



BULLETIN

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- ❖ *Armenia-Diaspora Third Conference*
- ❖ *15th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Armenia*
- ❖ *French President Jacques Chirac's State visit to Armenia*
- ❖ *Digest of other Armenian events*
- ❖ *Embassy and Community events*

Armenia-Diaspora Third Conference



PHOTOLURE

Yerevan, 18-20 September. The third Armenia-Diaspora Conference convened at the Karen Demirchian Complex in Yerevan, hosting over 2000 individuals and representatives of Armenian community organisations from all over the world. A delegation from the Armenian Diaspora of the United Kingdom, headed by Mr. Ara Palamoudian, Chairman of The Armenian Community & Church Council of Great Britain, also participated in the Conference.

In the light of the 15th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Armenia, the Conference looked into the past years and considered how history and current geo-political realities raise new issues for the Armenian nation, and to seek possibilities and prospects for resolving them together.

On September 18th, the current condition and future prospects for Armenia-Diaspora relations and cooperation were addressed – a traditional concern which requires new approaches, taking into consideration geopolitical developments. Speakers included President Robert Kocharyan and other leaders of the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, the Catholicos of All Armenians, the

Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia, as well as other spiritual leaders, and the heads of all Diaspora-wide structures.

During the second half of the day and on the next day, the conference focused on rural development in Armenia. The objective was to rally the resources of the Armenian government and Armenia's business community, the Diaspora and international organisations, to renovate rural infrastructure, facilitate economic development and create the necessary contemporary conditions to live and work in rural communities.

Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian called on Diaspora to be "apostles" for a program spearheaded through the Foreign Ministry that would erase poverty in Armenia's villages by 2020. Mr. Oskanian launched the "Rural Poverty Eradication" program by introducing the 112-page two-language volume published specially for the Conference.

Endorsements for the minister's initiative (first announced in July) came also from international aid agencies including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

New York businessman Garo Armen, whose Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) became a model for the Government's new plan, praised Armenia for its "outstanding job, with its limited resources", but called on his fellow Diaspora to rally behind the Foreign Minister's appeal.

For his part, Minister Oskanian said the Rural Poverty Eradication program offers a chance for "every Armenian to participate", and challenged the "2000 apostles" (conference attendees) to engage their communities.

On September 19th, a forum on "New Answers to Old Questions for a New Nation-State in the 21st Century" convened. The aim was to look at new approaches for understanding the elements of culture and identity, their application to Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora, as well as to understand how other Diaspora-Homeland relations have evolved, especially when the Diaspora is older, larger and more diverse than the State.

The Conference concluded by adopting a Declaration, quoted below:

Armenia-Diaspora Third Conference Declaration

Armenia-Diaspora Third Conference, which took place on the eve of a historical event – 15th Anniversary of the Armenian independence, reiterates our resolve and determination to promote in every possible way the strengthening of Armenian Statehood, as a vital precondition for the resolution of all problems faced by all Armenians and for our continuous advancement.

...The Republic of Armenia, as a state, assumes with all its capacity and power, the responsibility to provide the necessary conditions for every Armenian to participate in state-building, and in Armenia's strengthening and development processes.

The Conference reaffirms that our national identity is indivisibly linked with Christianity, and that the mission of the Armenian Church in the spiritual and ethical life of the Armenian people, as well as in the expansion and deepening of Armenia-Diaspora relations, is momentous and significant.

The Conference approves the Rural Poverty Eradication Program and appeals to all structures, organizations and to all our people as a whole to actively participate in the planning, organization and implementation of the Program.

In our modern history, the greatest achievement of our people has been the liberation of Artsakh, which is the expression of our people's unwavering resolve to defend our historic rights. The liberation of Artsakh has become the clear evidence of our unity, solidarity and commitment.

We reiterate our total responsibility and complete support for the right of the people of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic to live in freedom and to exercise their right of self-determination.

...Concurrently, the issues faced by the Diaspora remain mostly the same. These are preservation and continuity of national identity, traditions and culture in the various host countries, in different religious and ethno-cultural conditions. Toward that end the Republic of Armenia lends its total support to Diaspora.

