

# Earthquake in Armenia Strongest After 1988, Followed by 165 Aftershocks

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia/Azatutyun) — The earthquake registered in Armenia on February 13 was the strongest after the 1988 Spitak earthquake, Head of the Regional Survey for Seismic Protection Sos Margaryan told a press conference.

He said the 5.2 magnitude quake was followed by 165 aftershocks, the strongest of which had a magnitude of 3.

According to Margaryan, aftershocks are typical of such earthquakes. He reminded that in August 2021, an earthquake at the same epicenter was followed by 69 aftershocks within a day, with the number reaching 223 on the 40th day.

According to the Armenian seismic protection agency, the epicenter of the earthquake was at a section of the Armenian-Georgian border about 40 kilometers north of Gyumri. Tremors were felt in Yerevan and six of Armenia ten provinces as well as Tbilisi and southern Georgia.

The quake did not kill or injure anyone. The Armenian Ministry of Emergencies reported minor damage caused to buildings in Yerevan, Gyumri and three other towns.

Many Gyumri residents rushed out of their homes immediately after the quake, which knocked out power in one of the city districts. Power was restored about 90 minutes later.

“Residents can return to their homes,” the Ministry of Emergencies said in a late-night statement. It urged them not to “succumb to panic,” saying that they should only expect weaker aftershocks.

The ministry’s seismic protection service

recorded 165 aftershocks by Monday morning.

“It’s probably the strongest since the Spit-



New block of apartments in Gyumri (Azsatutyun photo)

ak earthquake,” Margarian said, referring to 1988 calamity that killed more than 25,000 people and devastated much of northwestern Armenia, including Gyumri.

## Russian, Armenian Officials Again Discuss Talks With Turkey

MOSCOW (RFE/RL) — Deputy parliament speaker Ruben Rubinyan on Monday, February 14, discussed with a senior Russian diplomat the upcoming second round of negotiations on normalizing relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Rubinyan, who represents Armenia in the negotiations, had already spoken with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko ahead of his first meeting with Turkish negotiator Serdar Kilic held in Moscow on January 14. Ankara and Yerevan described that meeting as “positive and constructive.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Rudenko discussed with Rubinyan by phone the implementation of the latter’s “understandings” with Kilic reached in Moscow as well as their second meeting that will take place in Vienna on February 24.



Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko (Tass photo)

“The Russian side reaffirmed its readiness to further assist in the search for common ground between Yerevan and Ankara in the interests of stability and sustainable development in the region,” read a statement issued by the ministry.

According to the official Armenian readout of Rubinyan’s phone call with Rudenko, the two men expressed hope that the Vienna meeting will be productive.

Earlier this month, Armenia’s Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan voiced cautious optimism over the success of the Turkish-Armenian dialogue which has also been welcomed by the United States and the European Union.

Ankara has for decades linked the establishment of diplomatic relations with Yerevan and the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border to a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict acceptable to Azerbaijan. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has repeatedly made it clear that his government will coordinate the Turkish-Armenian normalization talks with Baku.

## Dr. Armoudian Uses Power of Ideas to Take on Wrongdoers

By Alin K. Gregorian  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — Journalist, author and professor Maria Armoudian is focusing on ideas and actions in the quest for justice; she knows that one needs plenty of the former to arrive at the latter.

Her latest book, *Lawyers Beyond Borders:*

*Advancing International Human Rights through Local Laws and Courts*, was released this fall by the University of Michigan Press.

Armoudian’s family history of crossing continents in search of a better life following the Armenian Genocide has led to her current career.

Armoudian, who last month was interviewed via Zoom in her home in Auckland, New Zealand, was born in Oklahoma. And not just that — her story, like many other Armenians, has seen her family go from historic Armenia to Cyprus and Lebanon, and finally to yet another country, in this case, the US.

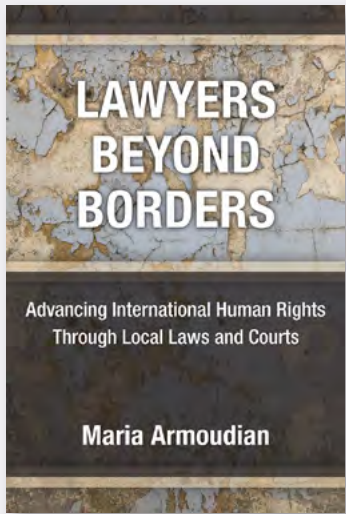
Her dad was born in Lebanon, her mother grew up in Cyprus but attended the American University of Beirut. They met and married and her father got a scholarship to Louisiana State University to do a PhD.

She joked, “My brother and I were both born in Baton Rouge, so, we are Cajun Armenians.”

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Dr. Maria Armoudian



## French Prime Minister Jean Castex Attends Banquet of the Armenian Organizations of France

By Jean Eckian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PARIS — On Tuesday, February 8, the Council of Armenian Organizations of France (CCAF), represented by Ara Toranian and Mourad Papazian, received for its eighth annual banquet, more than 150 French personalities from politics, culture and worship, sport and media, and Armenian, Jewish, Assyro-Chaldean, Kurdish, Cypriot, Tutsi associations, as well as elected representatives of the French Republic and representatives of the embassies of Armenia, Russia, United States, UNESCO, etc. Civil society was also represented by academics and specialists from the sphere of criminal law. In all there was a total of 450 guests gathered in the salons of Hôtel du Collectionneur in Paris.

The most notable attendee was Prime Minister Jean Castex.

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Jean Castex (photo Jean Eckian)

### CALIFORNIA

Olympic Gold Medalist Artur Aleksanyan Meets With Hovsepien School Students

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### MICHIGAN

Nairi Folk Ensemble Wows US Audiences

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### TOKYO

Japanese Duduk Player Honored with Diploma for Popularizing Armenian Music

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenia Covid Infections Surpass 400,000

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The number of confirmed coronavirus infections in Armenia grew by 2676 to reach 402403 on Friday, February 11, according to information provided by the Health Ministry.

Fresh figures also revealed that 3658 more people recovered, 31 patients died from Covid-19, while eight others carrying the virus died in the past 24 hours.

A total of 6743 tests have been performed in the past day, the National Center For Disease Control and Prevention said.

So far, 365,662 people have recovered, 8,145 have died from the coronavirus in the country, while 1,567 others carrying the virus have died from other causes.

Armenia, CSTO Chief Discuss Border Situation

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Secretary of Armenia’s Security Council Armen Grigoryan spoke to Stanislav Zas, the head of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) by phone to discuss the situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, the press service of the Armenian Security Council reported on Friday, February 11.

“During the conversation, the sides discussed the situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Grigoryan stressed that there has been a border between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the Soviet Union,” the Council said.

“He also noted that under the 1991 agreement on ‘the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States,’ the parties recognized the border, ratified the deal in their parliaments and made it an integral part of the legislation of the two countries,” the Armenian authorities reported.

Grigoryan’s comments came after Zas said there is no border between Armenia and Azerbaijan as such, but a line of contact, strongholds and observation posts.

Azerbaijan Forces Continue Shooting at Border

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — On February 15, at around 4:15 p.m., the Azerbaijani troops violated the ceasefire regime in the eastern border zone of the Artsakh Republic.

A conscript in Artsakh’s Defense Army, Khachatur Khachatryan, was wounded in the shooting.

His condition is assessed as serious.

The Russian peacekeepers have been informed about the incident.

At present, the operative-tactical situation in the mentioned part of the line if contact is stable.

On the same day, Azerbaijani armed forces opened fire in the direction of Armenian farmers from positions located in the vicinity of the village of Khramort in Artsakh’s Askeran region, Artsakh’s Prosecutor’s Office reported.

Inflation Continues at Alarming Rate in Armenia

By Gevorg Gyulumyan  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Inflation, which began to appear in Armenia in 2020, has become a serious problem currently, as a result of which daily the rates of poverty and emigration are increasing. In addition, minor crimes are emerging, reminiscent of the 1990s.

Inflation in Armenia has increased almost 8 percent compared to last year, which is a huge jump. Below are some examples that reflect the year-end price increases of 2021 compared to the end of 2020.

Food prices rose by 11.2 percent, household goods by 8.7 percent, leisure by 3.8 percent, utility bills by 1.3 percent, alcoholic beverages by 9.3 percent, clothing by 8.1 percent, entertainment by 3.2 percent, internet by 0.9 percent, transport by 9.1 percent, healthcare by 5.4 percent and education by 1.8 percent.

These figures, of course, have already changed during the first two months of 2022, unfortunately for the worse, because inflation has continued to increase.

The State Commission for the Protection of Economic Competition was established in Armenia to implement policy in the field of protection of economic competition. The first composition of the commission was approved in 2001. The main goal is to protect and encourage free economic competition, to provide the necessary environment for fair competition, to promote business development, and to protect the interests of consumers in Armenia.

The Commission is a member of the Interstate Council for Antimonopoly Policy of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), the International Competition Network (ICN), and the CIS Interstate Council for Antitrust Policy’s Advertising Coordination Council.

This commission is evidently not able to function properly under the current circumstances, and so some products have almost tripled in price. For example, eggs which sold for 30-40 drams in 2020 have reached 90-95 drams; that is, they have increased from approximately 40 cents US to almost 2 dollars in price.

The Armenian government attempts to find the causes of inflation in the context of global inflation. Economic experts confirm that inflation is extremely high and could pose serious economic risks. For example, Hrand Mikaelyan, an expert at the Caucasus Institute, believes that the current in-

flation has been influenced by the rise in world energy and mineral prices, the rise in world food prices, and that inflation has been “imported” to various developing countries, including Armenia.

“After 2003, the balance of Armenia’s foreign trade has changed drastically: the difference between exports and imports

has significantly increased. Today, local producers are also dependent on foreign countries, as most of the raw materials and components for production are imported. Therefore, when the price of raw materials rises, so does the price of products,” said Mikayelian in an online article by Seda Hergnyan in *Hetq* this January.

Emigration from Armenia Increasing

By Ani Mejlumyan

Nearly 44,000 more Armenians left the country in 2021 than returned, a record figure for the last several years, according to newly released official data.

The theme of out-migration has been a hot topic and highly politicized issue in the country, and the recent numbers confirm what many believed: that many more Armenians are leaving — in particular for migrant labor abroad — than coming home.

In total, 43,874 more Armenians left than entered the country in 2021. That reversed a trend of three straight years when the country recorded positive balances: 15,317 in 2018, 10,506 in 2019, and 12,092 in 2020.

The migration figures did not come as a surprise, as Armenians struggled both with a declining economy and a deteriorating security situation following the 2020 defeat in the war with Azerbaijan. On top of that, loosening COVID pandemic restrictions meant many people who had wanted to leave before that were finally able to.

“Out-migration for employment to Russia averages 60-70,000 a year,” the head of the country’s Migration Service, Armen Ghazaryan, said. “Those people didn’t go anywhere in 2020 and naturally we had to have these people leave in 2021.”

The figures indicated that many Armenians, as expected, did return in the last quarter of 2021. In the first three quarters of the year about 103,000 more Armenians left the country than returned, 64,000 of those in the first quarter alone.

Migration figures in Armenia tend to track perceptions of economic and political stability. Following a 1998 attack on the country’s parliament that killed the country’s prime minister, the speaker of parliament and six other lawmakers, net migration topped 60,000 in 2000 and 2001. Following the 2008 global financial crisis, the figures topped 40,000 in both 2010 and 2011.

But the current government, which took power in the 2018 “Velvet Revolution,” had made it a point of pride that more Armenians who had sought their fortune abroad were returning home.

There are no precise numbers of how many people actually live in Armenia. The last census was conducted in 2011, and counted 3,018,854 people. The country was supposed to conduct another census in 2020 — the law requires one every 10 years — but it was delayed because of the pandemic. The state Statistics Committee has been testing a system to conduct an online census in 2022.

The national police also track data of people who register or unregister at addresses; in 2020, 33,203 people unregistered from their addresses, and that number jumped to 38,932 in 2021. Not everyone who moves abroad reports when they leave an address. Nevertheless, that data still offers a more precise picture of people who have definitely left the country, said Anna Hovhannisyan of the Armenia office of the UN Population Fund in an interview with RFE/RL.

National Security Services Arrests 19 in Alleged Spy Ring in Military

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The National Security Service (NSS) reported on February 10 that it has detected and neutralized the activity of the spy network operating in the territory of Armenia.

According to the NSS, foreign special services have set up an agency network in Armenia, which includes people serving in various units of the Armed Forces.

According to the Service, the people who carried out the espionage activities created fake personal pages on social networks posing as Armenian women. After that, the representatives of the foreign special services, who are fluent in the Armenian language, got acquainted with the persons holding different positions in the Armenian

Armed Forces, turned the acquaintances into close relations, and then offered to cooperate with them for money, provide information on the military sphere, in particular on the locations of military units, personnel, weapons, ammunition, number and type of military equipment, military units, their command staff, defense zones, engineering structures, equipment, etc.

According to the National Security Service, the persons who carried out espionage activities in the mentioned way involved about two dozen Armenian citizens in the agency network, who officially had the opportunity to get in touch with information and documents constituting state and official secrets.

In exchange for money, the servicemen, through various mobile applications, partially passed on military or other information to the representatives of foreign special services, committing treacherous acts to the detriment of the Republic of Armenia, according to the accusation.

The identities of the Armenian citizens involved in the network have been revealed, the volume and content of other military information has been revealed, and the further transfer of new information for hostile activities has been disrupted, the NSS reports.

A total of 19 people were arrested on suspicion of high treason during the preliminary investigation of the criminal case, some of whom testified.



# Natalie Muradyan, 20 Girls’ Math Camp Creator and MIT Student

By Cristopher Patvakanian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

(This is the third of the series Inspiring Armenian Young Adults, which highlights the accomplishments of a few of some of Armenia’s brightest, bravest, young adults. Their brief profiles showcase the talents of Armenia’s upcoming generation and shed light on the impressive work they have accomplished thus far.)

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Meet Natalie Muradyan. Natalie is currently in her third year of studies at MIT, majoring in Computer Science and Engineering. Born and raised in Yerevan, Armenia, Muradyan, now 20, is a graduate of the famous “Phys-Math School,” a top tier public school in Armenia which has an intense focus on STEM subjects, and has produced many students who go on to incredible success both in Armenia and abroad. Natalie, of course, is a great example of this; she not only participated but medaled in several international math Olympiads, competing against top students from all over the world. And since then, Natalie’s passion and success in STEM has grown even further.

In 2019, Muradyan applied to and was accepted to MIT, making history as one of the few from Armenia, and an even smaller number of women from Armenia to study there. Despite being thousands of miles away, Natalie has kept the bond with Armenia strong. Muradyan is currently president of the MIT Armenian Society (MITAS) and an active member of the MIT community, whether it’s hosting events on campus to bring together Armenians and non-Armenians or shedding light on the Artsakh war last year through an op-ed published in MIT’s The Tech newspaper.

But Natalie’s commitment to the Armenian cause didn’t stop there. This past summer, on her own initiative, Muradyan began teaching math courses to students in Artsakh despite having a full time internship in the U.S.

“After the war I was thinking ‘How can I contribute to my country despite being so far from it?’, and I said ‘Hey, I’m kind of good at math, maybe I can teach kids?’”. The popularity of the course was enormous, with hundreds of girls applying to join. Muradyan chose to make her class specifically for girls because “[i]t can be discouraging for girls to participate in math because of stereotypes that boys are better than them... sometimes they won’t even engage because of that”. The structure of the course was meant to be interactive, with students getting homework in advance and then reviewing the solutions, concepts and questions over zoom with Natalie. For students who could not join live, the recordings were also provided, making it even easier to participate.



Natalie Muradyan – Girls’ Math Camp Creator and MIT Student

Beyond teaching math, Natalie used the lessons to inspire those girls by telling them stories of her journey and encouraging them to partake in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) despite any preconceptions. “It doesn’t matter if my students won’t become Olympic medalists and don’t go into STEM, for me it was a pleasure to meet them and help them realize sometimes you can do something for your own joy and out of intellectual curiosity.” Moreover, her connection with the girls, and the bond of the girls amongst themselves, is an incredible byproduct of the lessons. Muradyan was happy to have united students and provide a network they can use to work together again in the future if they choose. Though for now Muradyan does not have concrete plans to do another summer camp, it is certain this is only the beginning of her important contributions to the homeland.

# Prime Minister Meets with Ambassador of Japan to Armenia Fukushima Masanori

YEREVAN — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 8 met with Ambassador of Japan to Armenia Fukushima Masanori.

Pashinyan spoke about the development and expansion of cooperation between Armenia and Japan in all spheres. In particular, Pashinyan stressed the need to deepen trade and economic ties, noting that the Armenian government is interested in attracting Japanese investments to our country. Highly appreciating the technical assistance provided to the country in the field of emergency situations and healthcare, Pashinyan expressed hope that it will be continuous and will contribute to the effective implementation of reforms in those areas.

Ambassador Masanori noted that the development of relations with Armenia in

the political, economic and humanitarian spheres is of great importance for the government of Japan. The ambassador added that the Japanese side is interested in expanding economic cooperation and is ready to work intensively with its Armenian counterparts for that purpose. Fukushima presented to the Prime Minister the programs implemented by the Embassy of Japan in Armenia, which are aimed at providing technical equipment in various fields.

