. Robert Simmons informed President Kocharyan on the NATO's cooperation with other CIS countries.

Parliamentary

Yerevan, 4 February. Chairperson of the NA Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture and Youth Affairs, Hranush Hakobyan received Alex Avanesian, President of the Forum of Armenian Associations of Europe and Toros Sakerian, the ex-president of the

forum. The Armenian forum was established in 1998 and is to consolidate the Armenians of Europe, combine their forces and promote the European integration of Armenia.

Mrs. Hakobyan highlighted the role of the family, school and church in maintaining Armenian identity and called for greater attention to these factors. The development of the cultural ties and information sphere between the European countries, international organizations and Armenia were also discussed.

Governmental

Yerevan, 8 February. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian received OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs Yuri Merzlyakov (Russia), Bernard Facie (France) and Steven Mann's Assistant Ms. Elisabeth Roode (USA). The Co-chairs, who accompanied OSCE's fact-finding mission to Nagorno Karabakh, visited Yerevan *en route* from Stepanakert to their respective capitals.

During the meeting, the parties discussed various organizational issues. Upon the co-chairs' suggestion, the possibility of organizing a meeting between Armenia's and Azerbaijan's foreign ministers in the Prague format was also discussed. Minister Oskanian expressed his willingness to re-start the meetings at earliest convenience.

Munich, 12 February. Minister Oskanian participated in the 41st Munich Conference of Security Policy. The keynote speakers at the Conference were Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, Horst Koehler, Germany's President, Gerhard Schroeder Chancellor, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General, Donald Rumsfeld, US Defense Secretary and others.

The forum stressed the need for conflict resolution through dialogue. In this framework, the participants referred to the Middle East peace process and shift of priorities due to the changes in US Administration.

More than 250 high-ranking officials and politicians attending the Conference also reflected on the future of NATO and its leadership in the context of foreign policy and security doctrines currently taking

shape in Europe and discussed the impact of developments in the Ukraine and Georgia on integration processes taking place in the post-Soviet space.

Minister Oskanian had bilateral meetings and discussions with Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General, and several other officials representing European countries.

Yerevan, 17 February. Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian welcomed Sergei Lavrov's visit to Yerevan, noting that in the last decade Armenian-Russian relations have deepened, with strategic cooperation between the two based on common interests. Minister Lavrov, too, expressed his satisfaction with the level of cooperation and the positive direction of interstate contacts. As evidence, he pointed to the fact that 2005 is the Year of Russia in Armenia.

Discussing the current stage of negotiations surrounding the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Minister Lavrov expressed hope that the Prague Process would give the two sides the opportunity to find common ground for the quick settlement of the conflict, and reaffirmed Russia's readiness to serve as guarantor for whatever agreement is reached by the sides.

The two ministers stressed the importance of a unified policy on the part of the countries of the South Caucasus and Russia towards the reestablishment of communication lines in the region, noting that this would at the same time benefit the settlement of existing conflicts.

They also discussed a variety of programs and activities in the fields of trade, culture, science, education, information, youth, sports and tourism, which will begin by mid-March, launching the Year of Russia in Armenia.

During his one-day visit, Minister Lavrov, who had last visited Armenia over a decade earlier, placed a wreath at the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial, visited Armenia's Slavonic University, and participated in a joint news conference with Minister Oskanian

Malabo, 20-21 February. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian paid an official visit to Equatorial Guinea. The purpose of the visit

was to establish relations between Armenia and Equatorial Guinea in various areas, as well as to discuss the fate of the six Armenian pilots, who have been imprisoned there since March 8, 2004.

The Armenian delegation included also Sergei Manaserian, Armenia's Ambassador to Bulgaria, formerly Ambassador of Armenia to Egypt. Ambassador Manaserian has been engaged in the case of the Armenian pilots since the beginning and has visited Equatorial Guinea several times.

