



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

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POLITICS

1. Serzh Sargsyan: "Turkey has no moral right to blame us about anything or to impose any conditions"

Interview of President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan to Euronews [Noyan Tapan, 03/20/10]



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"Serzh Sargsyan is President of Armenia, a country with a turbulent history, like a fair number of states which for a time were a part of the old USSR. Early in March on an official visit to Paris, the president spoke with Euronews about the Armenian genocide, relations between his country and Turkey, and on the frozen conflict of Nagorno Karabakh. Armenia is gripped in the geopolitical vice of the South Caucasus region, where Europe meets Asia. Its border with Turkey has been blocked since the Nagorno Karabakh war. The consequences of this for all involved are serious, including for Armenia's population of three million and the seven million Armenian diaspora.

Laura Davidescu, Euronews: President Sargsyan, with 23 votes in favour of the resolution and 22 against, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the United States' House of Representatives has decided to declare that the 1915 massacre of over one million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks was genocide. Why do you think the committee has voted the resolution now?

President Serzh Sargsyan: Discussions on the recognition of the Armenian genocide are not new in the political life of the United States of America. Several times at least in the past 10 years, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives has tried to vote on the resolution. Forty-two states in the US have recognized the events as genocide, so the resolution on the 4th of March is neither a surprise nor a new thing for us.

Euronews: Do you think of any particular reason for them voting it now, in this particular context of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation?

Sargsyan: We are currently in discussions with Turkey on the issue of re-establishing our relations. This should be done without any preconditions, and I think that Turkey has no moral right to blame us about anything or to impose any conditions. Re-establishing relations without preconditions means we are not under any obligations to stay away from any of the possible topics. Let's say that, by some miracle, the Turkish Parliament ratifies the protocols, the Armenian Parliament does the same, we re-establish our relations and a third country, which is against us re-establishing our relations, on purpose takes up the genocide issue. Will the Turks, therefore, use this as a pretext and break off relations?

Euronews: If Armenia's major problems now are unemployment, economic isolation and long-running disputes with Turkey and Azerbaijan, can these problems be more easily solved now?

Sargsyan: Our difficulties with Turkey did not begin yesterday. For 17 years, Turkey has kept the Armenian border under blockade. Was there such a resolution 17 years ago? We fully understand that Turkey is a big country — in terms of population, territory and power — vastly bigger than Armenia. And if we lived apart from each other we would [also] understand. But since Armenia and Turkey are part of the international community, and the United States, France and the European Union are too, then the international community must assess the developments and situations as they unfold.

Euronews: I would go back to the recognition of the Armenian genocide: If this issue is of paramount concern for Armenians both at home and in the Diaspora, could you please tell us why the Yerevan State University awarded an honorary degree to the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2007? The Iranian president denies the Holocaust.

Sargsyan: You know, we cannot oblige our neighbours to think as we do. One should not narrow things down to a single person. To bestow upon the leader of a country an honorific reward signifies an expression of gratitude and recognition towards the people of that country. The Iranians have been our neighbours for centuries and they are very important to us.

Euronews: Would you call the Yerevan state university's decision Armenian "realpolitik"?

Sargsyan: I would consider it as a particular approach by the State University of Yerevan towards a particular issue, an approach quite current in Europe and in the democratically developed countries of the world.

Euronews: You are quoted as having said in London, in February, that Nagorno Karabakh was never a part of independent Azerbaijan. Well, the international community seems to have another opinion, another assessment.

Sargsyan: The international community does not have a different vision. History is well-known Nagorno Karabakh was not a part of independent Azerbaijan. It was the Caucasus Bureau of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which attached Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan. Why did the international community acclaim the collapse of the Soviet Union and not consider Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan part and parcel of the Soviet Union? — still saying Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan? It is not logical, is it?

Euronews: What kind of compromises are you willing to make in order to achieve a peaceful resolution of this conflict?

Sargsyan: One cannot eliminate the consequences of this conflict without addressing its causes. And when speaking about the causes — we talk about recognising the people of Nagorno Karabakh's right of self determination — the recognition of this right and its implementation. The other problems will be



solved rapidly after that. The Armenian parts of this conflict, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, are profoundly interested in a swift resolution of this conflict. But a sustainable resolution that would allow for peace and security in the region, as opposed to giving Azerbaijan Nagorno Karabakh, which would spell the end of its existence.

Euronews: Azerbaijan states very clearly that it will never ever accept Nagorno Karabakh as an independent entity. They will never let it go.