The two sides also discussed issues related to the implementation of student exchange programs in the field of education, cooperation in high technologies, healthcare and other areas, as well as Armenia’s participation in the expo exhibition in Osaka in 2025.



The prime minister met with the Japanese ambassador.



# Yerevan’s Ayb School Makes It to Final of International Earth Prize Competition

YEREVAN (Ayb School) — The [Ayb School](https://www.theearthprize.org/finalists) team that represents Armenia at The Earth Prize (<https://www.theearthprize.org/finalists>) international competition has made it to the final along with the best 10 participating teams. The Ayb School team, consisting of 12th-grade students Ilya Lalazaryan, Nane Yengibaryan, and Mary Shushanyan is participating in the contest with the Rene’Mask project under the guidance of chemistry teacher Lilit Hambardzumyan.

There were 516 schools from 144 countries — a total of 560 teams — which filed applications for participation in the competition. In the final, Armenia will compete with the teams from the United Kingdom, Vietnam, Switzerland, Taiwan, Canada, United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Japan, and Kenya. The top ten teams are from world-famous schools like Eton College (UK), Havergal College (Canada) and the International School of Zug and Luzern (Switzerland).

The Earth Prize is a global \$200,000 environmental sustainability competition for students between the ages of 13 and 19 which will reward the teams whose projects have the most potential to address environmental issues.

The René Mask project was spearheaded by Ilya Lalazaryan, who conducted thorough research and set numerous laboratory experiments to process facial protection items into fuel. The purpose of this project is to solve two problems — save the environment from pollution and produce an alternative energy source that can be used for some heating appliances and engines.

The final is scheduled for March 25. The students will present their projects to the jury online.





ARMENIA

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## Ice Dancing Armenian Pair Finishes 18th in Olympics

BEIJING (Panorama.am) — Armenian figure skaters Tina Garabedian and Simon Proulx Senecal finished 18th at the 24th Winter Olympics in Beijing.

The pair scored 167.03 points in the short and free programs, the National Olympic Committee said. The ice dancers showed an impressive performance in the free program, it added.

Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France won the Olympic gold medal with a world record of 226.98 points.

Russia's Nikita Katsalapov and Victoria Sinitsina, the reigning European and world champions after Papadakis and Cizeron skipped those competitions due to Covid concerns, had to settle for silver. Americans Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue took bronze.

## Paylan Observes Renovation of Armenian Church

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Turkish lawmaker of Armenian descent Garo Paylan has visited St. Giragos Armenian Church in Diyarbakir, according to a Facebook post he published on February 12. "I visited St. Giragos Church in Diyarbakir to observe the work on site," he wrote.

The ancient Armenian church in southeastern Turkey being restored. The Church, built in the 16th century in the Alipasa neighborhood of Sur district, Diyarbakir province, has an area of 3,769 square meters.

Owned by the Diyarbakir Surp Giragos Armenian Church Foundation, the church, whose upper structure was completely destroyed, is also known as the Paddy Church as it was used as a paddy factory for a long time. An inscription, now in the Diyarbakir Archeology Museum, says the Christian place of worship was last repaired in 1840.

## Azerbaijan Announces Plans to Build Transmission Line through Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan is planning to build a transmission line to Nakhichevan through what it calls the "Zangezur corridor" through Armenia, and from there to Turkey and Iran. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev made these remarks in an interview with Azertag news agency on February 10.

The Azerbaijani side has on multiple occasions raised the question about a "corridor" through the southern Armenian province of Syunik that would connect Nakhichevan to the rest of Azerbaijan. The Armenian side, however, has repeatedly denied being involved in negotiations for the provision of a corridor to Azerbaijan, stressing that they have only agreed to unblock transport communications in the region. "Now we are working on a new energy project to lay a power line to Nakhichevan, and from there to international markets — to Turkey and Iran," Aliyev said.



EU envoy Toivo Klaar and Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin in Yerevan

## EU Special Envoy, Armenia Delegation Head Meet with Prime Minister

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Nikol Pashinyan on February 14 received the European Union (EU) Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia Toivo Klaar. Head of the European Union Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin was also present at the meeting, the prime minister's office reported.

Pashinyan highlighted the continuous development of Armenia-European Union relations and the joint efforts in that direction. He stressed that the agenda of democratic reforms continues to be among the priorities of the Armenian government, adding that the commitment of the Armenian authorities to the process of democratic reforms is inviolable. The interlocutors discussed issues related to the process of

works in the direction of implementation of the EU's €2.6 billion investment package for Armenia. In this context, the effective implementation of the €80 million package in Syunik Province was particularly highlighted.

The premier praised the efforts of President of the European Council Charles Michel to strengthen mutual understanding and stability in the region.

The situation in the South Caucasus region after the 44-day war, steps taken to defuse the situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and ensure stability were touched upon during the meeting. In particular, the sides exchanged views on the meetings mediated by the Russian president in Sochi, the head of the European Council and the president of France in Brussels, as

well as the results of the quadripartite videoconference on February 4 and the implementation of the agreements reached.

The entry of the UNESCO mission and international humanitarian organizations into the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zone was highlighted, taking into account the threatening statements made by Azerbaijan against the Armenian cultural heritage and the steps already taken to destroy a number of Armenian monuments.

The need for the full resumption of the peace process under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairmanship for the lasting settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and the intensification of the Co-Chairs' activities were also emphasized.

## UK Seizes Millions from Lawmaker Linked to Azerbaijani Laundromat

LONDON (OCCRP) — The U.K. authorities have seized from an Azerbaijani lawmaker 5.6 million pounds (US\$7.56 million) derived from a sophisticated international money laundering scheme that was revealed by the OCCRP and its partners in 2017, the National Crime Agency (NCA) said in a statement on Monday.

The U.K. authorities have seized from an Azerbaijani politician, Javanshir Feyziyev, 5.6 million pounds (US\$7.56 million), derived from a sophisticated international money laundering scheme that was revealed by the OCCRP and its partners in 2017.

Based on the results of an investigation conducted by the agency, a court ruled that the money can be seized from six bank accounts belonging to Javanshir Feyziyev, his wife, one of his children and a nephew.

Feyziyev is a serving member of Azerbaijan's Parliament, Chair of the UK-Azerbaijan All Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, and Co-chair of the EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, according to the NCA.

The money came from the so-called Azerbaijan Laundromat, a complex money-laundering operation and slush fund that handled \$2.9 billion over a two-

year period through four shell companies registered in the U.K.

Some of it simply enriched the Azeri elite and some was, among other, used to pay several European politicians who lobbied on behalf of Baku at a time when the regime threw more than 90 human rights activists, opposition politicians, and journalists (such as OCCRP journalist Khadija Ismayilova) into prison on politically motivated charges.

In November, the NCA requested to seize 15 million pounds (\$20.25 million) from Feyziyev and his relatives but the court approved 5.6 million.

Investigators found that some of the transfers to Feyziyev's accounts were backed by documentation, such as invoices and contracts, pretending to support genuine and large-scale corporate operations but that the documents "were entirely fictitious and were produced in order to mask the underlying money laundering activities of those orchestrating the accounts," according to District Judge, John Zani.

Both sides appeared happy with the verdict.

"This is a substantial forfeiture of money laundered through the Azerbaijan Laun-

dromat, and our success highlights the risk to anyone who uses these schemes," the Head of Civil Recovery at the NCA, Andy Lewis, said.

A spokesperson for the Feyziyev family stated that although they are "disappointed that any of the frozen funds have been forfeited, they are pleased to have succeeded in the majority of the claim and to have had the Court confirm that neither 'Javanshir Feyziyev or any of the Respondents have been engaged in corruption'."

The Feyziyevs were "relieved" that the Judge has allowed them to keep some 10 million pounds (\$13.5 million) of the sum the NCA tried to take from them, "and that this long running matter has at last been resolved, for the most part, in the family's favour."

According to Ben Russell, Deputy Director of the National Economic Crime Centre, "this case demonstrates the NCA's commitment to investigating and seizing the proceeds of international corruption and associated money laundering."

(The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project has focused on large-scale corruption by governments.)





## INTERNATIONAL

# Islamic State Collaborators Received Turkish Citizenship, Official Report Shows

By Fahim Tastekin

ISTANBUL (Al-Monitor) — A leaked report has revealed details about how the jihadi group used Turkey to traffic money and obtain supplies.

Shortly after the Islamic State's (IS's) leader was killed in a Syrian hideout near the Turkish border, a leaked report by Turkey's Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) revealed details about how the jihadi group used the country to traffic money and obtain supplies, including drone parts.

The March 8, 2021, report by the MASAK, a body attached to Turkey's Treasury and Finance Ministry, indicates that IS members acquired equipment and parts to make drones and improvised explosive devices with the help of companies set up in Turkey, and used exchange offices, jewelry shops, post offices and banks to transfer money. Furthermore, it reveals that some IS-linked individuals investigated by the MASAK have acquired Turkish citizenship.

The 279-page document, obtained by Al-Monitor, was first reported by journalist Bahadır Ozgur in the daily *BirGun* last week and has since made it to parliament's agenda.

The most striking details pertain to the activities of three companies set up by the Aleppo-born Ibrahim Hag Gneid in Turkey's southern province of Mersin in 2014 and 2016. The companies — Altun Inci, Mavi Yelken and Elfarah — were registered as businesses dealing in construction materials, industrial supplies and hardware.

According to information sent to the MASAK by the directorate-general of the police on November 1, 2017, Altun Inci procured equipment and parts for drones and improvised explosive devices worth millions of dollars from 2015 through 2016. The authors of the report opine that Gneid's motivation was material but he was aware the supplies were destined for IS.

Gneid was business partners with Mustafa Ghassan Naway and Safi Naway, both Syrians who have settled in Mersin and acquired Turkish citizenship.

According to the report, Abu Naeema al-Turkistani, a Chinese national of Uighur origin involved in Altun Inci's procurement chain, ordered materials used in weapons-making worth some \$85,000 from a China-based company in 2015. Turkistani and his wife, Minawaer Maitituersun, belonged to an IS unit in charge of making chemical weapons.

According to the report, Sajid Farooq Babar, a Pakistani national known as Abu Muaz Pakistani, also supplied IS with large amounts of materials via Altun Inci and Mavi Yelken before being killed in a US strike in 2017.

The Pentagon said at the time that Babar and two fellow IS members responsible for modifying commercially produced drones were killed in successive strikes near Mayadin, Syria, in September 2017, which targeted also a research lab. A US military official described the three men as "highly skilled" militants whose removal would degrade IS' ability "to modify and employ drone platforms as reconnaissance and direct-fire weapons on the battlefield."

Gneid parted ways with Altun Inci in 2017, continuing his activities with Elfarah and Mavi Yelken. Open sources show Mavi Yelken is a member of Turkey's Mediterranean Exporters Assembly.

According to information obtained by Ozgur, the *BirGun* journalist, two Turks bearing the same surname became partners in Altun Inci after Gneid's departure. Elfarah, meanwhile, is currently owned by Cafer Ibrahim, a Syrian who acquired Turkish citizenship in 2017 and resides in Istanbul. Ozgur reports that Naway Group, a company owned by Altun Inci partner Mustafa Naway, was a key link in the network. The company, which was founded in Aleppo and opened an office in China in 2011, is still involved in e-commerce.

Gneid received Turkish citizenship through a Cabinet decision of May 29, 2017. In 2019, prosecutors in Mersin investigated him on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist group and, even though intelligence reports described him as an IS member, the probe ended with a decision not to prosecute. Writing to the MASAK in February 2021, the police reiterated that Altun Inci procured multimillion-dollar drones and explosive materials on behalf of IS.

The report cites also a Lebanese link: Fayeze Alfliti, a Turkish citizen of Lebanese origin. According to information relayed by the police to the MASAK on Jan. 22, 2020, Alfliti made contact with IS after crossing to Syria from Turkey and supplied the group with Lebanese-made detonating cords in 2015. In return, a payment of \$400,000 was sent with smugglers from Raqqa, then an IS stronghold in Syria, to the southern Turkish city of Gaziantep before the money was transferred to Lebanon.

The report indicates that Turkish members of the group were actively involved in IS efforts to raise money to help the escape of fellow militants and their relatives from al-Hol camp in northern Syria, which is controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. On Sept. 30, 2020, the police informed the MASAK that Abdi Yildirim, who was captured in December that year, and Selami Boztepe raised money in Ankara, Antalya and Konya to "rescue" female members of the group held in camps in Syria.

In another finding, the MASAK established that Abuliezi Abduhamiti, hailing from China's Xinjiang region and described as a key IS financial operative by US authorities, was linked to Abdulkadir Masharipov, the Uzbek assailant convicted of gunning down 39 people in an Istanbul nightclub just minutes into New Year's Day in 2017, and had a role in money trafficking linked to a network in Britain.

Standing out on the financial leg is also Ahmed El Ahmed El Harun, a Syrian from Deir ez-Zor, known also as Uday Ali Saad Khalifa Al Salmani, who joined IS in Iraq along with his brothers. According to the report, he was in charge of financing the transfer of arms and militants. As part of his mission, he ran jewelry shops, transferred funds using the informal hawala system, provided money to pay the salaries of IS members in Iraq, spent time in Turkey to take care of logistical issues, organized illegal border crossings and set up a solidarity fund for IS members.

The report shows that IS activities have extended to Turkish regions that have rarely been on the radar, unlike provinces such as Istanbul, Ankara, Konya, Sanliurfa and Bursa. For instance, a native of Deir ez-Zor named Yusuf El Ali El Hasan collected money from Syrians in the Black Sea province of Trabzon. He sent the money to contacts in Ankara and Sanliurfa, named respectively as Abdurrahman Abdulkareem,

also from Deir ez-Zor, and Ali El Ali. The pair then transferred the money to the El Hafiz company in Syria.

The report mentions numerous individuals linked to the currency exchange companies Saksouk and Al Haram, which are at the center of the money transfer chain. Among them is Aleppo-born Hasan Krayem, the owner of a jewelry business in Turkey, called Talbe Kuyumculuk, who, the report shows, has become a Turkish citizen.

According to information the police relayed to the MASAK on September 23, 2020, Suat Ozdemir from Elazig, eastern Turkey, collected 1.7 million Turkish liras for the release of about 200 IS-related women and children held in Syria. In two separate instances in November 2018 and September 2020, the police informed the board that Tahsin Elhalaf, a Syrian residing in the southern Turkish province of Kahramanmaraş, was involved in IS money transfers between Turkey and Syria.

Other information from the police, dated April 3, 2018, details a police raid on the El Hadi jewelry shop in Istanbul, owned by Halid Habu, a Syrian, on March 16, 2018. The police seized large sums of money believed to be used in IS-linked transfers, including more than \$1.2 million, nearly 129,000 euros, some 1.8 million Turkish liras, nearly 47,000 Emirati dirhams and 2 million Syrian pounds.

The report shows that some IS sympathizers such as Suleyman Soltamuradov and Rukman Mazashev who raised money for Gayratjon Mirzotokhirovich, an IS financial operative known as Abdurakhmon Uzbeki, have also acquired Turkish citizenships.

## UNESCO's Fact-Finding Mission to Artsakh Urgent – MFA

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia considers that a visit by UNESCO fact-finding visit to Artsakh is urgent and a priority, Spokesperson for the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vahan Hunanyan said in comments to Public Radio of Armenia this week.

"Armenia supports the soonest implementation of the mission, in line with the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols," Hunanyan said.

## Iran Plans to Host Second 3+3 South Caucasus Format Meeting

TEHRAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has welcomed the arrangements to hold the next meeting of the 3+3 South Caucasus Platform in Iran, hoping that the meeting would contribute to regional security and stability, *Tasnim* news agency reported on February 14.

In a telephone conversation, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov talked about the trend of ties between Tehran and Moscow and some issues of mutual interest at the regional and international levels, including the Vienna talks.

The Russian Foreign Minister welcomed Iran's plan to host the second meeting of the 3+3 platform on the South Caucasus and expressed hope that the conference

The report mentions also a Somali man, Abdifatah Abdullahi Mohamed, who belongs to the Somalia-based jihadi group Al-Shabaab, according to information the MASAK received from Turkey's National Intelligence Organization on Feb. 4, 2021. Prosecutors in Istanbul investigated Mohamed on suspicion of membership in a terrorist group in 2020, but that probe too ended in nonprosecution.

The report includes curious tables on the identities of the individuals investigated by the MASAK. A column titled "TCKN" — the Turkish acronym for "Republic of Turkey Identity Number" — lists 11-digit numbers starting with the number 9. In the "citizenship" column, many are marked as citizens of Turkey. The tables might mislead the reader to conclude that all IS-linked individuals mentioned in the report are Turkish citizens, even though the report's only open reference to the acquisition of Turkish citizenship pertains to Gneid. Back in 2017, following allegations that Ankara would allow Syrian refugees to vote, officials explained that identity numbers starting with 9 have been assigned to foreign nationals and do not denote citizenship. The identity numbers of several individuals other than Gneid do not start with 9.

Alpay Antmen, a lawmaker for the main opposition Republican People's Party, submitted a parliamentary question to the interior minister last week, asking why the police were not acting against the individuals cited in the report and how many IS-linked people have acquired Turkish citizenship. Antmen told Al-Monitor he has yet to receive a reply.

According to him, the implementation of the UNESCO mission and the comprehensive study of the historical and cultural heritage will contribute to the efforts to preserve the cultural heritage in the territories under Azerbaijani control and prevent possible negative developments.