Minister Oskanian held several meetings with high-level officials in the capital, Malabo. A Memorandum of Understanding on holding talks between the two foreign ministries was signed during the visit. It was also agreed to exchange ambassadors in the near future.

Minister Oskanian met also with Miguel Abia Biteo Borico, Equatorial Guinea's Prime Minister and with State Prosecutor Jose Olo Obono. They discussed several issues, as well as that of the Armenian pilots. The possibility of signing a bilateral agreement on extradition was discussed.

Minister Oskanian was able to meet with the pilots, as well.

Yerevan, 25 February – The Government of Armenia signed three Country Programme Action Plans (2005-2009) with the UNDP, UNICEF and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). They were signed by Vartan Oskanian, Minister of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the Government, and Sheldon Yett, UNICEF Representative and Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP/UNFPA Resident Representative. The Action Plans were developed based on the key national priorities set out in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In August 2003, the Government of Armenia and the civil society adopted a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) aimed at generating high rates of economic growth and redistributing this growth to social programmes for the most socially disadvantaged. By implementing the PRSP, the Government aims to establish a sound foundation for eradicating mass poverty and improving living standards by 2015 in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

The Action Plans will be implemented through a broad range of partnerships that will include the Government, Parliament, local administrations, UN Agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors, civil society, and leading national and international businesses.

Embassy News

London, 11-17 February. Ciné lumière at the French Institute hosted the Armenian Film Festival *Return to the Promised Land*. This was the biggest such event in the UK for many years and offered an eye-opening glimpse into the Armenian culture.

Showcasing shorts, features, documentaries and artists' films, the season featured not only directors like Atom Egoyan and undisputed classics like Parajanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates*, but also both older and contemporary films and directors not well known to wider international public. Panel discussions placed the films in the context of both Armenian experience and contemporary film and provided a unique chance to encounter Armenian cinema.

The festival was launched with a welcoming reception followed by an opening speech by HE Dr. Vahe Gabrielyan, Ambassador of Armenia to the UK. In his speech Ambassador Gabrielyan stated in part:

"Culture is a very short and safe bridge between nations and today we add another sturdy element to its construction. I am glad to say that we build from both sides. The Second International Film Festival, called "Golden Apricot" will take place in Yerevan in July. Its overall theme is "Crossroads of culture and civilization"...

....This is an important year for us. We celebrate the 1600th anniversary of the Armenian Alphabet, a milestone of Christian Civilization, and remember the victims of the 1915 Genocide of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey at its 90th anniversary. I hope that the London Armenian Film Festival will give you a better understanding of Armenians, their culture, mentality, and their place in the international community."

Other News

Stepanakert, 10 February. The authorities of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic consider the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted on the basis of David Atkinson's report as a negative document.

According to NKR Deputy Foreign Minister Masis Mayilian, one of the reasons for that is the fact that the NKR Parliamentarians were not invited to the January PACE hearings on the Nagorno Karabakh issue.

Speaking of the process of the Karabakh conflict settlement, Masis Mayilian stressed that the current framework of the negotiations, in which Armenia and Azerbaijan participate, does not reflect the real configuration of the conflict.

The NKR Deputy Foreign Minister reaffirmed the position of official Stepanakert that the problem could not be resolved without Nagorno Karabakh participation in the negotiation process and without taking into consideration the opinion of the people of Nagorno Karabakh.

Washington D.C., 17 February.

Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ) recognized and commended the people of Nagorno Karabakh for the 17th Anniversary of the Nagorno Karabakh Liberation movement. He submitted a statement into the Congressional Record, stating in part:

"February 20, 2005 will mark the 17th anniversary of the liberation movement of the people of the Nagorno Karabakh (NK). Seventeen years ago the people of NK petitioned the Soviet government to reunite them with their compatriots in Armenia.

The Armenians of NK were placed within the borders of Azerbaijan in 1921, as a result Joseph Stalin's "divide and conquer" strategy. Armenians of NK were subjected to brutal Soviet Azerbaijani rule for 70 years.