Sargsyan: What does the international community propose to us? To solve this conflict on the basis of three principles of international law: firstly, self-determination; secondly, territorial integrity; and thirdly, the non-use of force. I propose, through you, the media, to appeal to Azerbaijan to sign an agreement not to use force. This would instill trust in the Armenian people of Karabakh and Armenia. And under these conditions of trust we would begin the negotiations for a settlement. We Armenians know very well what Azerbaijan's territorial integrity means. We've talked about it openly several times. The Azerbaijanis can they say what the right of self-determination means for the people of Nagorno Karabakh? When we issue joint declarations about the right of self-determination, Azerbaijan is not talking about the Armenian people's right to self-determination but of the right of the main player in the conflict the people of Nagorno Karabakh.

2. Shavarsh Kocharyan: "Refusing to negotiate with NK Azerbaijan breaks the progress in negotiations" [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

"Mr. Mammadyarov presented to the reporters the results that may be reached in case he conducts negotiations with himself and in case Azerbaijan alone develops and signs with itself the peace treaty," deputy foreign minister of Armenia Shavarsh Kocharyan said, commenting on the yesterday's statements of Elmar Mammadyarov over the ways of Karabakh settlement.

"It is obvious that the recent statement of the Azerbaijani foreign minister is a regular unsuccessful attempt to justify by the Azerbaijani Constitution the aggression against the self-determined NKR violating the UN Charter. This Constitution was adopted after signing of cease-fire regime with the NKR and does not have any relation to the Nagorno Karabakh Republic which has its own Constitution," the deputy minister noted.

Armenian Foreign Ministry press and information department reported that Shavarsh Kocharyan said that by refusing to negotiate with the Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan breaks the progress in negotiations and cannot avoid the responsibility of consequences of the aggression initiated by it.

3. Shavarsh Kocharyan: "Statements of President Aliyev are bright proofs of not readiness of Azerbaijan to a constructive dialogue over the conflict regulation" [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

"Mr. Aliyev again came forth with the monologue of unrealized dialogue. According to this monologue, Azerbaijan has principally finished the negotiations it conducted with itself and to what it has come, mainly correspond to the interests of Azerbaijan. Of course with some exclusions: more probably it cannot agree with itself either," Armenian deputy foreign minister Shavarsh Kocharyan said, commenting on the statements of the Azerbaijani president over the ways on Karabakh conflict settlement.

He said that after registering in the constitution the point on unchanged inherited power Aliyev has vested himself with a right to speak on behalf of time, international right, mediators and people of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

"Baku shows as if it does not understand the absence of any alternative to the independence of Nagorno Karabakh either now, or hundred years after, or ever. Nagorno Karabakh is a realized state fully corresponding to the norms of international right which managed to oppose to the policy of ethnic cleansing adopted by Azerbaijan and its aggression. Azerbaijan, being forced to sign a cease fire regime with the NKR, has recognized its independence in 1994," Shavarsh Kocharyan said.

The deputy foreign minister said that the statements of President Aliyev are bright proofs of not readiness of Azerbaijan to a constructive dialogue over the conflict regulation.

"Azerbaijan continues blowing the ball of illusions which has been created from the endless distortions of the essence of the conflict and process of negotiations and from sitting on the oil needle," the deputy foreign minister said.

4. Artak Davtyan says process of normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations is not failed [Armenpress, 03/22/10]



The process of normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations has not been failed, chairman of the NA's Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sports Affairs Standing Committee, member of the Republican faction Artak Davtyan said today.

According to him, it is a very complicated process and postponements and difficulties are coming forth. He said the process continues, and probably Turkey will ratify the Armenian-Turkish protocols.

"Armenia continues its initiating policy in this process and now it is the turn of Turkey to do corresponding steps," Artak Davtyan pointed out. He noted that the whole international community waits for the constructive steps of Turkey. A. Davtyan reiterated the position of the Turkish side according to which the Armenian parliament will ratify the protocols after Turkey.

Referring to the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Davtyan noted that the civilized world does not link the Genocide issue with the process of normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations. According to him, parliaments of different countries will continue the adoption and discussion of the resolutions on recognition of the genocide. "Sooner or later Turkey must recognize the committed Genocide. A country which is striving to consolidate democracy, become member of the EU, must recognize it," Davtyan pointed out.

5. R. Zohrabyan, "By dragging out Armenian-Turkish protocols, Turkey tries to win dividends in Nagorno Karabakh issue" [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

In the process directed toward regulation of Armenian-Turkish relations, Turkey displays an immoral approach by not fulfilling its commitments, Deputy Chairman of the Armenian Republican Party Razmik Zohrabyan stated today at a meeting with journalists. According to him, Turkey artificially drags out the initially reached agreement on ratifying the Armenian-Turkish protocols by the parliament in a reasonable timeframe.

"It is evident for everybody that by the delay of the process Turkey tries to win dividends, particularly, in Karabakh issue. That is why that large states, particularly the USA, have started to exert pressures on Turkey," R. Zohrabyan said. According to him, the USA has numerous levies for exerting pressures on Turkey; one of them is the adoption of the resolution on the Armenian Genocide. In response to the question whether the resolution on the Armenian Genocide will enter into the plenary session of the U.S. Congress, R. Zohrabyan noted that it depends on Turkey's further behavior.