"We view the possible visit of a UNESCO mission to Yerevan and Baku in the above-mentioned context. There are no specific timeframes and agreements at the moment," the Spokesman said.

would further ensure the interests of regional countries and maintain stability and security in the region.

For his part, Amirabdollahian described the forthcoming session of the 3+3 South Caucasus Platform as an "opportunity for consensus and synergy to deepen regional cooperation in favor of the interests of the countries and people of the region."

The first session of the 3+3 regional consulting platform was held in Moscow on December 10.

Participating in the meeting were the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, as well as the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran.

Georgia skipped the meeting although it was invited to participate.



# French Prime Minister Castex Attends Banquet of the Armenian Organizations of France

BANQUET, from page 1

Candidates for the French presidential election, Anne Hidalgo (mayor of Paris) and Valérie Pécresse (president of the Ile-de-France region) attended. This election is scheduled on April 24, 2022, the day of the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. This commemorative day was formalized within the French Republic in 2019 by President Emmanuel Macron, who that evening was in Berlin. due to the crisis around Ukraine.

In the preamble to the evening, the co-presidents of the CCAF, in a serious atmosphere, took the floor to denounce the “butchery” of the Armenians of Karabakh, for which Azerbaijan is responsible.

Ara Toranian, very moved, exclaimed: “‘The Turks passed there,’ wrote Victor Hugo after the massacres on the island of Chios two hundred years ago. And today, again, ‘all is ruin and mourning.’ But in the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh this time, as was the case in Cyprus in 1974, among the Yezidis, the Assyro-Chaldeans, or in Syrian and Iraqi Turkish Kurdistan during the last decade [...] this is the nightmare, made worse by the fact that the world has fallen silent, except for one voice. It was yours, Mr. President of the Republic, you who, by evoking the crossing of a red line, denounced the Azerbaijani aggressor, as well as the presence in the fighting of jihadist mercenaries recruited by Erdogan in the region of Aleppo. [...] In the name of everything that binds Armenia to France, in the name of these very powerful formulas that you have used several times, we still hope for a referral to the United Nations



The banquet (photo Jean Eckian)

“Erdogan’s many threats against Armenia for years foreshadowed Turkey’s active participation. The political agenda of the Turkish-Azerbaijani forces was clear. And on September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive against Artsakh. And as if the unequal balance of power was not enough with the massive use of drones, cluster munitions and white phosphorus bombs, the Turkish army has engaged in this war by sending 80 military experts to Baku, 1200 Turkish elite soldiers on the ground, as well as 2000 Syrian jihadists auxiliary to the Turkish army. Yes, we are shocked that the Armenians were totally abandoned.”

Papazian was indignant because when 2,000 Azerbaijani soldiers had entered the sovereign territory of Armenia, and they should have been “expelled by force.” “So yes, we are indignant. We are revolted. We cannot accept this fait accompli which is imposed on the Armenians and which endangers their future in Armenia and in Artsakh,” he said. He continued: “So, dear friends, you will understand that we no longer believe in negotiations with Azerbaijan, we no longer believe in diplomatic summits, we no longer believe in summits in Brussels or Paris!”

Finally, the co-president of the CCAF regretted that “the file of the criminalization of the denial of the Armenian Genocide has not been dealt with in the face of the multiple Turkish threats hanging over the Armenian community in France, in particular with the resurgence of the ‘Gray Wolves’. He denounced “the Turkish organizations, controlled by Erdogan, which are prospering more and more, and manage many mosques, schools, lead many radical imams and export their policy of hatred to France. [...]” concluding, “We must act



From left, Gabriel Attal (government spokesperson), Jean Castex, Gérard Larcher (Senate president) (photo Jean Eckian)

before it is too late. We must act against Erdogan’s influence, act against his actions, act against his objectives of extending his power in France.”

denial, hate speech online and on social networks.” Regarding the Karabakh war, the prime minister paid tribute to the young Armenian soldiers “mowed down by the war that pitted Armenia against Azerbaijan for 44 days.” He recalled that President Macron “was the first head of state to denounce the aggression by Azerbaijan and the Turkish interference,” and stated “Our efforts will continue tirelessly until the release of all detainees by Azerbaijan is obtained.”

Castex concluded, “The destinies of our nations are deeply, intimately linked

and have been for centuries. The history of Armenia, we know, is forever marked by the blood of the victims of the Genocide and the tears of those who remained, of those who do not forget...”



Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo (photo Jean Eckian)



Ara Toranian (photo Jean Eckian)

Security Council to internationalize the issue and guarantee the existence of what remains of this people and this nation in danger. [...] Hasn’t the time finally come to reconcile justice and law so that we can gather with our heads held high in front of the Dzidzernakapert memorial, look Armenia in the face, and defend with her all our democratic and republican values?”

As for Mourad Papazian, he said with gravity: “We approach this year 2022 in pain. The inevitable happened! [...] We knew it, you knew it. Azerbaijan was preparing for war.



Mourad Papazian (photo Jean Eckian)

In his speech, Castex hailed President Joseph Biden for the United States’ recognition of the Armenian Genocide. He further stated that: “We have been working to develop the legal tools to fight against this



# Community News

## California Assemblymember Holden Builds Ties Through Syunik Sister State Relationship

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Assemblymember Chris Holden’s resolution, [ACR 105](#), proposing a sister state relationship between California and the Province of Syunik in Armenia, passed the California Senate Floor on February 10. Syunik is the southernmost province in Armenia and has profound historical and cultural significance for Armenia and the world. It is one of the original provinces of the ancient kingdoms of Armenia. It is also home to the Armenian Stonehenge, which dates to the bronze age and has petroglyphs that are seven thousand years old. Syunik is described by Armenians as the backbone of Armenia, as it is an essential to importing and exporting goods from the south.

ACR 105 would reinforce California’s solidarity with and support for the people of Syunik and will facilitate mutually beneficial educational, economic, and cultural exchanges between the two states. The resolution



Assemblyman Chris Holden

would create a taskforce with representatives from the community of Syunik, government of Syunik, government of California and community partners of California.

“Strengthening the relationship with Syunik comes at a critical time as regional powers like Azerbaijan and Turkey pose a threat to its existence and livelihood. This resolution reaffirms California’s solidarity with Armenia and our one-million-strong community of California-Armenians,” said Holden. There is power in our solidarity and there is even more when we acknowledge the wrongs committed and urge for justice. We set precedent for the future with our action or inaction and today, we are creating long-lasting ties to thread forward a better tomorrow.

“As an immigrant, this issue hits close to home for me. I and many of my constituents worry about the safety of loved ones residing in that region. So, I am deeply aware of the uncertainty inherent in living there and the privilege we have to live in California. By creating this sister-state

see TIES, page 8



Razmik with his parents in fall 2021

## Olympic Gold Medalist Artur Aleksanyan Meets with Hovsepien School Students

PASADENA, Calif. — On Thursday, February 10, Greco-Roman wrestler Artur Aleksanyan, an Olympic gold medalist (2016), silver medalist (2021) and bronze medalist (2012) met with the student body of the St. Gregory Alfred and Marguerite Hovsepien School and also visited St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Pasadena, CA.

The program began with Shahe Mankerian, principal of the Hovsepien School (pre-K–8th grade) welcoming Aleksanyan on behalf of the student body. Mankerian praised the beloved national hero of Armenia and Olympic champion from Gyumri, Armenia and thanked him for visiting the school. He then thanked the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles chapter for helping to arrange today’s visit. Mihran Toumajan from the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Metro Los Angeles chapter provided a brief biography about Aleksanyan to the students. Aleksanyan then humbly addressed the students and answered their questions one by one.

Mankerian introduced Carl Bardakian, chairman of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles chapter and former head coach of the Armenian National Basketball Team (2012-2015), who presented Aleksanyan with a copy of Avetis Baimarian’s Armenian language publication *Armenian Sports Encyclopedia*.

The program concluded with Principal Mankerian presenting Aleksanyan with a small gift on behalf of the school and each class having the opportunity to take photos with Aleksanyan. Afterwards, Mankerian led the champion on a tour of the school where he visited with the pre-school students.



Artur Aleksanyan visits with Hovsepien School pre-K students



From left, Shahe Mankerian, kindergarten student Dante Khachatorian, and Artur Aleksanyan

## Artsakh Census Completed By Anna Astvatsaturian Foundation

WESTBROOK, Maine — The Anna Astvatsaturian Foundation announced on February 8, the completion of the Artsakh Republic country-wide census, an initiative to research and document empirical data on the financial, personal, and property losses of the Armenian population, incurred during the Artsakh War of 2020.

The initiative to determine the impact of Azerbaijani aggression on the Artsakh population was the first project of the Foundation after the Artsakh War. The goal of the initiative was to document the emotional and physical damages suffered by the affected victims in the aftermath of the war. Information collected is being or will be utilized in three ways:

- To establish a knowledge base to assess need and to provide socio-economic and humanitarian assistance to those affected families
- To establish the legal framework for restitution to Armenians who suffered financial and personal loss during the 2020 Artsakh War
- To utilize the information collected for future preventative measures against genocide, war crimes, crimes of aggression and crimes against humanity

The initiative was launched in December 2020 and finalized by December 2021. It was implemented by the Association of Armenia’s Social Workers (AASW) to benefit the work of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Republic of Armenia, the Ministry of Housing and Social Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh and the Offices of Armenia’s and Artsakh’s Human Rights Ombudsmen. The Anna Astvatsaturian Foundation funded the project and in certain aspects of the initiative were assisted by the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and ACTED.

The interviews of the impacted Artsakhtsis were conducted in person by staff trained by the AASW and employed by the Foundation for the duration of the census. Surveys were conducted in four areas of Artsakh: Stepanakert, Martakert, Martuni, Askeran together with the four villages of Shushi. In Armenia, surveys were conducted for a portion of Artsakhtsi population that fled there during and after the war. A total of 20,297 households were surveyed. 2,982 households did not want to participate in the survey. An unknown number of families were unaccounted for due to relocation or death. Several communities in certain geographic areas of Artsakh were not surveyed in person due to the security concerns for the interviewers. As part of the census, images of properties and documentation were collected from the population surveyed.

Any individuals or organizations representing these victims may see CENSUS, page 8





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Erik Bazinyan Takes On Reinaldo Paniagua in Montreal on March 3

By Francisco Salazar

MONTREAL (The Ring) — Unbeaten super middleweight Erik Bazinyan is preparing himself to breakthrough this year and emerge as a strong contender.

Before facing the upper echelon of the division, Bazinyan must get past once-beaten Reinaldo Paniagua March 3 in a 10-round bout at the Casino de Montreal in Bazinyan’s hometown of Montreal, Canada.

Bazinyan (26-0, 20 knockouts), who is originally from Yerevan, Armenia and now resides in the Montreal suburb of Laval, has defeated modest opposition on his way to building an unbeaten record. In his last bout on June 6, Bazinyan stopped gatekeeper Scott Sigmon in round 2. He has stopped 11 of his last 12 opponents.

The 26-year-old has defeated the likes of David Zegarra, Alan Campa and Saul Roman, all of whom were stopped or knocked out.

Bazinyan has worked with trainer Marc Ramsey to improve his skill-set to complement his punching power. Eye of The Tiger Management is confident Bazinyan is ready to take that next step later this year.

“We (believe) Erik is ready to make the final push to put himself in the big fights at super middleweight,” Camille Estephan told RingTV.com. “We want to give him three to four fights this year, and hopefully get him in a position for an

elimination bout for a major (world) title.

“Erik was 109-1 in the amateurs and he’s 26-0 as a pro. He’s had a great path to become a champion for a long time.”

Bazinyan is not overlooking Paniagua (17-1, 16 KOs), who resides in Tijuana, Mexico. The 23-year-old knocked out journeyman Jorge Sillas in round 2 of his last bout on October 30. Paniagua has won his last eight bouts, all by knockout, since suffering his only loss as a pro to Elvis Bravo Salazar in March 2019.

While fights await Bazinyan later this year, he must win impressively against Paniagua and send a message to the rest of the top fighters at 168 pounds.

“(Paniagua) is a young, good boxer with a good record but I have more (than enough) experience to handle him,” said Bazinyan. “He is a Mexican boxer with a Mexican style and I think he will try to make a good fight, but I know what I have to do to win.

“The super middleweight division is very hot right now and I see myself with (the) top fighters this year. I’m ready for big fights and everyone will see me there soon.”



Bazinyan puts a foe down. He’s finished foes in 20 of his 26 outings (photo Vincent Ethier for Eye of the Tiger)

In the co-feature, hard-hitting middleweight Steven Butler will square off against Hector Zepeda in a 10-round bout.

Butler (28-3-1, 24 KOs), who resides in Montreal, has not fought since losing by knockout to gatekeeper Jose de Jesus Macias on January 21 of last year. Butler’s previous fight was a knockout loss to Ryoto Murata in December 2019.

Zepeda (20-3, 6 KOs) last fought on October 29, losing to Sebastian Papeschi by unanimous decision. Originally from Tijuana and now resides in San Diego, California, Zepeda has split his last six bouts. Two of the three losses came at the hands of unbeaten junior middleweight Sebastian Fundora and former world junior middleweight titleholder Carlos Molina.

In a clash of unbeaten female featherweights, Martine Vallieres Bisson (4-0, 1 KO) of Montreal will face Mexico’s Yolanda Vega (5-0) in a six-round bout.

## California Assemblymember Holden Builds Ties Through Syunik Sister State Relationship

TIES, from page 7

relationship with the Syunik Province, we will do our part, albeit small, to share some of the benefits of living here through economic, educational, and cultural engagement,” said Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian, co-author of ACR 105.

“Today, we are grateful to Assemblymember Chris Holden for working with us and spearheading the effort, now adopted both by the State Senate and the State Assembly, in establishing a Sister State relationship between California and Syunik province of Armenia. At such a critical time when Syunik’s sovereignty is at great risk under the grave threats posed by Azerbaijan and Turkey, this bold move by the State of California is a declaration of sol-

idarity meant to facilitate mutually beneficial educational, economic, and cultural exchanges, which in turn will strengthen the resolve of the people of Armenia to stand strong against the ongoing threats they face from belligerent and aggressive actors in the region,” remarked Nora Hovsepian, Chair of the Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region.

“In the aftermath of the war and given the absence of requisite pressure by the international community, the Azerbaijani military conducted deep, cross-border incursions into the Republic of Armenia’s Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces. Such actions are in clear violation of Armenia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Armenian Assembly of America salutes

and thanks Assemblymember Chris Holden for working in solidarity with Armenian Americans statewide and leading this landmark humanitarian effort. Now adopted both by the California State Senate and the State Assembly, we look forward

to assisting Assemblymember Holden in creating a long-lasting bond between the State of California and Syunik Province,” stated Mihran Toumajan, Western Region Director of the Armenian Assembly of America.

## Artsakh Census Completed By Astvatsaturian Foundation

CENSUS, from page 7

contact the foundation if they require access to specific information collected.

Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte is an author, lecturer, human rights advocate and humanitarian. She is a refugee from Baku, Azerbaijan. Anna launched her eponymous nonprofit in United States with its focus on community initiatives in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and the Armenian Diaspora.

Astvatsaturian Turcotte is an author, lecturer, lawyer, business woman and a human rights advocate. She is an Armenian refugee from Baku, Azerbaijan. After fleeing Baku in the fall of 1989 due to ethnic cleansing of Armenians, Anna and her family spent three years in Armenia as refugees before coming to United States in 1992.

In 2012 she published her book, *No-where, a Story of Exile*, which she wrote at the age of 14 as her family settled in North

Dakota as refugees. In April 2013 she successfully spearheaded the recognition efforts of Nagorno-Karabakh independence at the State of Maine House of Representatives. In November, 2015 she was elected to the Westbrook Maine City Council. In 2017 the Russian translation of Anna’s book was published.

She is the recipient of Mkhitar Gosh Medal, Republic of Armenia’s highest civilian honor awarded by President Serge Sargsyan for exceptional achievements in the political-social spheres, as well as outstanding efforts in the fields of diplomacy, law, and political science. Anna also received a Gratitude Medal from the President of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Bako Sahakyan, Vahan Cardashian award for her contributions within the Armenian Diaspora from ANCA-WR and Activism Award from ANCA-ER for enhancement of human rights, democracy, truth and justice.



The Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.,  
gratefully acknowledges the following donations sent in  
memory of the late Sarkis Keushkerian, brother of TCA  
Central Board member Kevork Keushkerian of Pasadena, CA.

- Kevork and Silva Keushkerian, Pasadena, CA \$200
- Arpi and Viken Melkonian, Laguna Niguel, CA \$200
- Zaven and Isgouhi Demirjian, Glendale, CA \$150
- Housib and Anahid Atechyan, Northridge, CA \$100
- Ara and Sonia Babayan, Glendale, CA \$100
- Drs. Raffi and Tamar Chalian, Sierra Madre, CA \$100
- Vahram and Kohar Tikijian, Valencia, CA \$100
- Takouhie and Bedros Kartounian, Pasadena, CA \$100
- Asdghig Keushkerian, Los Angeles, CA \$100
- Avo and Armig Markarian, Pasadena, CA \$100
- Khatchadour and Annie Nahabedian, Burbank, CA \$100
- Harout Pamboukian Family, Monrovia, CA \$100
- Anny and Artin K. Aghajanian, North Wales, PA \$75
- Virginia Aghajanian, Los Angeles, CA \$50
- Anush and Levon Ekmekchyan, El Segundo, CA \$50
- Zabelle Merjanian Revocable Trust, Redondo Beach, CA \$50
- Sarkis Iskenian, Glendale, CA \$40





OBITUARY

# Armand Andreassian

## Dedicated to the Arts

BOSTON — The quote “character is a tree and reputation is its shadow” describes the life honorably and well lived by Armand Andreassian.

