

# Azerbaijan’s Proposal ‘Not Fully Addressing’ Possible Peace Agenda

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — While Armenia considers the latest five-point proposal by Azerbaijan for starting peace talks to be acceptable, it still believes that it fails to fully address the possible peace agenda, the country’s foreign minister has said.

“Ultimately, there is nothing inadmissible in Azerbaijan’s proposal that was passed to Yerevan on March 10 except that these issues do not fully address the possible agenda of comprehensive peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and our answers were aimed at completing that

agenda,” Ararat Mirzoyan said in the National Assembly on Monday, March 21.

Armenia’s Foreign Ministry said on March 14 that it had applied to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs (the United States, Russia and France) requesting that they organize Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations on a peace treaty “on the basis of the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Helsinki Final Act.”

It followed a statement by Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov that Baku had submitted a five-point proposal to Yerevan to normalize relations.

Baku insists that a future peace treaty with Yerevan should be based on five fundamental principles, including mutual recognition of each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual reaffirmation of the absence of territorial claims to each other and a legally binding obligation not to make such claims in the future, abstaining from threatening each other’s security, delimitation and demarcation of the border

with the establishment of diplomatic relations and unblocking of transport links.

“We consider the rights of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and the addressing of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh to be key and fundamental. We are ready to start negotiations on this complete basis and it is with this proposal that we applied to the OSCE Minsk Group,” the minister said, answering questions of lawmakers.

He stressed that negotiations have not started yet.

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## Balakian’s Lyric Voice Resounds in *No Sign*, His New Poetry Volume

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

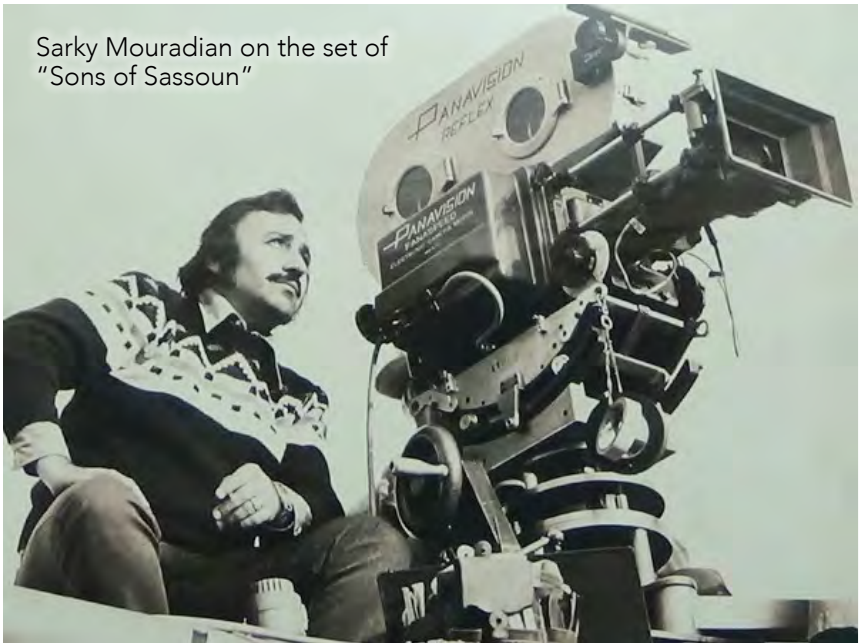
WATERTOWN — Armenians sometimes wonder if their voice is audible in the world, especially during times of crisis. In the realm of literature, and poetry in particular, there is no doubt that it is, with Pulitzer Prize winning poets like Peter Balakian. Balakian’s work places the Armenian experience on a level of universal significance, not leaving it isolated in the realm of ethnic or folk life, nor buried dead in history. At the age of seventy, he continues to produce prolifically. His newest volume of poetry, *No Sign* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), just published, is another masterful collection weaving together all sorts of elements of contemporary life, with an Armenian perspective and memory prominent.



This 85-page book is divided into four sections. The first contains a variety of poems flitting between the past and present, with Covid, the Vietnam War, world politics and the bitterness of history, including Armenian political disappointments, Arshile Gorky, various foods, beautiful flowers, and even the *duduk* making appearances. The poems of the second section all are named after various fruits, vegetables and foods, and are often palpably sensual in nature. They connect with various memories and experiences of the author, with deeper reverberations.