Referring to regulation process of Karabakh issue, R. Zohrabyan said that Nagorno Karabakh must unequivocally become a negotiation side. "I think that it is high time that the NKR becomes a negotiation side. It is a very important circumstance; it will not be right to solve the issue without participation of Karabakh," he said. According to R. Zohrabyan, leaving Nagorno Karabakh out of the negotiation process is wrong, and must be corrected.

6. Armen Kirakosyan "I regret that the contemporary Turkish authorities continue being guided not by European but by the system of values of the Ottoman Empire" [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakosyan with request of "Armenpress" to comment on the statement of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in which he threatened to drive out Armenians from Turkey as if to draw the attention of the international community on the Armenian migrants living illegally in Turkey, said: "Speaking about the Armenians who appear in difficult condition and came to Turkey, Mr. Erdogan forgets about the existence of millions of Turkish migrants in different countries of the world who are earning for their daily bread.

I regret that on the eve of the 95th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide the contemporary Turkish authorities speaking of forcibly displacing Armenians continue being guided not by European but by the system of values of the Ottoman Empire," Kirakosyan said.

7. President Serzh Sargsyan arrives in Syria on a three-day official visit [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

At the invitation of the President of the Syrian Arab Republic Bashar Al-Assad, the President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan and his spouse Rita Sargsyan paid today a three-day official visit to Syria.

The official ceremony of welcoming of the President of Armenia took place at the People's Chamber of Syria followed by the private meeting of Serzh Sargsyan and Bashar Al-Assad.

Presidential Press Office told Armenpress that welcoming the Armenian president, Bashar Al-Assad expressed assurance that the mutual visits of the presidents will give new impetus to the deepening of the existing relations between the two countries.



The private meeting of the presidents was followed by an extended meeting of delegations. Presidents of Armenia and Syria highly praised the current level of political dialogue between the two countries.

RA President thanked his Syrian counterpart for the invaluable support displayed toward Armenians during the difficult historic moments, noting that the Syrian-Armenian community is a reliable bridge of friendship between the two peoples and states.

Serzh Sargsyan and Bashar Al-Assad referred to the process of implementation of agreements reached during the visit of the President of Syria to Yerevan, highlighted the necessity of activation of the contacts between the business circles which will give an opportunity to expand the volume of trade turnover between the two countries.

After the negotiations the leaders of the countries came forth with a statement for mass media and answered to the questions of reporters.

At the end of the first day of the visit Serzh Sargsyan and Rita Sargsyan will be present at the "Spartak" ballet in the Opera Theatre of Damascus.

The President of Syria Bashar Al-Assad and Mrs. Asma Al-Assad will give an official dinner in honor of the President of Armenia and Mrs. Rita Sargsyan late in the evening.

8. Foreign Ministry: Azerbaijan welcomes Serzh Sargsyan's proposal to sign an agreement not to use force [Noyan Tapan, 03/22/10]

"Azerbaijan welcomes Serzh Sargsyan's proposal to sign an agreement not to use force," spokesman for Foreign Ministry Elkhan Polukhov told APA while commenting on Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan's appeal to sign an agreement not to use force.

"But it will be possible only after the cause of that threat is eliminated, Armenia withdraws its Armed Forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories. Azerbaijan agrees to sign such an agreement after Armenia takes this step," he said.

9. Chairman of Turkish Liberal-Democratic Party considers Erdogan's statement a racist and unacceptable approach [Armenpress, 03/23/10]

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's statement on exiling the 100 thousand Armenians living in his country illegally has been accepted by the Turkish society with criticism. Chairman of Turkey's Liberal-Democratic Party Jem Toker said at today's press conference that he has not yet read an article published in Turkey, which does not criticize the prime minister's statement. Even the government-oriented mass media have expressed strict discontent about the statement.

"I am one of those who strictly condemn that statement and consider it unacceptable. Moreover, even if the government makes a decision in accordance with the statement, the Turkish people would resist and would not allow to bring it to life," J. Toker noted.

The chairman of the Turkish Liberal-Democratic Party pointed out that the statement voiced by the prime minister is a racist and unacceptable approach.

10. J. Toker, "I do not have a distinct answer to the question on calling the 1915 atrocities genocide" [Armenpress, 03/23/10]

Chairman of the Turkish Liberal-Democratic Party Jem Toker visited Tsitsernakaberd, memorial complex dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide committed in Ottoman Turkey at the beginning of the 20th century, but he has not yet a completely formed opinion on the fact of the genocide. At a press conference today in Yerevan the chairman of the party noted that he does not like history in general and is not interested in it, but he has heard from Armenian historians that all the atrocities that were committed against the Armenians in Turkey are genocide. He said that the Turkish historians told him that they are not genocide, but "atrocities".