The son of the late Andre and Berdjouhi Andreassian, Armand passed away on February 6, 2022 following a courageous battle against complications of cancer.

Armand was born on March 18 in Marseille, France. He along with his parents and his sister, Helene, emigrated to Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1954. Thoughtful and insightful with a love for learning, Armand excelled as a student. He graduated from McGill University in 1970 majoring in Psychology.

Following a move to Newton, Mass. with his family in 1963, Armand accepted a position as a psychologist at the Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham where he specialized in adolescent treatment and programs. He became the director of events and activities for his department. Armand became admired and respected for his patient and creative manner in dealing with the complicated issues of his young patients.

Always eager for new challenges, Armand became a licensed real estate broker in 1980. Fluent in three languages, Armand translated documents for the Boston courts. He also taught English to adults in evening school programs.

Armand was a man full of life. He enjoyed making every day count. He was a “collector” of people and enjoyed introducing and connecting people of like interests together. He was a lover of music and the arts, especially opera, classical, and Broadway musicals. He was an avid theater goer and enjoyed small theater productions that focused on young talent.

He established the Andreassian Music Fund and along with his sister, they hosted memorable concerts featuring soloists from the New England Light Opera Company. The funds raised were used to establish scholarships for young people pursuing a career in music. The fund was established in honor of his late mother, an accomplished opera soloist in France.

As a creative and artistic observer, at a young age Armand began collecting paintings, antiques, and furniture of all styles and mediums at estate sales and auctions.

Among Armand’s outstanding qualities were his sense of humor and capacity for compassion for his family and friends. Sensitive and strong, he would reach out with words of comfort and solace to those in need. His strong faith was a “gift” he shared with others as his prayer line was always expanding to include anyone hurt or suffering. A devoted brother to his sister, Helene, they enjoyed many years together at their home in South Yarmouth, Cape Cod.



# Sarkis Leon ‘Lee’ Gazoorian

## Son of Genocide Survivors, Army Vet

HAINES FALLS, N.Y. — Sarkis Leon “Lee” Gazoorian, age, 81, of Haines Falls, NY passed away peacefully on January 24, 2022, surrounded by his children following a brief illness at Albany Medical Center.

Born in Worcester, he was the son of Sarkis and Maritza (Babolian) Gazoorian. His father was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide by the Ottoman Turks.

During his youth some of his hobbies included running track and playing saxophone in an Armenian band. After graduating from high school at 16, Lee graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute with a degree in electrical engineering.

He was in the ROTC in college and became a First Lieutenant in 25th Signal Battalion of the US Army serving from 1962-1967 including active duty for 2 years in Germany. After leaving the Army, he received a master’s degree in Business Administration from Seton Hall University in New Jersey and worked as an electrical engineer for NJ Public Service and later IBM in Manhattan, NY. He served as the president of the Armenian Students’ Association of America Central Council 1969-70.

Lee later owned a wedding photography business in Hackensack, N.J. and eventually settled in Hunter, NY and lived there for the rest of his life. He purchased a restaurant/bar in Tannersville, naming it Cheers and operating it for several years in the 1980s with his former wife, Anitra Michaelian Gazoorian. After selling Cheers, he worked as a bartender for local restaurants and began a career in real estate in the Hunter area and later on Cape Cod.



He loved the ocean and enjoyed many summers with family on Cape Cod and Martha’s Vineyard.

Lee had a passion for aviation, had his pilot’s license and

loved to fly. He was also a model airplane hobbyist and belonged to a club on Cape Cod. Lee was an enthusiastic educator, substitute teaching at Hunter Tannersville Central High School for many years.

He had a healthy appetite for learning and fun. As an adult his many interests and hobbies included photography, poetry, Ingmar Bergman films, and traveling.

He cherished spending time with his children and grandchildren and it was obvious they were the light of his life.

Lee is survived by his children Carli Gazoorian of Elka Park, NY and Christopher Gazoorian and wife Sara Eisenberg Gazoorian of Poestenkill, NY, as well as his sisters Natalie Barmakian of Belmont, Mass. and Marcia Gazoorian of Worcester. He is also survived by his three grandchildren Sasha, Lila, and Ruby Gazoorian. He was predeceased by his parents, as well as his sister Rosalie Chorbajian of Bowie, MD.

A memorial will be held at a future date for family and friends.

# Harry Mugar Surabian, Jr.

## WWII Vet, Musician

SAUGUS, Mass. — Harry Mugar Surabian, Jr., a resident of Saugus, passed away on January 28, 2022 at the age of 95. He was the devoted husband to the late Grace (Boyajian-Mirijanian) Surabian for more than 50 years.

Harry was born on January 17, 1927 in Saugus to the late Harry and Zaruhe (Katchadourian) Surabian. He was the youngest of four children.

He was a lifelong resident of Saugus and was educated in the Saugus school system

and holds a MS in education from Northeastern University as well as a BS in music education from the Boston Conservatory of Music.

After graduation from Saugus High School, Harry entered WWII joining the U.S. armed forces attached to the 60<sup>th</sup> Army Ground Forces Band stationed in Heidelberg, Germany.

After he received an Honorable Discharge from the military, he returned home to complete his formal education and worked in the family package store along with his father and two older brothers Carl and Fred. Harry’s career was spent in education as a Guidance counselor in the Saugus school system and retired after 34 years.

Over the years, Harry’s love for travel took him to most of the countries in Europe and several countries in South America.

In later life, he participated as part of the American Legion in concert appearances in England, Ireland, Germany and Russia as well as throughout the United States.

In addition, he was very civic minded and compassionate of his fellow man having served in various capacities in the following organizations: Aleppo Shriners, William Sutton Lodge of Masons, and as a member of the Knights of Vartan and the Mr. & Mrs. Club associated with St. James Armenian Church of Watertown.

He was also past secretary of the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research and served as a Saugus town meeting member. Lastly, he was a member of several bands and orchestras during retirement. He also was a choice director for two churches and boy’s choirs.

Harry was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, uncle, brother and son. He is survived by his two step-children, Jan Mirijanian of New Jersey and Patricia Egavian and her husband Gregory of Boxford; grandchildren, Lauren Egavian and her husband Julian, Eric Egavian and his wife Janna, Kim Gider and her husband Andy; great granddaughters, Sage and Gabriella. He was predeceased by his brothers Carl and Fred Surabian and Harry’s twin sister Mary Surabian. He is also survived by his sister-in-law Giselle and his nephews Carl and his wife Doreen and Ron Surabian and his wife Patty and their children. Harry is also survived by many cousins.

Due to the present pandemic, the family will be delaying the memorial service to a later date.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Dr. Armoudian Uses Power of Ideas to Take on Wrongdoers

ARMOUDIAN, from page 1

She said, “Armenians have had to start over so many times. First our indigenous homelands and all our family members and everything that we had built were taken away from us, with no justice whatsoever. So Armenians then flee to other countries and we find homes and we start over again and rebuild community and we rebuild family and we rebuild livelihoods and then those countries fall apart and we move to another country: this constant reinventing of ourselves – and rarely with any justice.”

“Within weeks of [my] being born, he [Armoudian’s father] went to New York to do his post-doc in Columbia. He ended up in a small town called Weatherford, Ok.,” she said. “Such a strange trip!”

Armoudian wears many hats. She was a journalist and later became a commissioner in Los Angeles on environmental affairs. She is a fierce advocate for journalists and their potential to shine a light on wrongdoing.

“Through it all, I was quite disturbed by how hard it was to advance good public interest policy and that is when I decided to do a PhD, to understand why it is so hard to get basic things that everyone needs, like water, air, healthcare, human rights,” she said.

She got her PhD in politics and international relations from the University of Southern California. “And when I finished, this was my third or fourth career,” she noted.

She is the author of two other books, *Reporting from the Danger Zone: Frontline Journalists, Their Jobs and an Increasingly Perilous Future* and *Kill the Messenger: The Media’s Role in the Fate of the World*.

Armoudian said she wrote *Kill the Messenger* as a sign of what was to come in the US.

At the time, right wing radio had taken off because of two law changes, “the Fairness Doctrine which had required that you treat things fairly and evenly, and the Telecommunications Act, which allowed these big huge corporations to gobble up these radio stations. This enabled people to say anything they wanted, completely lie, and frame things in what I call ‘Hate Frame.’ I wrote that 12 years ago and people believed the most ridiculous things. They believed Obama was the antichrist, for example,” she said. “All the chapters in the book are about how media has been used throughout history to either enable the mass killing of people, including the Armenian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, the Holocaust,” and the second half looks at how it can be used for peacemaking, such as Northern Ireland, South Africa and Burundi.

“Peace — and human rights — can be a short-lived thing unless people continue to subscribe to it and that’s a key role that the media can play” or do the opposite and propagate lies, she said.

Civil litigation, she commented, “seems like that’s all we’ve got left.”

The foreword to the new book is by Erwin Chemerinsky Dean and Jesse H. Chopper Distinguished Professor of Law University of California, Berkeley School of Law.

The reviews and reactions so far have been heartening and very positive, Armoudian said.

## Armenian Heritage and Its Effect

Growing up in a small town with no other Armenians, she said, and no sense of community, was tough. Her brother, she said, “eventually found a community, but I didn’t and I left, to find my community and that’s part of what made LA my home for a long time,” she explained.

Being Armenian is “a huge part” of her identity, “perhaps because I grew up without Armenians. And because I knew my grandfather had gone through some really horrific experiences in the genocide, it was not a subject I easily came to studying, but ended up doing partly because when I moved to New Zealand, there was such a paucity of any understanding of the region, World War I, [and] what the Christians went through. Nobody had any idea and so I am working on my fifth academic article related to the Armenians in New Zealand.”

She initially tried to stay away from the subject because it was too close to home, but now, she said, she is “totally immersed” in it.

She has made several appearances on television in New Zealand to speak about the Armenian Genocide and has written a chapter for the book *Remembering the Great War in the Middle East: From Turkey and Armenia to Australia and New Zealand* (edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser, Pearl Nunn and Thomas Schmutz, titled “New Zealand and the Armenian Genocide: Myths, Memory and Lost History” with frequent collaborator James Robins as well as V.K.G. Woodman.

“At the time [of the Genocide] New Zealand newspaper were covering what was happening there. There were something like 75,000 hits of the words ‘Armenia’ and ‘Armenians’.”

Compounding the amnesia surrounding the issue there is the active celebration of the myth of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in whose honor there is a memorial park in Wellington, officially opened in 1990.

“I was shocked to find out not only was there no understanding of the history but they had put this monument up to Mustafa Kemal,” she said. “I did two more articles on how this came up to be. Why would a country that prides itself on human rights, be so cozy with human rights violators like Turkey and China?”

In tackling the issue of the memorial, she is reaching out to the Greek and Assyrian community in New Zealand, who are much larger than the Armenian one.

“It’s fascinating how much pushback I got on the opinion piece about the Ataturk Memorial,” she said, “from New Zealanders who thought he was a modernizer and forgot that he was genocidal. A lot of modernizers who commit genocide don’t get monuments.”

She said now she regularly sends them links to inform them.

“The more we interact, the more we can build good things for our community as well,” she said.

The Greeks, Cypriots, Serbs and native Maoris had opposed the construction of the monument on the site and naming it Ataturk Memorial Park.

The root of the objection for Maoris, she said, was because the site was on a sacred burial site.

“We are meeting with them and we are in talks about seeing if rather than taking the entire monument down, [we can] rename it,” she said. There is no Armenian Genocide monument there now, only an Armenian alphabet.

“I’ve just gotten started and I think it is going to take a long time as these education campaigns do,” she said.

“It’s utterly ridiculous to have two sides to a genocide. There is no worse crime,” she said.

“I think our fates are so intertwined and people came to our aid at the time of the genocide, not so much now, but much more at the time of the genocide trying to reduce Armenians and taking us in as refu-

gees. We have been remarkably resilient as survivors, as a community, and we’ve been remarkably successful given what we were up against,” she said. “We have a long way to go to restore our indigenous lands.”

## Justice for Artsakh

The fate of Artsakh and the images of torture are painful for Armoudian, but she thinks the application of a legal approach can help its people. “Given the torture of the Armenian soldiers and all of those types of violations, some of these procedures that are in this book [*Lawyers Beyond Borders*] need to be explored,” she said.

In the US and Europe, the human rights lawyers have just gotten a case prosecuting a Syrian official for torture.

“Universal justice should be used for Artsakh soldiers and victims the same way in European and United States courts for those who are suffering,” she added.

“I’m a big, big advocate of these types of civil litigation where the victims and survivors themselves with their lawyers take on their tortes,” she noted. “There are a lot of disasters in the world right now and it’s hard to get attention for us. We are competing with how many other hundreds of thousands of survivors and victims all over the world. It’s so hard right now. We’re in a massive crisis.”

Civil courts can be helpful in cases of documented torture there. And there is precedent, which is documented in her most recent book.

“It [civil litigation for foreign nationals] started in the United States with lawyer Peter Weiss,” who took on the case of a Paraguayan doctor filing suit against the man who had caused the death of the former’s son, through torture. While the incident had happened in Paraguay, the torturer had later moved to the US.

“Peter found an old, obscure statute in the United States that was passed in the First Congress in the first judiciary act and used that to sue this guy who had killed by torture the Joelito Filártiga, the son of Dr Joel Filártiga. It became a precedent-setting case,” (Filártiga v. Peña-Irala), she explained.

“Peter then went and set up the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights that has been representing the victims in Syria and ISIS. He’s 95 and he’s still going,” she said with admiration.

Armoudian is a proponent of Armenians taking notice of and acting in favor of righting wrongs of other communities. That way, she suggested, Armenians can weave themselves in a global fabric.

“Other people go through it [tragedies] too and we have to care about them and build community with people. I think Armenians need to be involved in politics, journalism and law. Obviously they are involved in other things which is wonderful,” such as the Nobel Prize for Medicine winner Ardem Patapoutian, and Moderna. “We obviously have so much to offer and so much to bring to the table.”

## A Varied Career

While her career trajectory has evolved, the core of her beliefs has not.

“My first book was *Kill the Messenger: The Media’s Role in the Fate of the World* and it was similarly about similar human rights abuses, genocide, torture. I cried through the whole thing of writing that. Then I started finding people who were trying to make a difference,” ending up writing *Reporting from the Danger Zone: Frontline Journalists, Their Jobs and an Increasingly Perilous Future*, “and it was more heartening.”

Now, this most recent book, she explained, “is actually about getting redress, representing people who have no other options, was affirming in many ways and so while it can be pretty devastating to know what people and people get secondary PTSD through this but I am more heartened by people making difference. It was a creative way — the audacity and creativity it took to tackle the status quo, which is this people would never get justice. ... They were like ‘sorry, but we’re going to find a way.’ And they stood for people who were marginalized and no one was doing something about them,” she added.

A big part of this most recent book is the activities of the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), which was founded by a therapist Gerald Grey, who had attended a talk by Paul Hoffman, a lawyer who had represented three Ethiopian women who had been tortured during the Red Terror and had come to the US. As Armoudian says, the women, independent from each other, had moved to Atlanta. “One was working in a hotel and ran right into the man who had tortured her, who happened to be working in the same hotel. She contacted these other compatriots of her who concurred that it was the same man who had tortured them. The trio sued him. “He got deported and they got some money and donated it all to the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union],” where Hoffman was then working.

Grey, Armoudian explained, “thought that’s a problem for people running into their abusers,” she said. They are never going to heal and worried about tit-for-tat violence.”

She added, “He thought this is a way we can actually help people to heal through civil litigation where the torture survivors become agents for themselves and sue their torturer in a court of law. If they win they get this affirmation that what was done to them was very wrong and that’s very healing,” she said. Of course, they can also get money or deport the offender. “And that’s how the CJA was born.”

“They are pretty selective on their cases. The United States, which was the original place these cases were done, has changed. And the courts have been closing their doors for many of them. They’ve restricted the use of one of the laws, called the Alien Tort Statutes, but they cannot restrict as much a second law passed to support the Alien Tort Statutes, called the Torture Victim Protection Act. So individuals can still use that to sue torturers,” she said.

That law could possibly be used in Artsakh.

“I think what the lawyers are not doing is globalizing justice. They are working with organizations all over the world to try to ensure justice can happen somewhere. If not in the US, or Germany, maybe it can happen in the places they happened or the country next door,” she said. “I’m hopeful that we can move forward as a humanity. It’s all related to ideas and which ideas prevail. The ideas about justice are important ones and all the obstacles have been man-made. The obstacles around jurisdiction or extraterritoriality. You just need to either make something else up to overcome them or creatively put them together to overcome these barriers to justice.”