The Conference reaffirms its resolve to attain international recognition of the Armenian Genocide in all countries. The Conference welcomes and expresses its gratitude to all the just-thinking friends of the Armenian people, whose efforts testify the growing feeling of responsibility on the part of the international community for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

We are confident that principles of democracy, human rights and liberty are the priorities for a properly functioning state and social structures.

Our fundamental values are peace, friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation among peoples, the right of individuals and peoples to live in liberty and exercise freedom of speech and faith.

We are resolved and determined to protect our national rights and interests in the 21st century, to enforce peace and unity, to solve our problems, to fulfil our dreams together in the name of our people, for the safe and secure development and advancement of our homeland.

The first Armenia Diaspora Conference was held on September 22-23, in 1999, with the participation of over thousand people. The Second Armenia-Diaspora Conference was held in May 2000, with various commissions submitting their final reports to hundreds of delegates from 45 countries around the world.

Independence Day: 15th Anniversary Celebrations

On the 21st of September, with splendour and great enthusiasm, Armenians in Armenia and elsewhere celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the day when Armenia gained her independence.

The day started with a wreath-laying ceremony at Yerablur – the Cemetery of soldiers fallen at the Karabakh War.

This was followed by a military parade in the Republic Square -- the biggest military show in seven years. Hundreds of soldiers, military vehicles, towed artillery systems and other pieces of hardware paraded past the country's leaders standing on a podium erected in Yerevan's main square for the occasion. Thousands were present at the procession that was broadcast live by main Armenian television stations.

The parade began with Defence Minister Serzh Sargsyan inspecting the troops in a white convertible vehicle and congratulating each section of troops representing the five Armenian army corps, the interior and border troops. Their march around the Square was followed by a procession of armoured personnel carriers and artillery systems. Warplanes, and military helicopters roared overhead in the meantime.



In his speech, President Robert Kocharyan praised the role of the Armed Forces in Armenia's post-

Soviet history. "The armed forces of the Republic of Armenia are a reliable defender of the Motherland of all Armenians," he said.

The military parade was the highlight of official celebrations taking place in the Armenian capital and other parts of the country throughout the day.

Later during the day a Gala Concert was given at the Vazgen Sargsian Stadium, displaying a spectacular choreographic show presenting episodes of the Armenian history from pre-historic times to the present. The concert ended with fireworks. A late-night pop concert staged in another major Yerevan square concluded the celebrations.

Yerevan, 21 September. In his address on the occasion of the 15th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Armenia, President Robert Kocharyan stated:

" For the people with millennia long history the last fifteen years of statehood is just a blink. However, it took in a war, energy crisis, blockade, and all the hurdles of the transitional period. The starting point for establishing Armenian statehood was extremely difficult. But the spirit of our people was high and great was the desire to overcome all the difficulties in the name of freedom and dignity. In the flames of war that spirit gave birth to heroes and formed the army, which we are proud of. The armed forces of the Republic of Armenia are a powerful defender of the Motherland of all Armenians. The Republic of Armenia is the greatest achievement of determined hard work of many generations.

Today Armenia is a steadily developing country. Successful reforms are underway in all areas of life. The high tempo of economic growth makes Armenia a new, more promising country. It is of vital importance, since competitive and effective economy is the main guarantee for the building of a truly democratic state.

A number of strategic programs, which are being implemented in our country, are aimed at the general development and advancement of our people and our country, and particularly, at the resolution of social problems. Among priorities the state has identified poverty reduction, improvement of life quality, and equal development of the country as a whole.

In the establishment of the Armenian state the input of Diaspora is hardly to be overestimate. Since day one it has mobilized all its resources and stood by our state. Symbolically, the third Armenia-Diaspora conference is also being held during these jubilee celebrations. It is also important that through the years of independence the factor of Diaspora has been reevaluated, and our relations have become reciprocal and complementary.

In foreign relations Armenia has proved to be a

stable, reliable and predictable partner. We continue to successfully deepen the engagement of our country in international affairs, preserving and strengthening at the same time traditional ties.

The just resolution of the NK conflict remains the highest priority. And it can only be based on the respect and recognition of the Artsakhi people's right to self-determination. Nothing should threaten security and development of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

Such a precious jubilee is both inspiring and binding – we must do the utmost for the strengthening of Armenia. We should spare no effort to build a new country being citizens of which will make proud many generations of our people."