"Horrible atrocities have taken place, but I do not know whether they must be called genocide. I do not like history, that is why I have not studied it properly and cannot express a distinct opinion," Jem Toker said.

The Turkish political official visits Armenia already for the fifth time and as he said, tries to take positive stimuli to Turkey for changing the public opinion about Armenians in his country. During all those visits J. Toker understood that every Armenian family has its history connected with the mentioned "atrocities", but he also reminded that during the same pogroms there were Turks who stretched a helping hand to many Armenians.



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"I understand that it is an all-national deep shake, I realize and respect that. Nevertheless, I do not have a distinct answer over calling the atrocities genocide," he said.

Referring to the restrictions of the N 301 article on prohibiting the term "genocide" in Turkey, Jem Toker said that if a Turkish citizen accepts the fact of the genocide, no legal punishment is applied against him/her, but the latter is "labeled" as a traitor by people. In regard to organization of gathering of signatures in the last year with the purpose of apologizing to Armenians for the genocide, the chairman of the Liberal-Democratic Party said that it was of a symbolic nature and will not register a positive result.

BUSINESS

11. EBRD and Finca universal credit organization sign 4 million-dollar credit extension agreement [Noyan Tapan, 03/20/10]

On March 18 President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Thomas Mirow and Director of Finca universal credit organization Yervand Barseghian signed an agreement on extension of a 4 million dollar credit for crediting small and medium entrepreneurship.

Y. Barseghian called it a serious step for SME crediting. According to him, the local companies will receive the credit in drams - a measure to protect them from currency fluctuations. In his opinion, the provision of a credit in the national currency in the post-crisis period is a significant step. T. Mirow added that in this way the EBRD increases its presence in Armenia. He underlined that it is a good opportunity to develop SME, and they intend to continue cooperation with Armenia.

As for the global economic crisis, T. Mirow said that such a wave is not expected in the near future, although there are some risks. He noted that in a sense the Armenian economy emerged from the crisis, but some risks still remain. He considered the anti-crisis programs of Armenian government as praiseworthy, saying that thanks to them, the economy was not exposed to serious risks.

12. Bako Sahakian stresses importance of Yerevan Brandy Company in development of viticulture in Artsakh [Noyan Tapan, 03/22/10]

The work done by Yerevan Brandy Company (YBC) in Artsakh in 2009 and future activities of the company were discussed during the March 19 meeting of President of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic Bako Sahakian and CEO of YBC Ara Grigorian.

According to the Central Information Department of the Office of the NKR President, B. Sahakian stressed the importance of YBC in the development of viticulture in NKR, adding that it is necessary to make the company's involvement in the Karabakh economy more coordinated and long-term.

Prime Minister of the NKR Ara Harutyunian also participated in the meeting.

DIASPORA

13. Vardan Marashyan appointed deputy Diaspora Minister [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan appoints Vardan Marashyan as deputy Diaspora Minister, governmental press service reported.

14. Minister of Diaspora to have meetings in Syria and Lebanon [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

Hranush Hakobyan, RA minister of Diaspora, will pay official visit to the Syrian Arab Republic. Mrs. Hakobyan is in the delegation led by RA President Serzh Sargsyan, who is on official visit in Syria from March 22 to 24. An official from Public Relations and press department of RA Diaspora Ministry reported Armenpress that Mrs. Hakobyan will meet with the representatives of the Armenian communities of Damascus, Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor.

Diaspora Minister will visit Lebanon March 25-29. In the Lebanese town of Anjar Mrs. Hakobyan will meet with the mayor Sebuhan Skayan, teachers, heads of various establishments, etc. The next day the minister will visit editorial offices of several Armenian dailies and radio stations- 'Azdak'(Impulse), 'Vana Dzayn'(Voice of Van), 'Zartok'(Regeneration), 'Ararat', 'Radio Sevan'. She will meet with lecturers of Haykazyan University and then will participate in the opening ceremony of 'Grigor Narekatsi' cultural center of Catholic Church.



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On the fifth day in Lebanon the Minister will visit Armenian schools and orphanages. Official meetings with the Culture Minister of Lebanon, board representatives of AGBU Lebanese office and other organizations are scheduled.

15. Vahe Karapetian: Homeland is on the Right Path [Noyan Tapan, 03/22/10]

The March 4 discussion on Resolution 252 recognizing the Armenian Genocide by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress was the fourth discussion on this problem. However, as Vahe Karapetian - a national benefactor, Armenian-American businessman, member of the Advisory Board of the RA Ministry of Diaspora - told in an interview with Noyan Tapan, this fourth discussion was much more significant to the Armenians than the preceding ones and had a number of noteworthy characteristics, regarding which our talk took place.