It is imperative that we recognize the fact that NK's referendum to secede from Azerbaijan in 1988 was pursuant to Soviet law....

In 1988, ... Public expressions of determination by the Armenians of NK

were met with a campaign of ethnic cleansing, deporting the Armenians of NK and Azerbaijan.

In 1991, as Armenia and Azerbaijan followed most soviet states in succession from the USSR, NK also voted to secede. In an internationally monitored referendum, the NK population overwhelmingly voted to establish an independent Nagorno Karabakh Republic....

Following this referendum.... the Azeri army began a full-scale war, which took thousands of lives over three years, but which eventually ended up with NKR repelling Azeri forces. This victory was gained with an army that was out-manned and out-gunned, but had desire and guile that proved to be overwhelming.

...I had the opportunity to travel to NKR to witness the Presidential elections there, where we served as official monitors. I am proud to say that all election observers that participated in this historic event gave an overwhelmingly positive response.

...This process is astounding considering that NKR is not recognized internationally; that they still must deal every day with Azeri aggression, and that their economy is still devastated from the war. The elections were reported to have met, if not exceeded international standards.

...I congratulate the people of NKR for the 17th anniversary of the Nagorno Karabakh Liberation movement and their incredible determination to establish a free and open democratic society.

Stepanakert, 20 February. In connection with the 17th anniversary of the historic Session of the Council of the People's Deputies of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (February 20, 1988) the National Assembly of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic issued a statement, in which, particularly, noted, that in connection with Artsakh Revival Day, the NKR National Assembly:

-reiterates the willingness of the Nagorno Karabakh people to build an independent democratic state on the basis of the right for self-determination;

-assures, that the NKR authorities stay adherent to the peaceful settlement of the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group;

- calls again for the Azerbaijani authorities to give up the hopeless policy of confrontation and aim the efforts at the establishment of peace and stability in the region, the formation of atmosphere of trust and tolerance;

-applies to the Parliaments of all countries with an appeal to assist the international recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic;

- hopes, that the international community will worthily appreciate the efforts of the NKR people aimed at the creation of legal state and civil society;

- expresses the assurance, that the whole Armenian people in future as well will assist to the political and social-economic development of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

Geneva, 21 February. The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches called for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The Public Issues committee of the WCC central committee recommended to the organization's general secretary "to propose to all member churches to make Sunday April 24 a day of memory of the Armenian Genocide and to consider further appropriate actions". That day is the 90th anniversary of the tragic massacre of one-and-a-half-million Armenians in Turkey and the deportation of another million from their homeland.

"From the Christian perspective, the path towards justice and reconciliation requires the recognition of the crime committed as a sine qua non condition for the healing of memories and the possibility of forgiveness", stated the Public Issues committee.

Berlin, 22 February. The German opposition party Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) put forth in the German parliament a resolution to mark the upcoming 90th anniversary of the events in the former Turkish Ottoman

Empire involving the Turks' treatment of the ethnic Armenian minority. In the resolution, the CDU said that on April 24, 1915, the order was given by the Ottoman Turks to arrest and deport the Armenian cultural and political elites, leading to the murder of most of them. It said 1.2 to 1.5 million Armenians were victims. The resolution said that to this day, Turkey as the legal successor to the Ottoman Empire is still denying that the events were planned and massacres carried out.

"This position of rejection stands in contradiction to the idea of reconciliation which guides the community of values in the European Union which Turkey wants to join," the CDU/CSU resolution said.

Turkey's ambassador to Germany, Mehmet Ali Irtemcelik angrily denounced the resolution.

In January, the eastern German state of Brandenburg, bowing to diplomatic pressure from Turkey, struck the subject of the Turkish genocide against Armenians from its classroom curriculum. But then this move was partially rescinded, after pressure by Armenian representatives, so that the genocide against Armenians is taught in the classroom as being one of several examples of genocide in the 20th Century.

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