President Chirac's State Visit to Armenia

Yerevan, 29 September - 01 October. By the invitation of his Armenian counterpart, President Robert Kocharyan, the French President Jacques Chirac paid a state visit to Armenia. The French delegation included Foreign Minister Phillip Douste Blazy, Transport, Tourism and Seafaring Minister Dominique Perben, State Service Minister Christian Jacob and Culture and Communication Minister Reno Donedio de Vabre. President Chirac was accompanied also by a big delegation of French businessmen, prominent representatives of art, culture, academic and sport communities, members of the French Armenian community and journalists.

The official welcoming ceremony was held at Yerevan Zvartnots airport. A state dinner party in honour of the French President and Mrs. Bernadette Chirac was given at the President's residence.

After talks at President Kocharyan's residence, a Press Conference was held, where the two Presidents spoke to reporters. "I would like to remind that France recognised the Armenian Genocide on state level. This is our law and it's obligatory for everyone," French President Jacques Chirac said, when commenting to a *Le Figaro* reporter on the Socialist Party's initiative to adopt a law criminalising the Armenian Genocide denial. He added that any demonstration of racism and xenophobia is punished in France in compliance with the Penal Code.

Responding to a *Le Monde* reporter's question regarding Turkey's accession to the EU, Armenian President R. Kocharyan said: "Armenia is interested in a predictable and democratic state Turkey can become". In his words, the talks on Turkey's accession to the EU should give the answers to urgent questions including the Armenian Genocide issue. For his part Jacques Chirac underscored that the image of each country enhances if it acknowledges its past. "Germany has only gained

by recognising the Holocaust. The faults of the past should be acknowledged. This does credit to the nation and Turkey itself should be interested in the Armenian Genocide recognition," the French President said.

The French delegation laid flowers at Tsitsernakaberd -- the Genocide Memorial in Yerevan to commemorate the victims of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. President Chirac made a note in the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Book. He wrote, "Remember. President of France Jacques Chirac". The French leader and Mrs. Chirac also planted a fir-tree on the alley leading to the Memorial.

The French President was then hosted by His Holiness Garegin II, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On 30th September a ceremony of the official opening of the France Square in central Yerevan took place. The two presidents attended and spoke highly of Armenian-French relations. Afterwards, the Presidents attended an open-air concert of the world-famous French Armenian singer Charles Aznavour in the Republic Square.

The events launched the start of the Year of Armenia in France held under the motto "Armenia, my friend."

Digest of other Armenian events

Bucharest, 04 June. Robert Kocharyan and Ilham Aliiev had negotiations lasting over four hours in Bucharest in the presence of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Karel de Gucht, OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, Andrzej Kasprzyk, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, and Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Later the Presidents met tête-à-tête, following which the talks continued in an enlarged format.

Bucharest, 05 June. President Robert Kocharyan participated in the Summit of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership. In his speech to the Summit he reiterated Armenia's commitment to cooperate in the region, for the mutual benefit of all countries, and touched upon the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and Armenia's vision for its settlement.

Turin, 5 June. Armenia reinforced its status of chess power by winning the World Chess Olympiad in Turin. The Armenian men's team garnered 36 out of 42 points and was recognised the winner of the Tournament of Nations. The men's team included international grand masters Levon Aronyan (the winner of the FIDE world cup), Vladimir Hakobyan, Karen Asryan, Smbat Lputyan, Gabriel Sargsyan and Artashes Minasyan.

Yerevan, 06 June. President Robert Kocharyan received the Ago Group of the CE Committee of

Ministers, headed by the Permanent Representative of Germany to the Council of Europe Roland Wegener. The President of Armenia said that after the last visit of the Ago Group, Armenia concluded important tasks such as adoption of the package of amendments to the Constitution and noted that currently a serious work of bringing the legislation in compliance with the Constitutional changes is underway.

The objective of the Group is to monitor the process of adoption of 67 new laws stemming from the new Constitution. The Group deems it necessary to have the Venice Commission expert opinion on those laws before opening public discussion.

Nagorno Karabakh, 6 June. In compliance with an earlier agreement with authorities of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, an OSCE mission held a planned monitoring at the contact line between Karabakh and Azeri Armed Forces to the east of Seysulan settlement of the Mardakert region of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. Field Assistants of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Peter Key (UK) and Jrzhi Aberle (the Czech Republic) held the monitoring from the positions of the NKR Defense Army. No breaks of the cease-fire regime were registered. However, the Azeri party again failed to take the OSCE observers to its frontline.