- What, in your opinion, was the peculiarity of the discussion of Resolution 252?

- It was a much more difficult vote than the previous ones. Let's not forget that although last year on April 24 President Obama did not use the word "genocide" (noting that his opinion of the 1915 events did not change), in the past - prior to becoming president, he had repeatedly characterized the acts committed against Armenians in 1915 as genocide.

The Speaker of the Congress and many others struggled for years for adoption of that resolution, but today they all hold high positions. In this situation Democratic Congressmen found themselves in a double position and they had difficulty joining the Armenians' efforts to achieve the adoption of the Genocide resolution by the U.S. Congress.

- Do you think this issue will be passed at the Congress?

- There is great danger that this issue will not be passed by the Congress today because we are not so organized yet. We are not ready yet. I am sure that next time we will succeed through this new joint process.

- We all noticed that almost nobody denied the fact of the Armenian Genocide.

- That was another peculiarity of the vote: almost all the Congressmen who said no to the resolution noted: "Yes, the Genocide did take place, but..." This "but" is a political, inadmissible "but" - allegedly for America's interests, a "but" allegedly powerless in the face of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other problems.

After all, nobody accuses present-day Turkey and its people, we accuse those who committed these actions in the past, and Turkey itself sentenced many of them to death in 1919. So it is just a political game by Turkey which condemned the criminals who had committed the Genocide - because a lot of problems, for example, the problem of compensation, will arise after its actual recognition.

- In your opinion, what role did the presence of delegates from Armenia at the vote play?

- Yet another peculiarity of the vote was that it was for the first time that the representatives of Armenian authorities were standing during the discussion in that hall - before the eyes of the U.S. Congressmen. It was an important circumstance as even those Congressmen, who for years on end were backing the efforts on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, witnessed for the first time that the Diaspora was not alone but the Armenians are united with respect to that demand. It was a powerful step on the path of perceiving the unity of the Armenians and that force.

And it was not the first step towards building a bridge of mutual understanding between Armenia and the Diaspora: the first step was the open discussion that the president had in Diaspora colonies regarding the numerous problems and suspicions which arose in connection with the Armenia-Turkey protocols. We all in the Diaspora appreciated the greatness and benevolence of the Homeland, and we realized that we had misinterpreted the Armenia-Turkey protocols.

By taking a few steps, the president proved his aspiration: first, ensuring longevity of Armenia, longevity and recognition of Artsakh, improving the economic conditions of the people, and neither losing the rights of Artsakh nor forgetting the demands of the Armenians or the Genocide. The president proved this all, especially in the message he issued in Geneva prior to the protocols' signing, in which he announced his determination.

The fact that the Armenian deputies attended the discussion of the Armenian Genocide problem in the Congress served as an addition to the presidential message and demonstrated to the Diaspora that Armenia would support that problem and would not make concessions over the protocols and any other issue.

- You said that we, the Armenians are not well-organized enough yet. Do you believe that one day we will succeed in acting unitedly?

- I am convinced that we will become united all over the world. The Homeland is on the right path. Our force is in our hands.



16. Armenian women from throughout the world gather for celebration Armenian Relief Society Centennial [Noyan Tapan, 03/22/10]

Armenian Relief Society (ARS) Centennial was celebrated at Carnegie Weill Recital Hall on 10 March. Women from various countries, including Greece, France, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Argentina, Brazil, Canada as well as the United States took part in the three-day celebration. The evening's keynote speaker, Ms. Mary Ellen Iskenderian, President and CEO of Women's World Banking, praised the ARS for its philanthropic and charitable work. She urged the gathering to continue promoting educational, healthcare, housing and welfare issues for Armenian families throughout the world.

According to the press release of the ARS, the evening began with master of ceremonies Ms. Stephanie Mesropian. Then Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate, Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, was invited to read the Pontifical Encyclical of His Holiness Aram I Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, who declared 2010 the Year of the Armenian Woman, congratulating the ARS on its 100 years of selfless service to the Armenian nation.

His Excellency Tatoul Markarian, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States, congratulated the ARS and delivered a message from Armenia's Minister of Diaspora, Hranoush Hakobyan.

Their congratulatory speech said Armenian Revolutionary Federation Bureau member, Hagop Der Khatchadourian and Dr. Vartan Gregorian, President of the Carnegie Corporation.

Mrs. Vicky Marashlian, Chairperson of the ARS Central Executive Board, reminded everyone of the work that the ARS has undertaken; from sheltering and feeding orphans in the Homeland to equal justice.

At the conclusion of her address, she presented the ARS "Ararat" Award to Shant Mardirosian, the Chairman of the Near East Foundation.