The third section of the book, unlike the other sections, is composed of a single longer poem bearing the same title as the eponymous volume. More complex than the other poems, with many parts, it

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## In Memoriam: Sarky Mouradian, Father Of Armenian-American Television, Pop Music

By Harry Kezelian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

LOS ANGELES — Like many who devote their talents to the Armenian community rather than gain fame in the wider world, Sarky Mouradian was the community’s asset.

To Armenians in Los Angeles, he was something of a living legend. Others were disappointed that his work did not have the production values or seeming relevance of Hollywood. These Armenians were waiting for a major motion picture telling their story, something that was belatedly and partially realized with the release of “The Promise.”

Mouradian’s legacy was quite different. He was not a Saroyan or a Mamoulian who told the Armenian story to the world community. Instead, he served a vital role as community servant, telling the Armenian story from the perspective of the Armenians, through film and television, without regard to the editorial oversight of Hollywood executives or the preferences of the American public. And perhaps even more importantly, by creating content almost exclusively in Armenian, see MOURADIAN, page 8



Sarky Mouradian interviewing Charles Aznavour on Armenian Teletime

## Russia Is Losing Tens of Thousands Of Outward-Looking Young Professionals

By Jane Arraf

YEREVAN, Armenia (*New York Times*) — At the Lumen cafe in the Armenian capital, Russians arrive as soon as the doors open, ordering specialty coffees, opening up their sleek Apple laptops and trying to navigate a dwindling array of options for starting their lives over.

The background music and the sunlit interior are calming counterpoints to the frantic departures from their country, where they left behind parents, pets and the sense of home that all but vanished when Russia invaded Ukraine last month.

“This war was something I thought could never happen,” said Polina Loseva, 29, a web designer from Moscow working with a private Russian I.T. company that she did not want to name. “When it started, I felt that now, everything is possible. Already they are putting people in jail for some harmless words on Facebook. It was safer to leave.”



This is a different kind of exodus — tens of thousands of young, urban, multilingual professionals who are able to work remotely from almost anywhere, many of them in information technology or freelancers in creative industries.

Russia is hemorrhaging outward-looking young professionals who were part of a global economy that has largely cut off their country.

Before the war broke out, only about 3,000 to 4,000 Russians were registered

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**NEW YORK**  
Armenian Women Highlighted at UN Headquarters



**CALIFORNIA**  
Clarinet Concert Features Boris Allakhverdyan, Alin Allakhverdyan



**RECIPE**  
Lenten Recipes From The Armenian Kitchen.com







ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Moment of Silence to Honor 1920 Shushi Pogrom Victims

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Members of Parliament held a moment of silence on March 22 in honor of the memory of the victims of the 1920 Shushi pogroms, where thousands of Armenians were killed.

“I suggest that we hold a moment of silence to honor the memory of the victims of the pogroms committed by Turkish-Azerbaijani groups in Shushi in 1920,” MP Hayk Mamijanyan from Pativ Unem bloc said at the plenary session.

“Around 20,000 of our compatriots died as a result of the pogroms which lasted 4-5 days. I think that in the context of the present-day developments and the signals coming from Artsakh yesterday, it is necessary for the world to see that we remember our history very well,” Mamijanyan said.

In 1920, Armed units of the first republic of Azerbaijan attempted to resolve the Karabakh issue which had been already on the international agenda, by using force and mass killing of the civilian population.

As a result, the Armenian town of Shushi, a major economic, spiritual and cultural center of the region, was set on a fire and destroyed. This atrocity, committed by unprecedented cruelty, was led by Khosrov bey Sultanov, who later, during World War II, actively participated in the formation of Azerbaijani legion in the ranks of the Nazi troops.

Azerbaijan Again Cuts Gas Supply to Artsakh

STEPANAKERT (Public Radio of Armenia/Panorama) — Gas to the Artsakh Republic has been cut again due to the direct intervention of the Azerbaijani side, Artsakh’s Information Headquarters reported on Monday, March 21.

There are sufficient grounds to assume that during the repair works of the gas pipeline that exploded on March 8, the Azerbaijani side installed a valve, through which it stopped the gas supply hours ago.

Azerbaijan makes use of the unfavorable weather conditions to create additional humanitarian problems for the population of Artsakh.

The situation was immediately reported to the command of the Russian peacekeeping force stationed in Artsakh. The peacekeepers and the Artsakh authorities are making efforts to restore the gas supply. Earlier, the gas flow to more than half of the customers in Artsakh had been restored, State Minister Artak Beglaryan said on March 20.