London, 06 June. Following intensive lobbying by the Wales-Armenia Solidarity, over half the eligible Welsh Representatives of the UK Parliament signed a motion recognising the Armenian and Assyrian Genocide of 1915.

"This is a historic day for Wales. "There can no longer be any doubt that Wales has recognised the Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. We will continue to expose this government denial of the genocide in order to protect British investment in Turkey and to further Britain's strategic interests in the region. Our priority will be to put the issue of restitution and reparations for the genocide on the political agenda. The reunification of Armenia must no longer be a taboo subject during Turkey's accession talks. We in Wales can raise our voice to insist that Turkey should yield back land to the Armenian nation if she is to accede to the European Union," said a spokesman for Wales-Armenia Solidarity.

Paris, 13 June. A meeting was held between Foreign Minister Oskanian and his Azeri counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov, in accordance with the agreement between the Armenian and Azeri Presidents reached in Bucharest on June 5 during their last meeting. OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs Bernard Fassier of France, and Yuri Merzlyakov of Russia, and Andrzej Kasprzyk, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, were present at the meeting.

The ministers discussed the principles for settling the conflict and the problematic areas which remain unresolved. The Ministers expressed willingness to continue negotiations in order to try to bridge the different positions.

Yerevan, 14 June. Defence Minister Serge Sargsyan and Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian attended the North Atlantic Council (NAC) - Armenia meeting with the ambassadors of the 26 NATO members. The meeting agenda was a discussion of Armenia's implementation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). This followed the first assessment meeting by a delegation of NATO international staff to Armenia in May to evaluate the implementation of the agreement between NATO and Armenia.

Stepanakert, Nagorno Karabakh, 15 June. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic demanded that the Office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE CiO conduct a crisis monitoring in the zone near Azerbaijan, in order to assess the real situation on the spot and refute the accusations of the Azeri party on the arsons allegedly taken place on the territories controlled by Nagorno Karabakh. The NKR MFA expressed readiness to render assistance to the OSCE Mission in conducting the monitoring and ensure the security of its participants on the territories controlled by the NKR.

The initiative of the official Stepanakert was not accepted by Baku.

Ignition of dry grass is caused not only by the hot weather but also firing onto the territories controlled by the NKR by tracer bullets from the Azerbaijani positions. Similar bullets are also fired by Azerbaijani servicemen onto the neutral strip between the borders of the NKR and Azerbaijan.

Yerevan, 17 June. President Robert Kocharyan received a delegation, headed by the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Rodrigo de Rato, which had arrived in Armenia to participate in the meeting of the countries of Holland's Group of IMF and WB.

In the last five years Armenia has been demonstrating impressive economic growth and remarkable macroeconomic policy, the Managing Director of the IMF said. In the IMF-Armenia relations he highlighted the importance of improving tax and customs administration, expansion of tax base, and the fight against corruption.

Yerevan, 19 June. President Robert Kocharyan received Ambassador Miklosh Harashti, the OSCE Representative on freedom of mass media. In the President's words, Armenian media still go through a transition period and bear the typical traits of that period.

Geneva, 21 June. Minister Oskanian attended and addressed the first session of the newly-formed UN Human Rights Council. In his statement, Armenia's Foreign Minister congratulated the Council on its inaugural meeting and wished the Council well in its mandate to place the third pillar of the UN - human rights - on a par with the other two - peace and security, and development. The Minister in particular said:

"I know that it is only when the preconditions for a full and free life of dignity are in place, only then are markets powerful engines of development, only then is critical infrastructure sustainable, and only then do individuals stand up to demand and protect individual and collective human rights.

...In Armenia, we are tackling this greatest challenge through a public-private partnership that will engage the government of Armenia, Armenia's business community, the international community and individual countries, as well as our generous Diaspora, to embark on eradicating rural poverty through a comprehensive, integrated approach. Our intent is to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and to replace hopelessness and desperation with a sense of self-worth and security...