She further explained, “I think a lot of constitutional lawyers in the US, for a start, really need to address the issues of free speech versus hate speech and the definition of hate speech needs to be reexplored. There needs to be some global agreements made around these issues because all

*continued on next page*





COMMUNITY NEWS

Las Vegas Armenians Hold Farewell Reception for Ambassador Baibourtian

LAS VEGAS — On February 2, Consul General of Armenia in Los Angeles Ambassador Armen Baibourtian took part in a farewell reception organized by the Armenian community of Las Vegas on the occasion of his term in office coming to an end. The event was held at the St. Geragos Armenian Apostolic Church Hall hosted by Very Rev. Sasoon Zumrookhdian. It was organized under the patronage of the Honorary Consul of Armenia in Las Vegas Adroushan Andy Armenian.

The event was also attended by Rev. Fr. Artsakh Badoyan, Pastor of the St. Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church, Rev. Samuel Agulian, Pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church, and representatives of various Armenian community organizations in Las Vegas. Consul General Baibourtian highly appreciated and commended the exemplary work of Adroushan Andy Armenian as the Honorary Consul of Armenia in Las Vegas and presented him with the Certificate of Appreciation of the Consulate General. Ambassador Baibourtian also presented a Certificate of Appreciation to the Co-Chairs of the Armenian National Committee of America-Nevada (ANCA-NV) Lenna Hovhanessian and Hera Armenian. He praised their work in leading advocacy to promote the Armenian cause, supporting initiatives for the benefit of the Homeland, and for spearheading the Holocaust and Armenian Genocide Education Bill in Nevada last year.

The Pastor of St. Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church in Las Vegas Rev. Fr. Artsakh presented Baibourtian with a plaque of gratitude.



Adroushan Andy Armenian, left, presents a certificate to Ambassador Armen Baibourtian

Using Power of Ideas to Take on Wrongdoers

from previous page

human rights violations, all wars and all genocides begin in the minds of people with ideas that then get turned into frames that then get propagated out into the world to generate the extremely negative emotions like hate Without that, it's much harder to have genocides, mass killings or torture."

She concluded, for a better world and positive change, we need a "better form of democracy, better ideas and better means of propagating those ideas."

**From LA to New Zealand**  
Armoudian has been living in New Zea-

land for the past seven and a half years as a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland, teaching courses both undergraduate and graduate on media and politics as well as American politics.

Though New Zealand is considered a dream country for many around the world, the actual transition from the US was a bit difficult, Armoudian said.

"When I finished my PhD which was obviously a little bit later in life than most people," she said, she started looking for academic positions. The hiring schedule in New Zealand is different than many, and it was one that was convenient for her. "As soon as I finished the PhD I saw they had advertised for a position. I applied for it and got an interviews. I got an offer and have

been here ever since," she noted.

The process was certainly not easy.

"It meant uprooting and starting over like Armenians do, over and over and over again. Trying to rebuild a sense of community one more time. Thankfully there is a small Armenian community here and they are wonderful," she explained.

The adjustment might have been hard, but there are a lot of good points to living in the Land of the Long White Cloud, the translation of Aotearoa – the Maori name for New Zealand.

"It's beautiful. It's peaceful for the most part," she said. "Because it's an island, there are a lot of beautiful sea views all over the place. People are generally nice but they are not as open as Armenians or

Americans are. They keep a little back and it took a little to get used to," she said.

"The hard part is with covid I can't go home and visit. I haven't been able to do that for two and a half years," she said.

Armoudian had lived in Los Angeles for 27 years. "I was part of a lot of communities, the Armenian community, the environmental community and others. I had been a commissioner in the city of LA and was producing and hosting a radio program at a radio station. In addition, most of her family is in the United States.

Armoudian is still a big part of the radio program, Scholars' Circle, which she founded several years ago.

"While I was in graduate school I noticed it was changing how I saw the world and helping me really understand why things are the way they are. And I thought can I do this for the public," she said, leading her to reach out to scholars and experts and create a conversation.

She has been doing the program with An-kine Aghassian, a friend of hers who has been involved with the program since its inception. "We built it together, really," she said.

Now, Doug Becker, a USC Professor, hosts many episodes.

As for where she will end up, she threw her hands up and said, "I don't know. It depends on what happens next," she said. She noted that she would like to spend a year in Armenia, and "see if there are things there that I can do to make a difference."

She added that she would love to spend time in Cyprus, where she still has family. "At this point in life I am still a little bit of a *taparakan*" or gypsy.

Going forward, this former musician is concentrating on "the politics of human potential and litigation as a last resort for the planet," she said. "I don't know which one will come first."

"Mass extinction is happening now," she said.

When asked if, considering her close proximity to so many legal issues, she would consider becoming a lawyer, she laughed heartily and said, "I couldn't take another exam!"

*Lawyers without Borders* is available through University of Michigan Press and Amazon.

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# Arts & Culture

A CONVERSATION WITH...

## Aida Amirkhanian *Dance in Her Blood*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / GLENDALE — Aida Amirkhanian is a choreographer and performer in dance theatre, as well as a yoga teacher. Born in Tehran, she graduated from the world-renowned École Mudra in Brussels, Belgium under the direction of legendary choreographer Maurice Béjart, where she studied dance, theatre, music, improvisation and interdisciplinary composition. She has performed internationally with École Mudra and Béjart's Ballet du XXème Siècle for several years including performances at the Covent Garden in London, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in Athens and the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires among others.



In 1982, Aida moved to Australia where she continued her multidisciplinary career as a choreographer, performer and theatre director working in collaboration with many dance and theatre companies including the Human Veins Dance Theatre, the Canberra Dance Theatre, the Jigsaw Theatre Company and Women on a Shoestring Theatre Company in a variety of capacities.

Aida has been based and continues her artistic journey in Los Angeles and has been creating and performing new solo works as well as collaborating with various artists. She has also performed in Dance Kaleidoscope festival, Fountain Theatre's Festival of Solos and Duets and Interplay Santa Barbara among others. In 1991 Aida was the recipient of the Canberra Critics' Circle Award for her creativity and artistic integrity as evidenced in her choreography and performance over a number of years and as exemplified in "Mephisto Waltz." In 1992, she completed her solo piece for which she became one of the five finalists for the *Canberra Times* Artist of the Year award. In 2004 Aida was nominated for the Horton Dance Awards in Los Angeles as outstanding solo performer.

"To say that Aida Amirkhanian is a dancer is a little like saying the Eiffel Tower is a lookout. Certainly, you can take a lift to the top and the view is engaging. But by then you aren't see AMIRKHANIAN, page 14



Dancers Nazeli Aslanyan, Gayane Varderesyan, Adriana Avanesyan, and Meri Arakelyan

## Nairi Folk Ensemble Wows US Audiences

By Harry Kezelian

Mirror-Spectator Staff

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — On Tuesday, February 8, a group of devotees of Armenian culture ventured out in the snow and cold to St. John's Armenian Church, to attend a performance about which they knew little.

Local Armenians had received an email only the previous day telling them that there would be an "unexpected visit" by the "Nairi Folk Dance Music Ensemble." A few had already heard rumors about the group's visit after having seen Facebook streams of their performances in Florida and elsewhere, but it's safe to say few locally had heard of the group.

Despite this fact, and despite the fact that St. John's is undergoing renovations and the performance had to take place in a small auxiliary hall rather than on the main ballroom stage, and despite the weather, the Armenians came out of the woodwork to see the representatives of Armenia's song and dance culture.

The crowd were skeptical but that skepticism vanished almost immediately once the talented young performers started.

The program began with a lively performance by the graceful dancers Nazeli Aslanyan, Gayane Varderesyan, Adriana Avanesyan, and Meri Arakelyan, to the music of Ara Gevorgyan's *Artashat*. While it was relatively easy to grab the crowd's interest with anything that involved Gevorgyan's upbeat, hand-clapping music, it remained to be seen whether an entire evening's worth of performances would hold up.

The four dancers departed and four musicians entered carrying their instruments: *kamancha*, *kanon*, *dhol* and *duduk*. The strains of Sayat-Nova's *Nazani* began, and the crowd began to realize that they were in the presence of real talent. Without background music, without a large orchestra of folk instruments, the four musicians playing acoustical instruments were able to create the sound and feel of traditional Armenian *ashughagan* (minstrel) and folk music.

For the next piece, the ninth and final member of the group appeared, singer Silva Petrosyan, who is a young member of the Armenian National Opera Theatre. Petrosyan delivered an excellent a capella rendition of Gomidas' (Komitas') *Oror* from the region of Agn (also known as "*Aghvor es, chounis khalad*"). This rare Western Armenian piece was followed by a medley of the well-known folk songs *Yerginkn Ambel E* and *Shakhgr-Shukhgr*, also both collected by Gomidas, in which the four-piece ensemble accompanied.

*Duduk* player of the ensemble, the very young Narek Khanzadyan, stepped forward next for his solo, Khachatur Avedisyan's *Dzaghepunch*, which is very familiar to Armenian-American audiences from its classic recordings by the Soviet Armenian Song and Dance Ensemble as well as the many Armenian-American oud and kanun players who have created their own arrangements of this song. Avedisyan was known as the influential musician who made the *kanon* an integral part of the folk ensembles in the Soviet Era, and composed various pieces for the instrument, often inspired by Western Classical Music. Generally, performances of *Dzaghepunch* use the *kanon* as the featured solo instrument, but this group chose to feature the *duduk* instead, which gave a different and interesting effect.

It would be difficult to deny that the next performance was one of the most well-received of the evening. Dance soloist Meri Arakelyan, in a bright yellow and black see NAIRI, page 13

## Concert to Feature Quartet Led by Cellist Artyom Manukyan

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America recently announced its 9th Online Concert featuring an exclusive performance by the Artyom Manukyan Quartet. This Armenia-based electro-jazz ensemble features Arman Mnatsakanyan (drums), Arman Peshmaljyan (keyboards), Karen Mamikonyan (keyboards), and Artyom Manukyan (cello). The concert will be shown online on Sunday, February 27 at 1:00 pm EST (10 a.m. PST and 10 p.m. in Yerevan).

Artyom Manukyan made his name as a musician in Armenia and traveled the world as the youngest member of the BBC World Music Award-winning Armenian Navy Band. He has performed internationally with the renowned world music band Night Ark. After the success of his debut album "Citizen," Artyom performed with artists including rapper Everlast, Kamasi Washington, Melody Gardot, Flying Lotus, and Tigran Hamasyan.

Artyom has shown that the cello can be played in classical music, rock, and as the lead instrument in jazz. His virtuosity is equaled by his creativity and willingness to stretch himself with adventurous improvisations. His second solo album, "Alone," was released in 2019. In between gigs with different bands, the multi-talented artist has even nurtured another musical passion, hip hop.

"Our Online Concert series has

(HAL MASONBERG PHOTO)



Cellist Artyom Manukyan's electro-jazz quartet

been a great success for highlighting the traditional as well as the new," says Executive Director Jason Sohigian. "It is in this spirit that we are excited to present this concert by a young jazz quartet led by Artyom that includes the talented percussionist Arman Mnatsakanyan. We're grateful for the support of the Dadourian Foundation, whose mission is to promote Armenian culture, and which makes the performance available for everyone online."

"Our members have grown with the expansion of our online programming," adds Sohigian. "By the end of 2021 we received several leadership gifts including a sponsorship from Michele Kolligian, President of our Board of Trustees, to continue the weekly video series from our curator highlighting objects in our collection, and a grant from the SJS Charitable Trust to support the Sound Archive program to digitize the 78 rpm records in our collection and make them accessible online."

The Online Concert series is free and pre-registration is not required. The link will be available on Sunday, February 27, on the Museum's Facebook page, YouTube Channel, and website ArmenianMuseum.org.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Nairi Folk Ensemble Wows US Audiences

NAIRI, from page 12

dress, executed a playful interpretation of the ever-popular Caucasus solo dance, *Shalakho*, in this case with Aram Khachaturian's music.

Considering that the original *Shalakho* was a playful dance associated with the Armenian street peddlers of Tiflis (Tbilisi), Arakelyan was successful in bringing out a feminine version of the same concept, as opposed to most female performers who typically interpret it as an ultra-graceful



Dance soloist Meri Arakelyan performs Shalakho

Armenian women's solo dance while the playfulness is left to male dancers on stage.

Armenian folk music lovers should look out for Arakelyan in the future; her vivid stage presence and terpsichorean abilities are sure to make her one of our great folk dance artists of the coming generation.

The excellent performances kept on coming; next was Gevorg Melikyan, the *kamancha* soloist of the ensemble. Accompanied by *dhol* player Arman Ghazaryan, he performed the famous Karabakh dance melody, *Uzun Dara*. The strains of the *kamancha* rose through the air punctuated by the beat of the *dhol*, with skillful rhythmic and melodic effects executed by Melikyan, whose *kamancha* is sure to be heard more often in the future. Melikyan relates that he is one of only two young people his age in Armenia who know how to play the classic instrument, which is best known as the one favored by legendary minstrel Sayat-Nova in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Another difficult instrument is the *kanon*, the 72-string zither popular across Armenia and the Middle East. Armenian-Americans may know it as an instrument often played by men in their grandparents' time, but which is rarely played in the Diaspora today due to being difficult to master and expensive to procure. In today's Armenia, *kanon* is favored by women and has become quite popular thanks to its beautiful and ringing harp-like sound.

Lilit Petrosyan is an excellent performer on the *kanon*, and performed yet another legendary Armenian folk song, *Grung* (the Crane), for her solo portion. The setlist of this group was beginning to resemble an introductory course on the history of Armenian music, but the inspired interpretation of all the performers breathed fresh life into these classics, and made for a show that was never boring. Petrosyan's passionate striking of the *kanon* strings brought to life the plaintive melody of *Grung*, traditionally the anthem of the Armenian Diaspora.

With most of the soloists having had their turn to shine, the ensemble was only done with half of their program. The musicians next played *Dzaghdadz Paleni*, a favored melody by Kh. Avedisyan, with the four dancers returning again to the stage to execute flowing feminine movements.

Next, soloist singer Silva Petrosyan was joined by Lilit Petrosyan for the folk song *Akh Dnavor*. This song seems to have been rediscovered and gained popularity in the last few years, and several artists in Armenia have recorded versions of it. Apparently being a folk song from the Mush/Daron region brought to Eastern Armenia during the Genocide, the melody resembles the well-known *Siro Yerk* (*Ashkharhum Sirel Em Kez*), which, however, was an art-song composition of the Soviet Era, popularized by Hovhannes Badalian. To this writer's knowledge, *Akh Dnavor* had not previously been performed in Detroit or anywhere in the Eastern US, unless it was sung generations ago by a Mushetsi immigrant. The familiar melodic style of the region is often associated with the descendants of Genocide survivors from Mush, Sasun, and Van, who reached safe haven in the Republic of Armenia. The Armenians in the US are familiar with the melody too, not only from Badalian's popularity in the diaspora, but also from the fact that *Siro Yerk* was reworked by generations of diasporan performers in both the "kef time"



Kanon player Lilit Petrosyan performs solo

and "Armenian pop" styles. But this older song, stripped of adornment and performed simply with the accompaniment of a single *kanon*, brought a more poignant folk style to the ears of the listeners.

Silva Petrosyan continued her singing performance with Gomidas' well known

see the dancers performing to the music of the excellent four-piece folk orchestra.

One of the unexpected positives of having this concert in a small space instead of on stage was that audience members could see and hear the traditional instruments being played practically inches away; it was an experience that cannot be replicated with recorded music nor in most concert settings where one sees this type of music.

The group was brought to the United States by Vitaliy Bezrodnov, director of a non-profit 501 (c)(3) named "Reunite Cultures Fund" or RCF. Formerly known as the Rotary Children's Fund, the group was started by Bezrodnov and other members of Rotary International, but is not officially affiliated with the service club. Bezrodnov, a native of the Soviet Union, joined Rotary when the group began to reach out to Eastern Europe in the wake of the breakdown of Soviet Communism; subsequently he immigrated to the US where he makes his home in North Carolina.

Aleksan Zakyan is the president of the Armenian branch of the International Delphic Committee, which runs an annual competition called the Delphic Games. The Delphic Games are an international competition for youth in the fields of art, music, and dance, which Zakyan describes as an artistic equivalent to the Olympics. Currently, the movement is primarily active in the former Soviet Republics, and the International Delphic Committee is headquartered in Russia. The Games are slated to take place in Armenia in 2023.

Zakyan assembled the members of the Nairi Ensemble and brought them to America, while Bezrodnov organized their tour, which has taken them throughout several states in the Mid-Atlantic, South, and Midwest. Most of their performances were for non-Armenian school and community groups. Bezrodnov says that a packet of information on Armenia is sent to the school groups in advance so their students can learn about the land, history, and culture before the group visits. In between the group got a chance to see some of the tourist attractions of the US, such as Washington, DC, Disney World, and Michigan's Henry Ford Museum. The group stayed in the US for only three weeks and do not perform as a group in Armenia; but they have all represented Armenia in the Delphic Games. Therefore, they had very little time to rehearse and make sure that they could play together as a unified ensemble. They were clearly more than up to the task.



Kamancha player Gevorg Melikyan with Dhol player Arman Ghazaryan

*Hoy Nazan*, accompanied by the *kanon* and *duduk*. Next came *dhol* player Arman Ghazaryan who executed a drum solo to a recording of Ara Gevorgyan's *Artsakh*. The show-stopping virtuosity excited the crowd of Armenian-American music fans who already being fans of the "dumbeg", were enthused to hear the *dhol* played with such flair.