“Some 30-40 cm of snow fell in Stepanakert today. The snowfall was even heavier in other settlements of Artsakh, which is unprecedented for March. In such conditions, the population of Artsakh was deprived of natural gas for more than 11 days in a row due to artificial and deliberate obstacles created by Azerbaijan,” Beglaryan said.

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“Once political settlement is acceptable to the parties, it should be put on paper and fixed in an agreement ... We do not make any contradiction between territorial integrity and the right [of peoples] to self-determination or in the demarcation of borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We strongly believe that it does not concern the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh’s Armenians, their status, etc.,” Mirzoyan stressed.

The top Armenian diplomat again reminded that Armenia does not regard the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as a territorial dispute or a matter of territorial encroachment on Azerbaijan.

“It is solely and fully a question of the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh,” Mirzoyan underscored.

The OSCE Minsk Group has not yet responded to Armenia’s application. Azerbaijan has not responded to Armenia’s offer to hold peace talks on the basis of the Minsk Group either.

Earlier on Monday it was reported that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held separate telephone conversations with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts. The subject of a possible peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan was reportedly discussed during both phone calls.

In separate phone calls with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts this week, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has said that as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group France is ready to make efforts to support the negotiation process between Yerevan and Baku over a peace deal.

According to the French Foreign Ministry, in telephone conversations with Ararat Mirzoyan and Jeyhun Bayramov, Le Drian highlighted the importance of stability and peace in the South Caucasus and stressed the readiness of Paris for consultations with the countries of the region.

The top French diplomat, in particular, stressed the importance of contacts between the sides on the issue of restoring gas supply to Nagorno-Karabakh, which was disrupted earlier this month due to a damaged pipeline passing through Baku-controlled territory.

During his telephone conversation with Mirzoyan, the French foreign minister also welcomed the recent visit of the Armenian foreign minister to Turkey, stressing that France “encourages continued negotiations on the normalization of relations between the two countries.”

The situation in Ukraine was also reportedly discussed during both conversations.

In reply to an RFE / RL Armenian Service question regarding Washington’s position

on Armenia’s request for mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs in organizing talks with Azerbaijan on a peace treaty, the embassy said: “The United States remains committed to promoting a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future for the South Caucasus region. As a Minsk Group Co-Chair, we urge Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue and intensify their diplomatic engagement to find comprehensive solutions to all outstanding issues. The United States is ready to assist Armenia and Azerbaijan with these efforts.”

As for whether the Minsk Group co-chairs plan a visit to the region any time soon, the embassy said it did not have anything new to share on this matter.

The mediating troika, including representatives of the United States, Russia and France, have not visited the region after the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia claims the mediators’ visit is hampered by Azerbaijan’s position.

At a news briefing in Moscow today Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Moscow welcomes the readiness of Armenia and Azerbaijan to engage in the preparation of a peace treaty. She added that Russia was ready to provide “all possible assistance” to such a negotiation process.

Teach for Armenia and the American University of Armenia Partner to Expand Educational Opportunities

YEREVAN — Teach For Armenia and the American University of Armenia (AUA) have launched their partnership to expand educational opportunities for Teach For Armenia staff. Teach For Armenia will provide its employees tuition scholarships to pursue graduate degrees and certificate programs at AUA. As one of Armenia’s leading universities, AUA is thrilled to support this initiative by offering TFA staff the opportunity to pursue one of its graduate programs in business, economics, the humanities, social sciences, health sciences, and engineering.

“At Teach For Armenia, we believe that people are our greatest resource and that there is no greater investment than our people. As an organization, it is our responsibility to provide our staff with opportunities to grow professionally and personally,” said Larisa Hovannisian, Founder and CEO of Teach For Armenia.

Founded in 2013, Teach For Armenia recruits and trains recent college graduates and professionals to teach in rural communities in Armenia and Artsakh for a period of two years. In this way, the organization works to alleviate Armenia’s critical teacher shortage and increase the quality of education nationwide. For nearly a decade, Teach For Armenia has partnered with local universities to allow program participants to earn a Master’s Degree in Education in parallel with their teaching placements.

“We are pleased to partner with Teach For Armenia on this initiative,” said AUA President Dr. Karin Markides. “By offering its members the opportunity to benefit from higher education, Teach For Armenia is doing something which should be very much celebrated.”