Armenia has and continues to promote stronger international mechanisms to prevent and eradicate the crime of genocide, and all of its precursors - including efforts, too often successful, at not just cleansing a region of its indigenous people, but also erasing their memory. Armenians have survived and gone on to live through each of these attempts. Even today, in the 21st century, we have watched helplessly as the spiritual and cultural markers of our people are decimated."

[Referred to the destruction of the Jugha Cemetery in Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan.] *"This violation of the memory and spirit of centuries of Armenian existence on lands which are today Azerbaijan's is cynical and dangerous. This most recent manifestation of organized violence, in a place where no Armenians live today, and far from the Nagorno Karabakh conflict area, tells us that neither Azerbaijan's methods nor its intent has changed. Such unambivalent, callous demolition of culture and history also destroys trust and peace."*

Speaking about the present state of negotiations with Azerbaijan on the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the Armenian Foreign Minister said, *"If Azerbaijan's one step forward, one step back approach in the negotiations was simply alarming, their recent, desperate offers of autonomy are concrete examples of a retreat from the letter and spirit of these talks, and clearly not in sync with international trends. Offering autonomy to a people who have for nearly two decades been in control of*

their lives on their own historic lands is at the very least, self-deception."

Minsk, 23 June. President Robert Kocharyan participated at the regular session of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The session of the Council was preceded by the meetings of Foreign Ministers of the CST countries, Councils of Defence Ministers and of National Security Council Secretaries. The Council discussed and signed a number of documents, which will enlarge the legal base for the cooperation of the member states in the military and political fields.

In Minsk, President Kocharyan also participated in the works of the interstate Council of the Eurasian Economic Association, as an observer.

Yerevan, 23-30 June. The second pan-Armenian festival "**One Nation, One Culture**" was held in Armenia. Over 40 events were organised in all the regions of Armenia, Javakhk (Georgia) and Nagorno Karabakh. The festival started with a parade of the participants, outdoor fetes and non-stop performances.

Separate days were devoted to theatre, cinema, painting, literature and poetry, music, dance and museums. Some 2000 people from Armenia, Russia, Italy, the U.S., Austria, Australia, Turkey, UK, France, Iran and Syria participated in the second pan-Armenian festival.

The festival is initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Youth and One Nation, One Culture Fund and is held under the RA President's patronage.

Nagorno-Karabakh, 28 June. Following the request from the NKR FM, to the Office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE C-i-O, a recurrent monitoring was held at the contact line of the Karabakh and Azeri armed forces, near the settlement of Yusifjanly. Field assistants of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Peter Kii (UK), Irzhi Aberle (Czechia) and Hunter Folk (Germany) conducted the monitoring from the Karabakh side. Despite the allegation of arsons by the Azeri side, the monitoring participants did not register any cases of arsons in the NKR security zone.

Yerevan, 03 July. The European Union is likely to grant Armenia the status of a state with market economy, head of the Department for Cooperation with the WTO and EU at the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development Vahagn Ghazaryan informed. "Our part of work is finished and the essential papers have already been submitted to the European Commission," he said adding that in the near future the assumption of the status is expected according to the norms established by the EU.

Nagorno-Karabakh, 03 July. Following another request from the NKR FM, the Office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office (C-i-O) monitored the contact line of the Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijani Armed Forces in Aghdam-Gindarkh direction and in the settlement of Novrouzlou.

Contrary to the Azerbaijani side's allegations on intentional fires in the NKR security zone, the monitoring did not find any evidence of such facts.

In one part of the neutral region, traces of fire were discovered, which spread from territories under the control of Azerbaijan. This was viewed as a confirmation of the earlier statement of the NKR authorities that the Azerbaijani side burnt the grass.

Tehran, 05 July. President Robert Kocharyan, who arrived in Tehran for a two-day working visit, had a tête-à-tête meeting with President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. Armenian-Iranian relations, as well as regional developments and international issues were the topics of discussion.

During the President's visit, the two sides signed seven documents on cooperation including the "Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of the RA and the IRI on assistance provided by the IRA for the development of Armenia", "Agreement on Legal Cooperation in the investigation of civil and criminal cases", and "Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministries of Energy of the RA and the IRI", which augmented the package of nearly 100 already existing bilateral documents.