The phrase "show-stopping virtuosity" can describe Lilit Petrosyan's *kanon* playing on the next selection, Khachatur Avedisyan's *Perpetuum Mobile*, a solo piece written especially for the instrument. It seemed that Petrosyan could not make a mistake even in such a difficult piece. It was advertised that the performers are the best of the upcoming generation of folk musicians in Armenia, and that certainly seemed true in this case.

The performance ended with the four dancers returning to the floor to execute a medley of Armenian dance steps to the music of *Ov Hayots Ashkharh* by Ara Gevorgyan. If there was one criticism of this concert, it would be that one too many of the dance selections were performed to the recorded music of Gevorgyan. Upbeat though it may be, the audience, in Detroit at least, would probably have preferred to



Fr. Armash Bagdasarian of St. John's thanks the performers





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# A Conversation with Aida Amirkhanian: Dance in Her Blood

ARMIKHANIAN, from page 12

seeing the tower itself with its lean strength, it's soaring spirit, its spare design, its truthful lines. You are looking in the wrong place to find its essence – for that resides inside the structure and it is seen only with an inner eye. She is not just a dancer. She is an artist, and dance is part of her art form,” Robert Macklin, wrote in the *Canberra Times* in 1992.

From [www.aidaamirkhanian.com](http://www.aidaamirkhanian.com)

**Aida, first we met in 1998 in Yerevan. Are there some essential changes in your artistic and personal character?**

I was very fortunate to have met you more than two decades ago in Yerevan and know you an incredibly knowledgeable, inspiring character that advocated various performing art forms, and for that meeting I am grateful. As about what has been changed — for one thing I am 20 years older and hopefully — a little wiser. I am calmer and yet the life force is still flowing through my veins with intensity, so I have learned a little about subtleties and nuances and maintaining my integrity and using my inner energies mindfully and generously, that is a good thing.

**Your biography includes various countries and cultures — Armenian, Iranian, European, Australian, American, Hindi... How has each shaped you as an artiste and person?**

I love traveling and seeing the world. I have lived in various countries in four continents. I have been exposed to different cultures and traditions; I have co-existed with these different cultures because at my core I had my own strong culture. Being an Armenian in this world is not an easy task! Even though I was born in Tehran and not in Armenia, the roots are deep. Experiencing all the other cultures were adding different flavors to my own culture: some were very different, some were similar, some were unpleasant, some were rich, but at the very core I understood that humans are the same; no matter where you go, they just react differently to different things and have different perspective on various things in life.

**Your surname is not easy to pronounce for non-Armenians. Have you ever thought about a stage name?**

My name is easy to remember, my great-grandmother who was a Genocide survivor had chosen this name and I have no idea why. My surname was mostly

reach in and touch people a little bit deeper and hopefully put them in touch with their deeper selves.

**I am sure many ask you to tell about your years with Maurice Béjart. After his death I asked you to write down your memories about that legendary artist. Will you give us such gift one day?**

My years at Mudra (the performing arts school under the direction of Maurice Béjart) and later in the Ballet de XXème siècle under the artistic direction of Béjart was “Magical” with a capital “M”! He was a genius, he was the creator, he was the destroyer of obstacles like Shiva. He was kind and very intense. He had tremendous love in his heart; his love was contagious and genuine. He suffered and felt pain for humanity. He had humor, he truly was a legend, one of a kind a genius. As a



17-year-old I was exposed to these qualities in a human being and that was so rich and unique. He wanted his interpreters to not just use their bodies, but their voice, their intelligence, their awareness. He wanted us to be alive and present and conscious from moment to moment in whatever we did.

**You performed also in Australian dramatic theater. How was that, not being a English native speaker?**

When I used to live in Australia I wanted to learn more acting skills, so I approached various theater directors and asked them to give me a chance to act in various plays as an actress. I had learned French, but had never learned English, even less Australian English. I picked up the language and studied on my own, but resisted learning the Australian accent. When I auditioned, some directors told me that they appreciated my

movement vocabulary and my skills in voice and singing, but they could not give me a role, because I did not speak Australian English. Other directors got a whole play written to accommodate my accent! I wanted to build my acting skills and would refuse to be used as a dancer just doing a dance as a part of the play. I found out actors were lazy compared to dancers; that was an interesting discovery for me.

**How do dance and yoga complement each other?**

Yoga is an internal journey, an internal expression, that doesn't need to be exhibited. Dance is an external expression though it has to start from deep inside, but it has to be expressed and exhibited. Over 30 plus years I think I have found a way to find a bridge between the two, a bridge where I can cross deep inside from one to the other

if needed.

**Being an Armenologist, in my interviews I often ask people about their roots. What do you know about your ancestors?**

My grandfather from my mother's side, Nerses hayrik, was a survivor of Genocide from Van. I believe there were seven children, two of them survived. I loved him dearly. He had survived his trauma with his great sense of humor and his tenacity. He was generous, loved Komitas and sang songs. My grandmother also was a survivor of Genocide; her family had tea farms. There were also seven or eight children; two of them survived. She was the most loving and caring and generous person with a smile on her face at all times. When she was in her early 60s her trauma as a Genocide survivor manifested as deep de-

American contemporary dance techniques which is fine, but I think that each culture has to develop their own contemporary techniques based on their own cultural roots. Various cultures have developed that very successfully and we can achieve that as well, specially that we already have such strong roots in dance and movement.

Our national culture is very rich, the movements in our traditional dances, not staged ones, the *naz pars* etc. but the true traditional dances from various regions are the base movements from which then the new vocabulary can develop, and this is what I call innovative, a true exploration in the heart of the movement and then an evolution of it, an expansion of it. Very difficult to explain in words because this is a true experience not an intellectual activity. I believe one has to know the very root and the heart of one's own culture in this case the dances and then proceed from there if the intention is to become innovative.

**In 2006, Gharabekian again invited you to choreograph and perform Shchedrin's Carmen, at the site of the ruins of Zvartnots cathedral. I am sure if Aram Gharabekian did not leave us so early, you would continue to perform in Armenia. Do you have any plans to return?**

Maestro Gharabekian called me up to ask me to participate in this project and I straight out rejected it saying he should look for someone else and here was his response: “When I stand in the ruins of Zvartnots I can't see anyone else but you. This seems to be your responsibility and no one else's.” The trust he gave me was remarkable, and that level of trust made me take on this responsibility. It was an extremely challenging project which we co created. Not just the creative process, but also during the performance we (the musicians, maestro and myself and everyone involved), we were also challenged by the powerful winds that at times I felt that it may sweep me away in the air! There was a moment during the performance where I had a powerful experience of belonging to that land standing solid on my two legs getting a glimpse of what is it like to feel so deeply and to dance with the music, the wind, the stars, the sweeping dust and everything and become one with it all. Zvartnots is a very powerful place and had tremendous energy if one is open to receive it. As you can imagine I was devastated when maestro left us in body and moved on to other dimensions. We had a lot of plans for other projects. I performed in his tribute in Los Angeles and thereafter I could not perform and I did not want to perform for the longest time. Maybe my next performance will be in Yerevan when that time comes.

**Unlike classical dance, contemporary dancers do not retire early – do you continue dancing and what are your current projects?**

Please allow me to answer this question with a poem by Rumi:

Dance when you are broken open'  
Dance if you've torn the bandage off,  
Dance in the middle of fighting,  
Dance in your blood,  
Dance when you are perfectly free.

It does not really matter anymore if anyone sees me dance. When I am inspired and feel that from the depths of my being I have something to express which will serve other, then I will.

Thank you for your interest and your care as well as your patience!

Here is what Pina Bausch said:

DANCE, DANCE, DANCE! without it we are lost!



Aida Amirkhanian (right) interviewing Maurice Béjart, Iran, 1974.

spelled by different people incorrectly, that would intrigue them and they wanted to know where I was from, so I always had the opportunity to tell them that I am Armenian. No, I never thought of changing my name to a stage name, it's not because of your name and your fame that you get up on stage, the stage does not welcome you because of your name, you get up on stage because of your own merit, because you have something to say, because you want to





ARTS & CULTURE

# Where East Meets West: Hakob Karapents’s *The Book of Adam*

By Arpi Sarafian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The book “I am about to write, nobody else can write . . . It is going to be unique in its depth and breadth,” notes Adam Nourian, the protagonist of Hakob Karapents’ 1983 novel, *The Book of Adam*, just released in an English translation by Ara Ghazarians (Amaras Press, 2021).

This new publication is dedicated to the ninety-fifth anniversary of the birth of the celebrated writer.

The novel tells the story of the 48-year old Nourian, a respected academic and editor, living in New Haven, Conn. Nourian has left his hometown of Tabriz in Iran and is traveling the earth in search of the place where he can build his mansion and say,

“heroes” of Beckett, Joyce and Kafka, whom Karapents evokes in his novel, his protagonist is “alone everywhere.” Even in Yerevan, where all were Armenian, “he had felt like a stranger among them.”

Interspersed in the narrative are excerpts from Nourian’s editorials that decry the absence of spiritual values in America. Nourian’s comments on the obsessive consumption of Americans and the abuses of advertising agencies, seamlessly woven into the narrative, further acknowledge his generous and sensitive nature. The fierce defender of human rights accepts his wife’s decision to leave him after twenty-one years of marriage, because she has the right “to be human and free.”

Karapents’s protagonist may be endlessly searching, yet there is no confusion or uncertainty in his search. Nourian lives two loves. True to his vision that “no happiness lasts,” both end, but not before they give him the satisfaction of a fully lived life. With his first wife, Meline, Nourian fathers two children, “the most priceless creatures in the world.” His second love ends tragically when his second wife, Zelda, falls off the magnolia cliff she climbs up to pick magnolias, a symbol of their love, to celebrate “the happiest day of my life. New husband, new baby, new book.” Zelda would like to raise her children in Armenia so they will be “exempt from the pain of duality.”

The translation could not be timelier. With the recent Artsakh war, the theme of displacement and exile has acquired a new relevance. One would hope that in a world where exile is increasingly the norm, there would be a greater sense of belonging for the masses. Yet, at this historical moment, that seems to be a very distant possibility.

*The Book of Adam* is beautifully written. Karapents penetrates deep into the world of his characters and recreates their experiences through beautifully dramatized scenes. The flashbacks to Nourian and Meline’s courtship and to their parting are a masterful recapping of the lovers’ twenty-one-year-long relationship. No less captivating are Karapents’s descriptions of the fields, the meadows, and the forests of Vermont and Connecticut, as Nourian and Zelda drive north along the Hudson River, leaving behind the smog and the soot of New York. His, “After the Tappan Zee Bridge, nature began to open up and curve like a pregnant woman,” is simply exquisite. Karapents’s unique ability to tell a story makes it impossible to put the book down. “Nourian embraced Zelda, rocking like a mourner, took her body into his arms and into the bedroom” in the cottage in Vermont, foreshadows Zelda’s tragic death.

The novel reads smoothly in translation. Ghazarians has a good ear for the rhythms

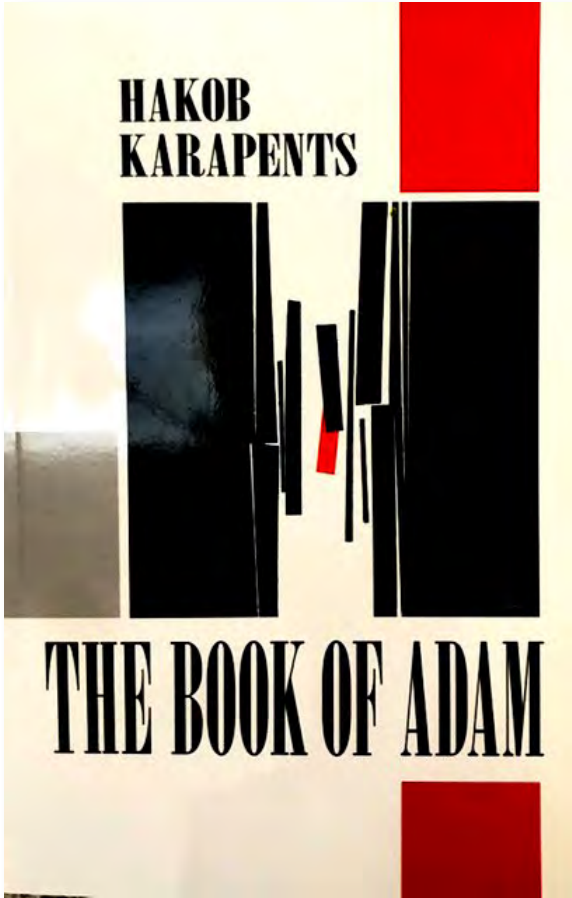
of English prose. However, nostalgic for Karapents’ seductive Eastern Armenian, I interrupted my reading of the novel a few times to read one of his short stories in Armenian. Returning to the English translation was not in the least disappointing.

*The Book of Adam* is an Armenian novel. It opens with Karabakh, “the abode of my forefathers,” and closes with Karabakh without which, Nourian’s son Vahe believes, “there won’t be an Armenia.” The cottage in Vermont where Adam and Zelda go to celebrate the beginning of their new life together recalls *Geghard*. Nonetheless, ever-present in the book is the promise of “new winds, new suns, new sprouts.” Nourian’s unequivocal, “I made a mistake coming here,” and his inward smile at Zelda’s total devotion to him and the “enduring, constant miracle of rebirth,” are not contradictions. They are simply affirmations — of both the pain and of the beauty of life.

I would like to add a note about the title

of the novel. *The Book of Adam*, the title of the fictional novel the fictional Nourian writes, is to me a clear indication that Karapents’s novel of the same title is autobiographical. Like Nourian, Karapents left his hometown of Tabriz, in Iran, and lived in exile his entire life. While this fact neither adds to nor detracts from the literary merit of the book, it does help highlight the theme of exile, and gives universality to the “sheer loneliness of humanity” the novel constantly evokes. Nourian will always grieve for his children’s “torment as human beings.”

In a thoughtful Introduction, Ghazarians gives us a brief biography of Karapents, highlighting the prolific writer’s unique place in Armenian Diaspora Literature. Ghazarians covers the reception of Karapents’s work both in Armenia and the Diaspora. He also provides a Glossary of names and terms the anglophone reader may not be familiar with, as well as a Bibliography of the author’s literary works.



“I belong here.” The wanderer with the “dark Armenian eyes” is haunted by questions like, “Should we have left Tabriz?” or, “When I die, where will I be buried?” Underneath his calm Americanized facade is his turmoiled Armenian soul.

Unable to handle the pain of being “an Armenian writer and an American editor,” Nourian withdraws from Armenians, only to return to “my sweet Armenia” with more passion. The esteemed journalist walks away from the editorial offices of the New York Herald Tribune and decides to write his new novel in Armenian, knowing full well that “there are no Armenian readers.” When “there’s no word in English for *karot*,” how would one say, “I have no home.” Only in Armenian could Nourian truthfully portray his unique Armenian world.

Paradoxically, the grieving Adam, with forefathers from the land of the Meliks of Karabagh in the East, is also the alienated hero of the writers and thinkers of the modern West. East and West merge in the eternally discontented Nourian, roaming “this poor planet tossed into an obscure corner of the Milky Way, one of the billions of galaxies in the universe.” Much like the

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

NEW YORK

OCTOBER 15 — Save the date! The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York Chapter is celebrating the diamond anniversary of the Tekeyan Cultural Association with a gala. Details to follow.

MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 7 — St. James Men’s Club presents speaker Elsa Ronningstam, PhD, who will discuss diagnosis and treatment of narcissistic personality. Dr. Ronningstam, a St. James parishioner, is a clinical psychologist in the Gunderson Outpatient Program and the Adult Outpatient Services at McLean Hospital and is an associate professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School. Social hour starts at 6.15 p.m., followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Losh kebab and Kheyma dinner, 20 per person. St. James Armenian Church, Watertown.

10th Anniversary Celebration Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for events during the year at the Park. Watch this space for details.

APRIL 3 — ANNUAL RECONFIGURATION OF THE ABSTRACT SCULPTURE (Rain Date: April 10) A crane lifts and pulls apart the two halves of Abstract Sculpture, rhomboid dodecahedron made of steel and aluminum, to create a new sculptural shape. 7.30 a.m. The Park’s Endowed Fund for the Annual Reconfiguration, the generous gift of Charles and Doreen Bilezikian, supports the annual reconfiguration. A&A Industries, Anahid and Aurelian Mardiros, manufacturer of the Abstract Sculpture, their generous gift in kind, oversees the annual reconfiguration. Coffee, hosted by Starbucks & Conversation is from 8:00am—9:00am. RSVP appreciated, hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

SEPTEMBER 21 — GALA BENEFIT CELEBRATING CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR NATION’S IMMIGRANTS! InterContinental Hotel, Boston. 6 p.m. Honoring STEPHEN KURKJIAN, Distinguished Citizen, Leader, Pulitzer Prize Journalist and Author, and Recognizing Organizations Serving Immigrants and Refugees. Funds raised support the Legacy Fund, endowed fund to care for and maintain the Park year-round. Advance Reservations only. To receive the invitation, please send name and address to hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

MICHIGAN

FEBRUARY 24 — The four Armenian Churches of Greater Detroit (St. John Armenian Apostolic Church, St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church, St. Vartan Armenian Catholic Church and Armenian Congregational Church) along with the Knights and Daughters of Vartan will commemorate the Feast of Sts. Vartanank, 6 p.m., St. Vartan Armenian Catholic Church, 256000 Drake Road, Farmington Hills. Celebrant will be Monsignor Andon Atamian. No reception will be held due to COVID





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## Salpy’s New York Cheesecake With Chocolate Ganache

This original recipe and photo are courtesy of Salpy’s International Kitchen food blog. Discover this recipe and other international recipes at Salpy’s International Kitchen created, adapted, and tested by Salpy Rozario herself.