The 100th anniversary is also being celebrated with local and regional events throughout the 26 countries where ARS entities are located. The New York-based gathering is part of a series of events that will culminate this fall with a pilgrimage to Der Zor, the Syrian desert where hundreds of thousands of Armenians perished during the Genocide and a week-long celebration in Armenia.

17. NKR President attaches importance to continual strengthening of Armenia-Diaspora cultural contacts [Noyan Tapan, 03/22/10]

On March 20, NKR President Bako Sahakian received Metso Igitian, the Chairman of the Armenian Culture Development Fund. Issues related to implementation of various cultural programs in Artsakh were discussed at the meeting held with participation of NKR Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs Narine Aghabalian.

According to NKR President's Press Service, B. Sahakian attached importance to continual strengthening of Armenia-Diaspora cultural contacts considering it one of the important factors of preservation of Armenian identity and education in Armenian spirit.

18. Ara Boyajian awarded the "Gratitude" Medal [Noyan Tapan, 03/22/10]

On March 20, President of Nagorno Karabakh Bako Sahakyan signed an executive order granting a Medal of Gratitude to Ara Boyajian, member of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund Board of Trustees. About this was informed Noyan Tapan by the central information department of the office of the NKR President.

The honoree has been a founding member of the Hayastan Fund Toronto affiliate since 1993 and a member of the Hayastan Fund Board of Trustees since 2007. Ara and Calabrina Boyajian are also donors of the Hayastan Fund and have contributed more than \$100000 US for its development projects.

In 1993 Mr. Ara Boyajian was recognized a Benefactor by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

ARTS

19. Francophone Days kick off in Armenia [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the International Organization of the Francophonie (l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), RA Foreign Affairs Ministry took the initiative to organize the Francophone Days in Armenia, which officially kicked off March 19. Christian Ter-Stepanyan, advisor to the Armenian Foreign Minister on Francophone issues, said at a press conference



today that a number of events in the spheres of music, literature, science, education, etc. will be held in Yerevan and the regions of Armenia till April 10.

Armenia became a member of International Organization of the Francophonie in 2008 and participates in a plenty of cultural and educational events implemented by OIF. Mr. Ter-Stepanyan informed the OIF Secretary General will pay official visit to Armenia in April I.

He stated that more and more schools participate in the OIF projects every year, which means that interest in French is gradually growing.

France's Ambassador to Armenia Serzh Smessow said a number of events will be held in Yerevan, Armavir, Artik, Goris, which are aimed at presenting the cultural variety of France, Belgium, Canada, Romania, Switzerland and other Francophone states in the spheres of music, literature, science, education, etc.

The Ambassador informed that over 30 events- exhibitions, seminars, jazz concerts, poetry evenings, theatre performances, film screenings and days of fairy-tale reading- are due from March 19 to April 10.

He said within the frames of the Francophone Days in Armenia RA Education and Science Ministry has scheduled to organize a composition contest on "Let's go to France" in the schools of the republic. The winner will get an opportunity to travel to France. This contest will be held in a plenty of cities of the world! , and all the winners will gather in France.

20. A number of works of art donated to RA National Gallery [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

By the decision of Aram Isabekyan, rector of Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts, 32 works of Sedrak Arakelyan and Vano Khojabekyan, famous Armenian painters, were donated to RA National Gallery. It is the first time the pictures are exhibited.

Paravon Mirzoyan, director of the National Gallery, said donations to the gallery have become a good tradition. Mr. Mirzoyan expressed his gratitude to all the individuals, organizations and painters for assisting in fund stocking by donating works of art of great historical value.

Aram Isabekyan, rector of Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts, told that years ago, when making inventory of the academy goods during the reconstruction works, they found out that a number of valuable works of arts are preserved in the academy, which had been ignored before. Vano Khojabekyan and Sedrak Arakelyan's works were among these 'inventions', Aram Isabekyan said.

Viktoria Badalyan, director of graphic arts department, says now the National Gallery owns Vano Khojabekyan's best 12 works, which are unique masterpieces of graphic arts and represent the Armenian national customs and habits. She said the gallery had had a few works of Sedrak Arakelyan, so the donations of the painter's works are of great importance to the gallery.

The donations are symbolic; 2009 is the 125th anniversary of Sedrak Arakelyan and 135th anniversary of Vano Khojabekyan.

21. 'National Gallery' International Music Festival to take place April 21-June 2 [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

This year the 'National Gallery' International Music Festival will kick off in Yerevan April 21 and will last till June 2. Mariam Shahniyan, founder and organizer of the festival, director of the 'Gallery of Arts' cultural foundation, told Armenpress that the spring festival will consist of 7 concerts during which soloists and orchestras from Armenia, as well as from Russia, Slovenia and Sweden will perform.

Except 'National Gallery' and 'Veradardz' music festivals the 'Gallery of Arts' cultural foundation took the initiative of organizing a republican festival of violoncello and viola in association with a famous cellist Aram Talalyan. 'This is an educative, unique and very important festival, as it increases public interest in violoncello.' Mrs. Shahniyan said.