Brussels, 10 July. Leading political European Parliament factions stated that they are for the introduction of the Armenian Genocide recognition issue into the agenda of the EU-Turkey talks. The parliamentarians urge Brussels to set acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey and lifting of the blockade of Armenia as a precondition for Turkey's EU membership.

Yerevan, 13 July. President Robert Kocharyan chaired the first sitting of the Commission on Cooperation with the European Structures. (Members of the Commission include Speaker of the National Assembly Tigran Torossian, Minister of Defense Serzh Sargsyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian, Minister of Trade and Economic Development Karen Chshmaritian, and other officials.)

The President of Armenia instructed the working group to prepare in a two-month period a plan of actions and a timetable related to all the responsibilities assumed by Armenia in the European structures. According to Robert Kocharyan, such a plan will allow coordinating actions in different areas and will be included in the

next year's plan of actions of the Government of Armenia.

Yerevan, 14 July. As a response to the Lebanon events, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement whereby expressed its concern about the situation in Lebanon, the escalation of military actions and denounced the use of disproportionate force. It expressed hope for restraint and immediate ceasefire.

Yerevan, 24 July. President Robert Kocharyan discussed with Peter Semneby, Special Representative of the European Union for the South Caucasus, the Armenia-EU relations, and particularly the issues pertaining to the synchronization and adoption of Armenia's Individual plan in the framework of the EU New Neighbourhood Initiative.

Yerevan, 27 July. President Robert Kocharyan discussed with the American Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group the latest developments in the Nagorno Karabakh peace process.

Yerevan, 27 July. Within three years Armenian peacekeepers fulfilled all their tasks in Iraq and Kosovo, Armenian Defence Minister Serzh Sargsyan stated in Yerevan. In his words, within a short term Armenian peacekeepers have been able to show their worth both professionally and morally.

"There has been no single case of our servicemen making an incorrect move. Their blameless service was highly appreciated by the Command for Sustaining Peace in Kosovo and Restoration of Iraq. NATO Command in Kosovo and Peacekeeping Forces Command in Iraq appreciated the professional skills, diligence and responsibility of Armenian soldiers", Minister Sargsyan mentioned.

By an order of the Defence Minister, six peacekeepers, who participated in operations to settle the Kosovo conflict and post-war restoration of Iraq were presented with medals and diplomas.

Yerevan, 28 July. An international conference entitled "European integration: Ways of formation of unified and peaceful neighbourhood" commenced in Yerevan. The purpose of the conference was to represent the European values, principles and obligations as guarantees of security and partnership, as well as to discuss the current situation and further cooperation. Representatives of Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey, the EU, NATO, OSCE and CoE took part in the conference.

Sochi, 15-17 August. President Robert Kocharyan participated in the Informal Summit of the leaders of member and observer states to the Eurasian Economic Association (EEA). Members to the EEA are Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus,

Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, while Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova are observers.

On August 15, at the "Bocharov Ruchi" summer residence of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, a meeting between the Presidents of Armenia and Russia took place. Vladimir Putin highlighted the importance of the fact that bilateral contacts on all levels, including the highest one, continue. According to the Russian President, the turn-over between the two states is increasing, economic relations are developing normally, and prospects for their expansion in future are very real.

Yerevan, 15 August. President Robert Kocharyan received Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Noting that the refugee problem is still substantial for Armenia, the President of Armenia stressed the importance of full integration of the refugees in our society. In this regard, he highlighted the role of the UNHCR office in Armenia, and expressed hope for a continued cooperation. Antonio Guterres spoke about the programs underway in our country. In this regard, too, President Robert Kocharyan assessed the cooperation as extremely productive.

Yerevan, 21 August. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian received António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The two discussed Armenian Government's programs to aid refugees and others in vulnerable circumstances. Both Minister Oskanian and the High Commissioner spoke highly of the cooperation between the Armenian authorities and the UNHCR, particularly through its office in Armenia.

They also focused on refugee issues in the region, specifically as a consequence of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. In this context, Minister Oskanian presented Armenia's stance on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement process, and the latest developments.

Yerevan, 23 August. Minister Oskanian received a delegation headed by philanthropist and entrepreneur Jon Huntsman, head of the US-based Huntsman Corporation. Minister Oskanian underscored with appreciation the assistance provided to the Armenian people during the years since the earthquake, by Jon Huntsman, his family and his corporation.