Nowadays there are hundreds of different cheesecake recipes (<https://www.epicurious.com/recipes-menus/best-cheesecake-recipes>). The ingredients are what make one cheesecake different from another. The most essential ingredient in any cheesecake is cheese (the most commonly used are cream cheese, Neufchatel, cottage cheese, and ricotta.) What is the difference between New York cheesecake and regular? Regular cheesecake relies on heavy cream and sour cream to thin the batter and create a silkier, creamier texture. New York cheesecake is heavy on cream cheese which is why it’s so dense and rich.

New Yorkers fell in love with cheesecakes back in the 1900s. The credit for the creation of the New York cheesecake is bestowed upon Arnold Reuben, who was also known for his signature sandwiches. Reuben also claimed to have created in 1914 the famous Reuben sandwich, consisting of rye bread spread with Russian dressing and topped with sauerkraut and slices of corned beef and Swiss cheese, then grilled on both sides.

In 1929, Reuben, the owner of the legendary Turf Restaurant at 49th and Broadway in New York City, claimed that his family developed the first cream-cheese cake recipe. Other bakeries relied on cottage cheese. According to legend, he was served a cheese pie in a private home, and he fell in love with the dessert. Using his hostess recipe and a pie she made with ingredients he provided, he began to develop his own recipe for the perfect cheesecake. Reuben served his new recipe at his Turf Restaurant, and the cheesecake quickly became popular with the customers who frequented Reuben’s Broadway restaurant (<https://newyorkstreet-food.com/desserts/ny-cheesecake/>).

Reuben’s famous cheesecake recipe, also known as Jewish cheesecake thanks to his heritage and the recipe’s kosher ingredients, was allegedly a favorite of actors and actresses seeking late-night indulgence after shows. In 1950, Junior’s (<https://www.juniorscheesecake.com/our-story/>) opened in Brooklyn and has been a king among New York cheesecake makers ever since. “My grandfather said, ‘If you’re going to open a restaurant in New York, you’ve got to have great cheesecake,’” says Alan Rosen, third-generation owner at Junior’s. In fact, it’s as

true today as it was 70 years ago when we started, “You haven’t really lived until you’ve had cheesecake at Junior’s.”

As Mr. Reuben would agree, there’s always time for an impressive cheesecake that tastes delicious. For Valentine’s Day or for any special occasion, try Salpy’s New York Cheesecake with Chocolate Ganache. It’s a cheesecake that anyone can make and enjoy — any season of the year.

INGREDIENTS:

- Crust:**
- 2 cups graham cracker crumbs
  - 1/4 cup granulated white sugar
  - 1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted
- Filling:**
- 32 oz. cream cheese, room temperature (use full-fat cream cheese)
  - 1 cup granulated white sugar
  - 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
  - 5 large eggs, room temperature
  - 1/3 cup heavy whipping cream
  - 1 tablespoon lemon zest
  - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

New York Cheesecake:

Cut a piece of parchment paper in the shape and size of a 9-inch springform pan bottom, spray with cooking spray the bottom of the pan and place the parchment paper, then spray again the top and sides of the pan, place the springform pan on a larger baking pan to catch any leakage while the cheesecake is baking.

Preheat oven to 350F with rack in center of oven.

**For Crust:**

In a medium bowl combine the graham cracker crumbs, sugar, and melted butter. Press the crumbs evenly over the bottom and about 1 inch up the sides of the springform pan. Cover and refrigerate while you make the filling.

**For Filling:**

Place the cream cheese, sugar, and flour in a large bowl. With an electric mixer, beat on medium speed until smooth and lump-free, scraping down the bowl as needed. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the whipping cream, lemon zest, vanilla extract and beat until well incorporated. Remove the crust from the refrigerator and pour in the filling.

Place the cheesecake pan on a larger baking pan and place it in the oven. Bake for 15 minutes and then lower the oven temperature to 250F and continue to bake for another 60-70 minutes or until firm and only the center of the cheesecake looks a little wet. (Baking time can vary due to the differences in ovens, so make sure to check that the cheesecake is firm with only the center being a little wet.

Remove from oven and place on a wire rack. Meanwhile, prepare the ganache.

- Chocolate Ganache:**
- 8 oz. heavy whipping cream
  - 2 oz. butter
  - 8 oz. semi-sweet chocolate
  - 1/4 cup confectioners’ sugar

In a small bowl, combine chocolate and confectioners’ sugar and set aside. Heat cream and butter in a small saucepan on low heat, until just before boiling, remove from stove and pour over chocolate, whisk until chocolate is melted and the mixture is silky smooth.

Pour over warm cheesecake and cool completely before covering with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for several hours, preferably overnight.

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/SalpysInternationalKitchen/photos/a.193574207461364/1881629011989200/?type=3&theater>

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- <https://www.pinterest.com/salpyrozario>

For all of Salpy’s recipes featured at The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, go to: <https://mirrorspectator.com/?s=salpy>

## Japanese Duduk Player Honored with Diploma for Popularizing Armenian Music

TOKYO (Public Radio of Armenia) — Japanese duduk player Yasutaka Tarumi was awarded a diploma by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia for his significant contribution to the active dissemination of Armenian music in Japan, the Armenian Embassy in Tokyo announced on February 14.

Ambassador Areg Hovhannisyan presented the diploma to the Japanese musician . The prospects of implementing joint programs were also discussed at the meeting.

Above, Yasutaka and Hovhannisyan are pictured during the ceremony.





# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



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## COMMENTARY

# EDITORIAL

## Ukraine Crisis and Its Spillover in Armenia



By Edmond Y.  
Azadian

The new world order, following the fall of the Soviet Union, is still taking shape. That is why many aftershocks are continuing to shake up international relations.

Amongst those aftershocks are the break-up of former Yugoslavia, the Arab Spring, wars in the Caucasus and now the threat of war in Ukraine.

The implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 landed Russia in a state of turmoil, allowing the West to take advantage of the situation and put its marks on the global map.

At that time, the West drew a line in the sand by intimidating Serbia in the wake of its actions against other ethnic groups and signaling to Moscow that its influence on the European continent was significantly shrunken.

With Vladimir Putin's rise to power, Russia responded in kind by drawing its own line in the sand in the Syrian front, while the West was jubilantly destroying one Middle Eastern country after another. Thus Russia's stand in Syria halted the drive of the Arab Spring, whose terminus would have been Iran. That is why Iran joined Russian in support of the Assad regime, though it certainly had its own political ambitions in the Middle East.

All eyes are now on Ukraine at this time, on whose borders hundreds of thousands of Russian troops are amassed and Western capitals are announcing an imminent Russian invasion, without giving up hope on diplomatic efforts.

France and Germany have already sent their presidents to Moscow to negotiate and the United Kingdom followed suit with its foreign minister.

In the meantime, President Joe Biden talked to President Putin by Zoom. They all presented stern warnings to the Kremlin, indicating that a package of powerful sanctions will be put in place which could cripple Russia's economy, should it invade Ukraine. In addition, defensive arms and economic assistance are pouring into Ukraine, in lieu of military participation by the West.

What Russia wants is Ukraine's neutrality and its pledge not to join NATO. President Putin insists that the West had pledged not to expand NATO further east and pose a risk to Russia's security. In fact, Mr. Putin is gambling with high stakes, expecting perhaps to get the minimum. He is asking the West to withdraw the NATO borders to its 1997 position. The Kremlin is basing its claim on a verbal assurance by US Secretary of State James Baker to then Premier Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would "not shift one inch eastward from its present position" once it had safely taken in a reunified Germany. This pledge has not been honored.

Gorbachev was considered one of the shrewdest statesmen of his time and he had not figure that such a verbal assurance may disappear with the people who had made them.

Any collapse of power will create a vacuum which other countries will try to take advantage of. At that time, US Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady had advised President George H.W. Bush that America's strategic priority was to see the Soviet Union become "a third-rate power, which is what we want." At that time, with its sagging economy, Russia was indeed heading in that direction, until Putin came to power to stage a turn-around, mindful of the US's intentions.

Indeed, NATO's expansion was intended to contain Russia and never allow it to reemerge as a superpower.

Today's crisis in Ukraine is a direct face-off between Russia and the West. However, France and Germany have been soft-peddling the issue. Outwardly, the West has been demonstrating a unified front against Russian aggression, but cracks within the alliance are visible. Particularly, Germany is too dependent on Russian energy supplies. It was very indicative that when President Biden threatened to shut down North Stream 2, which supplies gas to Germany, in the presence of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the latter kept silent.

As the standoff continues, diplomacy is at work. Tulsi Gabbard, a Democratic presidential candidate in 2020, in a recent interview on Fox News, said President Biden can diffuse the situation by a simple statement that Ukraine will not join NATO, since the probability is so remote. Also, Ukraine's Ambassador to the UK Vadym Prystaiko, made a slip of tongue when he stated in an interview on BBC that his country may

reconsider its bid to join NATO. That statement was immediately refuted by Ukraine's Foreign Ministry as the prospect of joining NATO is in Ukraine's constitution.

While the crisis continues and many countries are removing their diplomatic staff and citizens from Kyiv, the Armenian government has announced that its embassy is operating normally and it has no intention of withdrawing the embassy staff nor their families. However, even if Armenia wanted its citizens out, it could not achieve this practically because they are 500,000 strong and contribute to Armenia substantially.

Armenians in Ukraine, just like those in Russia, do not represent political power, as they do in Europe and the US.

Even with an Armenian serving as Ukraine's interior minister, Arsen Avakov, Ukraine continued sending military aid to Azerbaijan during the 44-day war. Thus, relations between Armenia and Ukraine are complicated.

Turkey and Azerbaijan have lined up with Ukraine and that further impacts Armenia.

During this latest crisis, President Ilham Aliyev rushed to Kyiv and signed an agreement with Ukraine, which has a military component. That hostile act did not aggravate the Kremlin, which is so beholden to the Aliyev regime.

Should war break out, Armenians will suffer on both sides of the border as there are at least three million Armenians in Russia. Many of them continue sending money back to their families back home. In addition, Russia is the largest market



for Armenia and a war will adversely impact Armenia's exports and economy.

In addition, prospective Western sanctions on Russia will have a domino effect on Armenia. A case in point is Iran, a country which has neighborly relations with Armenia. Iran is Armenia's only other outlet to the world after Georgia. Yet, trade capacity has not reached its full potential because of sanctions on Iran. The same may happen should Russia go to war and its economy languish under those sanctions.

Another dilemma is Armenia's membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). As we witnessed during the recent crisis in Kazakhstan, Moscow dragged Armenia into the conflict, although that Russian-led military alliance did not lift a finger when Azerbaijan attacked Armenia.

It was not enough that Armenia was mistreated by CSTO; one of its loudest members, President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, made derogatory remarks in a recent interview with Russian journalist Vladimir Soloviev, by stating "Who needs Armenia? Nikol [Pashinyan] has nowhere to go but to join the Union State" which is a goal Moscow and Minsk have been working toward for a long time. Lukashenko, whose position is tenuous after the last presidential elections, predicted that Ukraine would also join that same union in 15 years' time.

Another issue is the involvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the Ukraine crisis. Already, its mission in Karabakh through its Minsk Group is dragging; with the current crisis in Ukraine, the OSCE see UKRAINE, page 19





COMMENTARY

# Three Steps Towards Resetting the Diaspora-Armenia Connection

By Avo Piroyan

The relationship between the Armenian diaspora and Armenia has overall been disjointed for many years and has not improved in recent years.

The charity-based model of diaspora participation does not and cannot guarantee consistent long-term involvement. While charitable donations have made a big difference to individual people, families and groups, they have not fundamentally made a difference to the economy of Armenia and have at best sustained Armenia rather than led to substantial growth.

A new innovative and inspiring model for diaspora participation is required. One based on a mutually beneficial relationship that will guarantee significant and long term financial involvement.

### Three Steps Towards a Mutually-Beneficial Relationship

**Citizenship** - Being a citizen of a country is a special thing and a deeper commitment than just occasionally engaging and disengaging from afar. Therefore, the creation of a special Diaspora Citizen of Armenia passport (similar to India) or Armenian citizenship with a special non-residency status with differing rights and responsibilities to regular citizens of Armenia will greatly enhance and entrench the diaspora’s participation in Armenia.

Crucially, this new passport type/status should include, first, voting rights basis tax contributions of a minimum amount and secondly, an acceptance that compulsory military service is in reality an unrealistic expectation.

**Land** – Among the main — though by no means the only — issues the diaspora faces when looking to invest or engage with Armenia is knowing which of the many organization, projects or appeals to support. The time required to research is simply not available to the vast majority of working people.

In addition and perhaps contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of diaspora Armenians earn the average income of their home nation and therefore disposable income is limited. Only a very small portion are millionaires. Also perhaps contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of the diaspora does not see Armenia as a place to invest for purely economic reasons.

Nonetheless, the desire to engage with the fatherland and invest is strong, not for economic but mainly for patriotic reasons.

One excellent way to address all of the above points is to distribute land either for free or basis a nominal fee, for example, \$500 per plot to every extended Armenian family with the above mentioned passport/non-residency status. The land will go towards building dynastic and/or holiday homes, entrenching that diaspora family with their Armenian roots long term almost no matter how ethnically thin the Armenian part may become.

Such a program will automatically give diaspora Armenians something to invest in

and it will create construction jobs in areas of the country with acute job and investment shortages. It will also create a regular place for diaspora Armenians to visit, increasing the number of visitors to Armenia and boosting the tourism sector.

For the Armenian state it is a win-win. They will have to make no financial contributions in what is effectively a public-private partnership. They will suffer no opportunity costs as most of the land is barren and/or unused and at the moment has no economic value as evidenced by the fact that it is unused. And in addition, there will be an influx of small and medium scale foreign direct investments on a mass scale throughout the country.

**Bureaucracy** – The reality is that Armenia’s attraction for diaspora Armenians is primarily emotive and based on patriotism instead of any practical benefits. Therefore, participation in Armenia’s economy and society must be easy, simple and accessible for the whole of the diaspora. Currently, it is not.

Armenia’s bureaucratic systems have been in need of whole scale review and reform for some time. Ideally, an independent commission is required to carry out the review and make recommendations which can then be enacted.

In order to attract the diaspora in bulk instead of just a small percentage of the very most committed, bureaucratic reforms are vital.

The aim of the reforms should be to reduce all bureaucracy to a minimum and simplify daily life. This would significantly encourage and ease diaspora participation in Armenia.

### Benefits for Armenia

The diaspora is Armenia’s single greatest economic resource, arguably by some distance with the potential to generate tens of billions of US dollars’ worth of economic activity but it is currently badly underutilized. Just funds from nominal administration fees for the passport applications and nominal fees for land will raise upwards of \$500 million from just 250,000 diaspora families. This does not include the much greater financial benefits to Armenia’s economy stated above.

However, in order to utilize this resource to its highest limit, diaspora Armenians must be allowed to be stakeholders in Armenia with rights, benefits and a voice that recognizes them as members of Armenia society that do not live in Armenia.

This will guarantee major, long term diaspora financial participation in Armenia based not on charity but patriotism and self-interest. In so doing, the Armenia-diaspora association will transform into a mutually beneficial and mutually reinforcing ascendant relationship.

### Urgent Need and Trust Building

The diaspora is a major asset with only a limited shelf life. The pressures of assimilation are strong and the diaspora needs strong links to Armenia to sustain itself, without them it will likely dissipate within the next 50-100 years, according to Professor of Sociology Georgi Derluguian.

This will be to the detriment of both Armenia and diaspora Armenians. At that point, the great economic resource of the diaspora will no longer exist.

For Armenia, it is currently at a low point. It lacks significant economic and human resources. Therefore, it is imperative for both the diaspora and Armenia to find a common understanding and develop a mutually beneficial relationship.

In order for the above to turn into reality, trust building in the near term is essential. The three initial steps (listed above), if implemented, will do just that and be the first big steps towards facilitating a lasting diaspora-Armenia partnership.

(Avo Piroyan is a London-based contributor.)

# Vartanantz...What Are We Celebrating?

By Rev. Vartan Tootikian

In the Maritime Province of Canada there is an old fort called Queen Ann Fort. It was built by the French and was held some time by the French. Later, it was attacked by the British. After a heroic defense by the French, the fort fell into British hands. On one of the walls of the fort, the British put up a bronze plaque to the memory of the brave French commander who finally surrendered the fort. The plaque reads: “In Memory of the French Commander of this fort. Honor to an unsuccessful valor.”

What are we celebrating in the Vartanantz? A defeat or a victory? Are we paying tribute to an unsuccessful or a successful valor?