Violoncello and viola festival will take place from June 2 to 22. 3 of scheduled 7 concerts will be held in Kotayk province, 4 concerts- in Yerevan.

22. Alexander Iradyan wins Grand Prix in 'Road to Mastery' international competition [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

Alexander Iradyan, representative of Armenia, won Grand Prix in the 2nd 'Road to Mastery' international competition held February 8-13 in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Alexander Iradyan, 19, is a third-year student at Yerevan State Conservatory after Komitas. He said at today's press conference that over



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40 young musicians from CIS states participated in the international review-competition of young conductors, music theorists and composers.

The Armenian representative performed compositions of Sergey Prokofiev, Dmitry Shostakovich, Alexander Scriabin, Sergey Sarajyan, as well as his own creations. 'The jury was really impressed when I started to play my own music. In this way they understood how I feel and percept music,' Alexander Iradyan said.

The video of Iradyan's performance will be presented this evening at 'Moscow House'. Armine Naghdyan, lecturer, assistant professor at Yerevan State Conservatory, said the fact Iradyan achieved such a success is connected with his diligence, great inspiration and desire to perform the most difficult compositions and music program.

Premiere of the young composer's new composition, 'City of Solitude', will take place April in Georgia. It will be performed by Swiss chamber orchestra during an international competition.

23. "Mingled Parallels" film by Hovhannes Galstyan to participate in 43rd Houston International Film Festival [Armenpress, 03/23/10]

"Mingled Parallels" film by Hovhannes Galstyan will participate in 43rd Houston International Film Festival to be held April 9-18 in Texas. Director of the Armenian National Cinema Center Gevorg Gevorgyan told Armenpress that the film is presented at the contest program of the festival. It has passed a long festival way by participating in Rotterdam International Film Festival, "East-West" festival of Orinburg and in a number of other international film festivals.

Houston Festival is among the most famous film festivals of North America. It has been conducted since 1961. Professional discussions and workshops are organized within the frameworks of the festival as well, the goal of which is to get acquainted with distinguished creative figures and give them a worthy appraisal. Premieres of 55-60 full-length and of 100 short-length films will be held within the frameworks of this year's festival.

RELIGION

24. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill I awarded Order of St. Gregory the Illuminator [Noyan Tapan, 03/20/10]

Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill I gave a joint thanksgiving prayer at Yerevan St. Gregory the Illuminator Church on March 17. RA President Serzh Sargsyan was present at the ceremony.

Catholicos of All Armenians in his speech said that the Armenian people looking at Russia at difficult moments always found support, and Armenia has always been Russia's devoted ally. "Today we express gratitude for the brotherly support the Russian Orthodox Church showed to our people, for its great efforts in condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, as well as in the issue of Nagorno Karabakh problem's fair and peaceful settlement by organization of meetings of Azerbaijan's and Armenia's spiritual leaders," His Holiness the Patriarch said.

As an expression of the deep respect and gratitude of the Armenian people spread all over the world Karekin II awarded Kirill I the highest award of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Order of St. Gregory the Illuminator. Kirill I, in his turn, gave Karekin II a Saint Cross and Plate (highest clergyman's badge).

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia in his response said: "We learn of the territory of historic Armenia from the first pages of Holy Writ: "The land of Ararat is for several times mentioned in Old Testament." Kirill I also added: "It is generally known that Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as a state religion." When the Christians were still cruelly persecuted in Roman Empire Armenian King Trdat permitted preaching Christ Gospel and himself christened and adopted Christianity with his country, and after invention of the alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots "the God spoke Armenian."

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia considered symbolic that the church built in 2001 on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of adoption of Christianity bears the name of St. Gregory the Illuminator and one of the niches of St. Vasily the Blessed Cathedral in Moscow Red Square is named after St. Gregory the Illuminator.

25. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia consecrates foundation stone of Russian church in Yerevan [Noyan Tapan, 03/20/10]



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The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill I on March 18 consecrated the foundation stone of a Russian Orthodox church, while the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II offered his prayers.

The ceremony was attended by ambassadors accredited to Armenia, Ara Abrahamian - a Russia-based benefactor of the church, and numerous believers.

"Today we consecrated a new Orthodox church in Yerevan where the representative mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in Armenia will be located. It is a significant event, long-awaited by all of us," Patriarch Kirill I stated in his speech. According to him, in addition to being a new place to offer prayers, this church will become another haven of the friendship and cooperation of the two Churches and the two peoples.

Then the Catholicos of All Armenians delivered his speech of blessings.