Mr. Huntsman spoke of his impressions of the positive changes he witnessed in Armenia, as well as about his future plans, specifically regarding the opening of a cancer treatment hospital and sponsoring college scholarships for education in the United States.

Minister Oskanian accompanied Mr. Huntsman to Gyumri in order to visit the school and the residences the construction of which the Huntsman Foundation had funded.

Yerevan, 09 September. The Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin, and Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian signed an additional protocol to the Memorandum of Understanding between the OSCE and Armenia which creates the legal basis for establishing presences to implement OSCE programs in regions of Armenia.

An on-site presence in Kapan, the capital of Syunik, Armenia's remotest region, focusing on developing and implementing economic and environmental projects, will be opened by the OSCE Office in Yerevan at the end of June.

In 2004, with the help of the OSCE Office, a year-long study of the socio-economic development of Syunik province was completed. The paper revealed major social and economic problems in the region, identified priorities and outlined potential business opportunities.

Paris, 12 September. Foreign Minister Oskanian met with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. They discussed issues related to the present state of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement process and explored the ways of addressing the still disputed issues on the negotiating table. The Minister and Co-Chairs paid special attention to obstacles and initiatives beyond the peace process itself that only impede the process and discussed the possibility of a meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers.

Yerevan, 12 September. President Robert Kocharyan received the Speaker of Iranian Majlis Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel. They discussed the development of the Armenian-Iranian relations and the progress of the implementation of joint programs. Among other sources for a full realisation of the potential for cooperation, both sides noted the necessity to invigorate inter-parliamentary ties.

Berlin 22-23 September. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian participated in the 10th Bertelsmann Forum, entitled "**Europe's Strategic Responses**". The audience of over 100 political leaders included former German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Following the opening session, Minister Oskanian participated in a panel on "*The Balkans and the Black Sea - a Litmus Test for Europe*". The panel also included the presidents of Bulgaria, Romania and Azerbaijan, and the Prime Minister of Montenegro.

Throughout the discussion, Oskanian affirmed that the region's litmus test for Europe would be an effective European Neighbourhood Policy, the functionality and integrity of the Black Sea region, and practical approaches to conflicts.

During a discussion on Kosovo, Minister Oskanian cautioned against denying peoples their right to self-determination, simply out of political expediency. If the world were guided by a fear of setting precedents, he said, half the countries in the world today would not exist. But there has to be strict criteria, he said, and the chief principle should be whether the state can claim the moral authority to rule.

The Bertelsmann Foundation is sponsored by the Bertelsmann Group, the world's largest publishing company.

Yerevan, 26 September. More than 190 NGOs and informal community groups in Armenia's regions will gain access to training and resources through a program administered by the Eurasia Foundation's representative office in Armenia, enabling them to play a more effective role in the development of rural communities.

Yerevan, 29 September. The five year **Millennium Challenge Anti-Poverty Development Program** agreed to earlier this year by the United States and Armenia was officially inaugurated with an exchange of letters. In a ceremony held at the Ministry of Finance and Economy, Finance Minister Vartan Khachatryan and Alex Russin of the Millennium Challenge Corporation exchanged letters which formally inaugurate the \$235 million anti-poverty program.

The Armenian Compact is designed to reduce rural poverty through a sustainable increase in the economic performance of the agricultural sector. The Compact includes a \$67 million project to rehabilitate up to 943 kilometers of rural roads. When complete, the road network will ensure that every rural community has road access to markets, services, and the main road network. Under the Compact, the Government of Armenia will be required to commit additional resources for maintenance of the road network. The Compact also includes a \$146 million project to increase the productivity of approximately 250,000 farm households through improved water supply, higher yields, higher-value crops, and a more competitive agricultural sector.

Yerevan, 02 October. Foreign Minister Oskanian received an EU delegation led by Erkki Tuomioja, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Finland, representing the Finnish Presidency of the European Union. The delegation also included Gunter Gloser, State Minister of the Federal

Republic of Germany, which will take over the EU Presidency in early 2007, and also Ambassador Torben Holze, who represented the European Commission.

The delegation representing the Troika expressed satisfaction with the elaboration of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, as well as the conclusion of all preliminary work on the EU-Armenia Action Plan. The Action Plan is a political document laying out the strategic objectives for the cooperation between Armenia and the EU. The Action Plan will be submitted for formal adoption to the Co-operation Council between the EU and Armenia in November in Brussels.