Had the Vartanantz heroic struggle in 451 A.D. ended with battle of Avarayr, the observance of Vartanantz would simply be a memorial, by which we “honor an unsuccessful valor,” paying tribute to the memory of Commander Vartan Mamigonian and his comrades. But the Vartanantz war was more than a one-day battle. It began on May 26 451 A.D. with the Battle of Avarayr, but it did not end with Avarayr. It did not end with the martyrdom of Vartan and his 1035 comrades. Rather, the Vartanantz war lasted 33 years and was ended with the victorious Treaty of Nuvarsak in 484 A.D. Thus, this heroic war can be described as a chain of events beginning with the defeat on the field of Avarayr and ending with a victory at Nuvarsak.

It was Vartan Mamigonian who led the resistance against the Persian army of 300,000 men, whose king Yazdegert (Hazgert II), demanded that the Armenians deny the Christian faith and embrace his fire-worshipping faith of Zoroastrianism.

The combined militias of several Armenian principalities had formed an army of 66,000 under the command of Vartan who tried to repulse the attacking Persian army.

Although the Armenian suffered a military defeat, their relentlessness eventually scored a victory.

The indomitable faithful Vartanantz spirit, as exemplified in the loyalty of the religious and lay leadership, eventually prevailed. Under the leadership of Vartan’s nephew, Vahan Mamigonian was successful in getting Persia’s new monarch, King Vagharsh signed a treaty known as the Treaty of Nuvarsak, granting the Armenians in his dominion religious freedom and national autonomy. The free, unimpeded worship of the Christian faith, the termination of forced conversions, and the right of the Armenian people to live according to their ancestral and traditional laws were granted. Also, the autonomy of the Armenian people, under the sovereignty of the Persian Empire, was recognized.

The Vartanantz resistance became a pivotal point in Armenian history and a source of inspiration for the succeeding generations.

Having said this, the question that arises in our minds is: What are we celebrating through Vartanantz’s heroic struggle?

First, we are celebrating a commitment to freedom. Freedom in all its forms is the cornerstone of a nation, the desire for freedom has always been, and will always be, one of the deepest longings of the human heart. Freedom for individuals and nations means to be themselves—to live their own lives, to think their own thoughts, to seek their own answers, and to decide their own destinies.

Vartan, and his comrades known as Vartanank, were the heroes who tolled the bell for freedom. And they paid a high price for it.

We, their descendants, observe the Vartanantz heroic struggle in grateful commemoration of those valiant souls who defied the enemy and who by their valor defended their faith, their homeland, and their human rights.

Freedom can be kept only with great vigilance and sacrifice. It can be lost overnight by a generation that exploits its privileges and renounces its responsibilities. Freedom is a spiritual quality which lives in the hearts and the wills of those who are determined to keep it.

Secondly, we are celebrating a commitment to living above the consensus. Living above the consensus is the capacity to say “no” to something that is not right and is against one’s conscience. Conscience is a gift that God has endowed human beings with. It is an internal sense of right and wrong. It is the built-in “computer” within the human soul that will not allow a person to do wrong and to feel right about it.

Living above the consensus is the heroic dimension to reject that which is reprehensible to human sensibility and conscience. It is the moral courage to reject that which is expedient and to do what is right.

In 451 A.D. the vast part of Armenia was subject to the Persian Empire. The Persian emperor Yazdegert demanded that Armenians renounce their Christian faith and adopt Zoroastrianism. The response of the Armenian people was, “From this faith [i.e. Christianity] no one can separate us, neither sword, nor fire, nor any other force.” This kind of defiance was the courage and determination to live above the consensus.

It is not easy to live above the consensus. Sometimes it is very costly. Vartanantz resistance became a baptism of fire, but it eventually kept the Armenians a Christian nation. Christianity became firmly rooted in Armenia thanks to the Vartanantz heroic stance to live above the consensus.

Thirdly, we are celebrating a commitment to Christian faith. Vartanantz faith was more than belief in the existence of God; it was trust and confidence. Vartan and his comrades were faced with a choice: Survival without Christ, or physical death for Christ. That saved the Soul of the Armenian nation.

see VARTANANTZ, page 20





## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenia Needs Better Counter-intelligence To Deter Foreign and Domestic Spies

Last week, we were all shocked by the news that Armenia's National Security Service (NSS) arrested 19 members of the Armenian military on spying charges

for Azerbaijan.

The NSS accused the arrested 19 Armenian soldiers of having transferred classified military secrets to Azerbaijan in return for money. The NSS explained that Azerbaijani agents had contacted the Armenian soldiers by setting up fake Facebook pages with photos of attractive females who communicated in the Armenian language. There are plenty of Azeris who speak fluent Armenian since they were born in Armenia and attended Armenian schools before they fled to Azerbaijan after the civil unrest over Artsakh in the late 1980s.

There are several serious security issues that the Armenian government should pay immediate attention to and take special measures to minimize the repetition of such spying cases. But even with improved counterintelligence, such problems may not be eliminated, but simply minimized, since almost all countries fall victim to foreign and domestic spies.

Here are my thoughts and suggestions:

1) The Armenian government should take immediate steps to appoint competent experts who know how to run an intelligent service. This suggestion is made because Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has appointed to almost all positions inexperienced and incompetent officials purely based on their membership in his ruling party. The most recent example of incompetence was the surprising announcement by the NSS that they learned from reading a newspaper article that the President of Armenia is a dual citizen which is a violation of Armenian law. Imagine Armenia's intelligence services learning about such a critical issue from a newspaper after the President was in office for four years, instead of being the first to uncover it.

2) The National Security Service, besides needing expert personnel, must also have the most advanced counterintelligence technology.

3) The Armenian government must consult with ally governments on how to improve the training, organization and activities of its intelligence services.

4) The 19 Armenians who were arrested for spying are accused of transferring to Azerbaijan secret information about Armenia's military personnel, weapons and military facilities. It remains to be seen if they will be found guilty in a court of law since there have been many Armenian officials arrested in the past four years for committing various offenses, but were not convicted.

5) How can the Armenian military allow its soldiers to have Facebook pages since everyone knows that they are vulnerable to hackers and can be co-opted by outsiders?

6) Where was the oversight by Armenia's intelligent services as the compro-

mised soldiers were transmitting national secrets to the enemy? It would have been best to prevent the transfer of such secrets before they happen, not after the damage is done.

7) It is highly concerning that such a large number of soldiers of various ranks were arrested. The NSS announced that a total of 24 soldiers were involved in these spying activities which means that there are several other suspects who have not been arrested either due to a lack of evidence or because their identities and locations are unknown. We also do not know how long this spy network has been operating before their arrest.

8) Even if the remaining members of this spy network are arrested and charged, it does not mean that the 24 suspects are the only ones involved in this spying Network. There may be dozens or hundreds of others whose identities and activities are unknown. As opposed to Armenia, Azerbaijan seems to have a highly competent and experienced cadre of agents who know what they are doing. They are most probably trained and aided by the highly skilled Turkish intelligence services, the MIT (National Intelligence Organization).

9) One serious aspect of this spying scandal is that some of the arrestees reportedly sold national secrets for a few hundred dollars. There must be something seriously wrong in Armenia's educational system if an Armenian, born, raised, educated, and serving in the military, is willing to betray his nation to the enemy for a handful of dollars. It is highly concerning that there seems to be a lack of national pride and patriotic sentiments among some Armenians, particularly soldiers.

10) This is not the first time that spies have been arrested in Armenia. There have been several cases of Armenians spying for Turkey in the past 30 years. Some of them were Armenian government officials.

11) Azerbaijan announced in the past the arrest of a number of Armenians and Azeris who had allegedly spied for Armenia. It is not known if they were really spies or not.

12) I fear that the spying problems in Armenia will get much worse with the contemplated opening of the border with Turkey and Azerbaijan. This will allow many more Azeri and Turkish spies to enter Armenia via air and land as tourists or business people.

13) In addition to actual spies, Azerbaijan and Turkey will collect valuable information about Armenia by debriefing their citizens after their return from Armenia. Of course, spying is not limited to these two countries, as other states are also engaged in gathering intelligence on Armenia.

14) There have been several cases where Armenians, who have immigrated to Turkey in recent years due to lack of jobs at home, have been approached by Turkish intelligence to gather information on Armenia upon their return home for which they were handsomely compensated.

In conclusion, antagonistic actions are carried out not only during the war, but also at peacetime by recruiting domestic and foreign agents. The Armenian government must approach this problem very seriously and allocate the necessary resources and personnel to counter such intelligence gathering activities.

## Ukraine Crisis and Its Spillover in Armenia

UKRAINE, from page 17

officials' hands are full. That, of course, favors Azerbaijan, which was hampering the organization's mission in the Caucasus. Now it has a good reason not to send its delegation to the region.

President Aliyev has stated many times that the OSCE has no longer a task there as the war resolved the Karabakh issue. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group insist the issue of status has yet to be resolved and it must happen through negotiations. However, there is no unanimity amongst the co-chairs. France and the US insist on the Karabakh status issue, while Russia, time and again, insists that the OSCE Minsk Group mission has to confine itself to humanitarian issues, like the release of POWs and the exchange of remains of fallen soldiers.

Scholar and journalist Simon Maghakyan states in an essay on the website Hyperallergic that Azerbaijan, emboldened by the crisis in Ukraine, has undertaken the task of officially distorting the identity of Armenian monuments in the occupied territories of Karabakh.

The Karabakh war has relevance to the Ukraine crisis due to the fact that the 44-day war was mostly won by the introduction of Turkish-made Bayraktar drones into the theater of battle. Their novelty and success have boosted their commercial value, which is injecting hard currency into Turkey's moribund economy, as the latter continues to supply Bayraktars to Ukraine. Whether true or not, military experts in the West believe that Bayraktars are superior to conventional Russian arms, which were defeated in Karabakh.

Incidentally, Turkey, besides supplying arms to Ukraine, announced that should war break out, it will fulfill its obligations as a NATO ally to boost its sagging credibility to that alliance, although President Biden has stated that the last thing he wants is to fight Russian forces in Ukraine.

The Russian tanks are moving on Ukraine's border as the war rhetoric is increasing. Hopefully, a face-saving breakthrough will take place to avert a war.

## Turkish-Held Areas In Syria Become Asylum for ISIS

By Armen Tigranakert

The news of an ISIS leader elimination, Abu Ibrahim al-Quraishi, by the US forces in Syria's Idlib went around the whole world last week. On the night between Wednesday to Thursday, American commandos had airdropped from helicopters in the town of Atmeh that located near the Turkish border, and then they stormed a house, where allegedly the Daesh's boss was hiding. Al-Quraishi blew himself up during the erupted clashes. According to the White Helmets, 13 people were also killed in the explosion, including 4 children and 3 women.

It is worth noting that this operation has become the most successful for the US special forces in two years. The previous "Caliph," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was also eliminated by Americans in the same area in October 2019. Most notably, both leaders of one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations were hiding in northwestern Syria near the border with Turkey.

The incident of al-Quraishi elimination triggered a lot of questions from military analytics. The main of them is – how did the Turkish special services allow a presence of such high-ranking terrorist in the area of their influence. Many experts agree that Ankara is directly involved in harboring ISIS militants, because Turkey has dozens of observation posts in the province of Idlib, which has already become a "Turkish patch."

No less important are long-standing ties of al-Quraishi with Turkey. He ran negotiations between the ISIS and Ankara in relation to the Turkish

consulate in Iraqi Mosul in June, 2014. At that time al-Quraishi personally moved a staff of embassy in a safe area, from which they were transferred to Turkey. Moreover, according to available information, the "second ISIS Caliph" had Turkoman origin, which demonstrates a sympathy for him from the Turkish leadership.

In turn, locals are also concerned about such close proximity with ISIS militants. A resident of Afrin city, who called himself Nizar, pointed out the people's fear related to their security. "A lot of questions come to our minds, the first of them is – how could such a high-ranking terrorist get territories that are fully controlled by the Turkish side and its intelligence, which claims that it is struggling against terrorism, including the ISIS," Nizar said.

Other citizen of Afrin, who hid his name, also expressed his concern after the recent events. "How could al-Quraishi residence be situated in a few kilometers from the Turkish border? Moreover, this area has always been considered safe, especially since a Turkish military facility and HTS checkpoint are located from several meters of it," he said.

And besides, a part of Daesh terrorists, who had previously escaped from Hasakah's al-Sina'a prison, fled to Turkey. Moreover, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, two runaway ISIS "Emirs" with their supporters are currently in Jarabulus city of northern Aleppo, which is held by Turkish-backed groups.

It becomes obvious that Ankara continues to support terrorist factions in Syria despite its statements of fighting international terrorism. ISIS militants are living in peace in Turkish-controlled areas side by side with civilians, who do not even know it. Thus, a logical question arises — either the Turkish special services are incompetent or involved in harbouring ISIS terrorists.

(Armen Tigranakert is a freelance journalist based in Aleppo.)



# US Envoy Reveals Meeting with Armenian Opposition Lawmakers

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The US Embassy in Yerevan said on Friday, February 11, that Ambassador Lynne Tracy had met with Armenian opposition lawmakers earlier this week to “hear their concerns regarding recent judicial and political developments.”

“The Ambassador stressed US support for Armenia’s democratic trajectory,” the embassy wrote on Twitter.

It did not name the deputies who met with Tracy. It said only that they are affiliated with the main opposition Hayastan bloc.

The bloc headed by former President Robert Kocharyan did not issue any statements on the meeting held on February 9.

Hayastan and the other parliamentary opposition force, Pativ Unem, issued a joint statement on February 3 strongly condemning criminal proceedings launched against a judge who freed a well-known opposition figure on January 26.

The judge, Boris Bakhshyan, was arrested on Monday on charges stemming



Amb. Lynne Tracy

from another decision made by him recently. He rejects them as government retribution. Armenia’s Union of Judges and outgoing human rights ombudsman, Arman Tatoyan, have also deplored Bakhshyan’s arrest.

In their statement, Hayastan and Pativ Unem demanded that the international community react to the “collapse of democracy in Armenia” and be “conscious of their share of responsibility.”

In recent months, representatives of

the two opposition groups have repeatedly accused Western powers of turning a blind eye to what they see as government crackdowns on opposition figures and independent-minded judges.

US and European Union officials have not publicly echoed the Armenian opposition concerns. They regularly voice support for “reforms” promised or implemented by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s administration.

On Thursday, Tracy met with Armenia’s Prosecutor-General Artur Davtyan. She stressed, among other things, “the importance of judicial independence and integrity,” according to the US Embassy.

The ambassador’s meeting with Davtyan came the day after Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party pushed through the Armenian parliament last-minute legal amendments that will make it easier for law-enforcement authorities to indict and arrest judges.

Opposition lawmakers denounced the amendments as another blow to judicial independence.

# COVID-19 Research by Bone Marrow Registry Team Featured in Leading Medical Journal

LOS ANGELES — An article featuring the findings of a major COVID-19 research conducted by the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR) has been published in *Frontiers in Immunology*, one of the world’s leading medical journals.

The results of the landmark research, which was conducted by ABMDR in collaboration with various Armenian scientists, pertain to the specific manners in which the COVID-19 virus affects ethnic Armenians. The article was published in the February 3 issue of “Frontiers in Immunology.”

A preeminent journal in its field, *Frontiers in Immunology* publishes rigorously peer-reviewed research across basic, translational, and clinical immunology. “Frontiers in Immunology” is the official Journal of the International Union of Immunological Societies (IUIS).

Commenting on the publication of the ABMDR article, Dr. Frieda Jordan, president of the organization, stated, “I think this is a historic milestone, as the results of a critically-important and timely research conducted by a team of Armenian scientists is being shared with the global medical community, contributing to a better understanding of a devastating pandemic.”

The ABMDR article, published in the “Viral Immunology” section of “Frontiers in Immunology,” was co-authored by Dr. Anahit Hovhannissyan, Dr. Vergine Madelian, Dr. Sevak Avagyan, Dr. Mihran Nazaretyan, Armine Hyussyan, Alina Sirunyan, Rubina Arakelyan, Zorayr Manukyan, Levon Yepiskoposyan, Karine R Mayilyan, and Dr. Frieda Jordan.

ABMDR’s COVID-19 research was supported in part by Dr. Carolann and George Najarian and the Armenian Medical Society of California.

# Vartanantz... What Are We Celebrating?

VARTANANTZ, from page 18

Vartan spoke very eloquently about Christian faith. Referring to King Yazdegert, he declared, “He who had conceived that we wear Christianity as one does his garments, now finds that no one can divest us of it than he can of the color of our skin, and let us hope, never will be able to the end.”

Christian faith for which the Vartanantz generation made the supreme sacrifice, became for the Armenian nation, the matrix from which a distinct identity emerged. This identity has affected our nation in such a manner that today we can declare that our Christian faith is the assurance for our survival.

Vartanantz Christian faith, however, must be reborn in our generation, and we must come to grips with it in terms of our problems and challenges. It demands of us, in the words of St. Paul, “Standing firm in our faith, being courageous and strong.”

(Vartanantz is celebrated on February 24.)



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SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2001, THE TCA SPONSOR A TEACHER PROGRAM HAS RAISED \$793,560 AND REACHED OUT TO 7,163 TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF IN ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH.



☐ Yes, I want to sponsor teachers in Armenia and Karabagh to continue helping them educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher's name and address.

☐ \$200 ☐ \$400 ☐ \$600 ☐ other\_\_\_\_\_

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

City\_\_\_\_\_ State\_\_\_\_\_ Zip\_\_\_\_\_

Email\_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to:  
Tekeyan Cultural Association—Memo: Sponsor a Teacher

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5326 Val Verde, Houston, TX 77056

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