Following the ceremony, Patriarch Kirill I and Catholicos Karekin II went to Yerevan State University (YSU) where they met with the management, teaching staff, and students of the university. During the meeting, the title of YSU Honorary Doctor was conferred on Patriarch Kirill I, after which the presentation of the Armenian translations of his books "The Word of the Pastor" and "Freedom and Responsibility" took place.

Those present had the opportunity to hear Patriarch Kirill's ideas about Christian values and their role nowadays, as well as about various social problems.

SOCIAL

26. 30-40% of Turkish society has doubts as to their ethnic affiliation, Turkologist Ruben Melkonian says [Noyan Tapan, 03/20/10]

The book "The Forcible Conversion of Armenians to Islam During the Genocide: The Process and Consequences" by Ruben Melkonian has been released. The author said during a press conference on March 16 that the problem of forcible conversion of Armenians to Islam is one of the least examined themes in Armenian studies. The author of the book used Turkish sources, including archive documents, comparing them with materials of Armenian sources.

According to R. Melkonian, the process of forcible Islamization took place mostly during the Genocide and the massacres. In his words, forcible Islamization of Armenians, especially children, is also genocide. He indicated two types of Armenians forcibly converted to Islam: those who preserved their national identity after being converted to Islam, and those who forgot their national identity after Islamization during the Genocide. R. Melkonian said about 200 thousand Armenians were converted to Islam, 98 thousand of whom converted back to Christianity later - in 1918-1922. "Under conditions of natural growth, the number of such Armenians currently makes about a million," R. Melkonian noted.

He said that in present-day Turkey, many are engaged in the search for their ethnic identity. In his words, 30-40% of Turkish society have doubts as to their ethnic affiliation, which has resulted in an ethnic crisis in the country.

27. Mkrtych Minasian: Moscow cinema's summer hall was illegally removed from list of monuments protected by state [Noyan Tapan, 03/20/10]

The government made the decision to build a church in the place of Moscow cinema's open-air summer hall hastily, without consulting with professional structures. Mkrtych Minasian, the Chairman of the Union of Architects of Armenia said at a March 17 press conference that today the whole architectural community is against that project.

It should be mentioned that by government's decision, the land plot of cinema's summer hall's building was alienated to the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin by the right of gratuitous ownership for building a new church with the appearance of the Saint Poghos-Petros Church destroyed in that territory in the Soviet years.

M. Minasian said that the cinema hall was illegally removed from the list of monuments protected by the state. In his words, the list of monuments protected by the state is determined by an expert commission, thus it is the expert commission that should make a decision to remove any monument from the list. However, according to him, the RA Ministry of Culture did not ensure that process.

M. Minasian said that the Poghos-Petros Church had no architectural value while the summer hall is considered one of the best samples of modern Armenian architecture. "How much is it expedient to build a church in that place if another church is built in the vicinity," the Chairman of the Union of Architects said.



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And according to priest Ter Mkhitar Aloyan, today the Church wants back the territory that belonged to it formerly. "I wonder whether the Palace of Youth, which was destroyed, had no architectural value. If cinema's owner built a cabaret or a swimming-pool, would you protest in that case?" he said.

28. Conference on "The issue of preservation of the qualities of the Armenian identity in mixed marriages" to be conducted in Yerevan [Armenpress, 03/23/10]

A conference on "The issue of preservation of the qualities of the Armenian identity in mixed marriages" will be conducted April 25-26 in Yerevan on the initiative of the Armenian Diaspora Ministry.

Head of the Repatriation and Research Department Arman Yeghiazaryan told Armenpress that all those who are engaged in the study of the Armenian identity and mixed marriages or appear to be representatives of families formed as a result of mixed marriages can take part in the conference. Nearly 30 reports are intended to be present at the conference.

Issues on preservation of the Armenian identity in mixed marriages, as well as circumstances endangering the identity and opportunities of their prevention will be discussed.

29. RA President Serzh Sargsyan hosted in the University of Damascus [Armenpress, 03/23/10]

On the second day of his working visit to Syria, RA President Serzh Sargsyan was hosted in the University of Damascus where he came forth with a lecture on the Armenian-Syrian relations.

Presidential Press office told Armenpress that the Armenian President also met with the Chairman of the Syrian People's Assembly Mahmud al Abrash, discussed Armenian-Syrian inter-parliamentary ties and issues on cooperation in international establishments.

30. First session of the genocide commission took place today at the RA government [Armenpress, 03/22/10]

First session of the genocide commission took place today at the RA government chaired by the Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan, who in his speech underlined the necessity of high-level conduction of the events dedicated to the 95th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Governmental press service told Armenpress that according to Tigran Sargsyan the events of the past year will be conducted this year too plus new requiem ceremonies.

Members of the commission presented to the prime minister a number of suggestions on organization and conduction of new events.

At the end of the session the head of the government assigned in the possible shortest period of time present all the suggestions in the written form, saying that they will be summed up in one comprehensive program.

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