Through this Action Plan, Armenia is invited to enter into intensified political, security, economic and cultural relations with the EU, enhanced regional and cross-border cooperation and shared responsibility in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. The implementation of the Action Plan will significantly advance the approximation of Armenia's legislation, norms and standards to those of the European Union.

Minister Oskanian explained that it is not just a document of intentions, but of concrete actions to bring Armenia's social, political, economic systems more in line with those of Europe, since the premise is that "we do in fact live in the same neighbourhood and interact together. It opens new partnership perspectives in very basic fields such as science, education, culture, and of course in economic development."

Embassy and Community News

The Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in London and the British-Armenian community celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the Independence of Armenia.

London, 21 September. The Embassy held the annual National Day Reception at the Nevart Gulbenkian Hall in Kensington. Attending dignitaries included Mayors of several London boroughs, officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other government departments, Ambassadors, members of the London Diplomatic Corps, as well as leaders and individuals of the British-Armenian community.



Receiving guests



Ambassador Gabrielyan talks to Sir Brian Fall, UK Government's Special Representative to the South Caucasus



Leaders of local government: Chairman of London Assembly Brian Coleman (right) talks to his colleagues from boroughs



Ambassadors of neighbouring countries, Armenia and Iran



Left to right: Trustee of the St. Sarkis Church Trust and the Armenian House Stepan Ovanessoff, Mayor of the Royal Borough Councillor Tim Ahern, Mrs. Hasmik Gabrielyan and HE Dr. Vahe Gabrielyan



Ambassador and Mrs. Gabrielyan pose with members of the Armenian community

London, 23 September. A Charity Concert Performance by Inga and Anush Arshakyan dedicated to the 15th Anniversary of Independence was given at the Logan Hall in London. With their band of traditional and modern Armenian instruments, the two sisters presented Armenian ethno-folk music in modern arrangements.



Arshakyan sisters perform in the Logan Hall

The Concert opened with a speech by H. E. Dr. Vahe Gabrielyan, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Court of St. James's. The Ambassador congratulated the British-Armenian community on the occasion of the Independence Day, re-visited the difficult path of Independence since 1991, highlighted the achievements of the Republic and the nation so far, and called on everyone to actively participate in the affairs of Armenia.



A scene of a folk song

The concert was organised by the "Hayastan" All-Armenian Fund of Great Britain, in association with the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia. The proceeds of the concert will benefit the Fund's project of distributing monthly benefits to the children of deceased and disabled soldiers of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

Such concerts have been regularly organized by the London branch of the "Hayastan" Fund and have significantly contributed to the Himnadram's successful projects in Armenia.

London, 30 September. The 15th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Armenia was celebrated by another event, held at the St. Yeghiche Armenian Church in Kensington. A Concert was organised by the Armenian Community and Church Council of Great Britain, under the auspices of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia. Chair of the ACCC, back from his first ever visit to Armenia, opened the ceremony with passionate words on Armenia and spoke of everybody's duties in regards of their Motherland. Ambassador Vahe Gabrielyan delivered a keynote speech, congratulating the community on the occasion of the National Day.



ACCC Chairman Ara Palamoudian

Young Armenian performers -- members of the community, performed Armenian and European musical pieces, as well as recited poetry by Armenian authors.



All the performers of the evening are on stage

The evening closed with the blessing of Bishop Nathan Hovhannisian, Primate of the Armenian Church of Great Britain.



Bishop Nathan Hovhannisian

London, 10 September. "Armenian immigrants and their descendants are the most successful ethnic group in the country, according to an analysis of "melting pot" Britain", says an article in the *Sunday Times* summarising the results of the survey.

"The new analysis places the 42.2m adults registered to vote in mainland Britain in 200 ethnic groups — on the basis of a person's surname and first name... Of the 2,651 people of Armenian descent in Britain, more than 1,600 run businesses and a high proportion live in expensive parts of west London", the article says.

London, 21 September. Mr. Karen Israyelyan took up his position at the Embassy as Consul and Second Secretary. He replaces Mr. Stepan Kartashyan, Third Secretary, who returned to Armenia upon completion of his posting.



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