By collaborating with institutions of higher education in Armenia, Teach For Armenia seeks to create educational opportunities for its staff and program participants. In September 2022, Teach For

Armenia and Yerevan State University’s Center for Pedagogy and Education Development will launch a Master’s Program in Teacher Leadership for Educational Equity. By offering high-quality instruction online, we will lower the barrier to pursuing a

graduate degree in education and increase the number of people entering the profession. The program emphasizes the need for system-wide transformation through innovative teaching practices and leadership in the classroom.

Armenian Defense Chief Visits Syunik

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan paid a working visit to the southern Syunik province where the deaths of two conscripts in separate incidents were reported earlier this week.

During the visit, which the Defense Ministry’s press office said took place on March 17, Papikyan also traveled to the border area where local residents claimed Azerbaijan had moved its military positions into Armenian territory.

According to the official report, while visiting Syunik the defense minister met with local officers to discuss the recent incidents involving conscripts.

Papikyan reportedly stressed that such incidents were a result of the violation of discipline in some units as well as an “insufficient moral and psychological level of individual servicemen.”

“After listening to the reports of the officers responsible for the incidents, the defense minister instructed that the commander of the military unit take the necessary measures to exclude such cases in the future,” the report said.

The Investigative Committee on Thursday launched criminal cases over the deaths of two conscripts in noncombat conditions in Kapan and Meghri. Both were found dead with gunshot wounds. At least in one of the cases investigators suspect a suicide, but do not exclude outside influence on the soldier’s decision to take his own life.

During the visit Papikyan also reportedly traveled to the border area adjacent to the village of Nerkin Hand in the southeast of Syunik where the commander of the local military unit, Major-General Artak Budaghyan presented to him the current situation.

The mayor of Nerkin Hand and other residents of the village said on March 15 that Azerbaijani servicemen had moved 800-900 meters deep into the administrative territory of the community, set up five tents and started digging trenches there earlier this month.

Later that day, the Armenian Defense Ministry dismissed statements about the advancement of the Azerbaijani military. In particular, it said that Azerbaijani servicemen had simply returned to the positions that they previously controlled, but recently had to leave temporarily due to harsh winter conditions.

“There can be no question of any [Azeri] advancement.” In this and all other sections of the border the Armenian Armed Forces are fully fulfilling their tasks, monitoring any movement of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces and keeping the situation under control,” the ministry said.





## ARMENIA

# New Reality in Armenia with Influx of Those Fleeing Effects of Ukraine War

By Raffi Elliott

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — As Russia's invasion of Ukraine enters its fourth week, its effects are being felt as far away as the Armenian capital. Across downtown Yerevan, a similar scene plays out almost daily as crowds of tall, Slavic-looking people — men, women, children, often entire families — conspicuously shuffle about, dragging carry-on luggage behind them as they look for their AirBnBs or hotels.

They are part of the more than 50,000 people estimated to have migrated to Armenia since hostilities began in Ukraine on February 24. The vast majority of new-comers are Russians escaping increasingly brutal political repressions back home as well as rumors of an impending martial law which could see many of them trapped inside Russia. However, smaller numbers of Ukrainians (believed to include those who had been stuck in Russia as well as ethnic-Armenian Ukrainian nationals repatriating) and Belarusians are also looking to make Armenia home.

IT professionals and other highly skilled people make up the bulk of this new wave of Russian émigrés, as entire Russian and international companies continue to relocate their operations to the Armenian capital to avoid the effects of Western sanctions.

“Our company sent us a message on Saturday morning announcing that they chartered a bus to Demededevo [Moscow's International airport] later that same day to relocate us to Yerevan,” said Sasha, an IT worker from a city in central Russia. Sasha, whose last name and place of work were withheld for security reasons, says he packed up what he could carry, took his family and flew to Yerevan where his company also maintains offices. “We knew the Caucasus had a tradition for hospitality, but I was surprised by how warmly we were welcomed,” he added.

For many escaping Russians, however, Yerevan was simply one of few remaining options as tit-for-tat overflight bans between Moscow and Brussels closed up most European destinations. “We chose Armenia because it's close enough and remains one of few places in Europe that isn't hostile to Russians,” Igor, another newly-arrived Russian, told the *Mirror-Spectator*. Armenia's pro-business regulations also make it easy to work out of. Igor noted he was able to find an affordable apartment and open a bank account and is now waiting for his wife and children to join him in Yerevan.

## Renters Beware

Not all Russian arrivals have been this lucky however. The sudden influx of desperate Russians with money to spare has encouraged some more opportunistic landlords to hike up rents, often to absurd levels. Within two weeks, apartments listed on popular real estate sites doubled and even tripled in price. As a local website MediaLab put it “Apartment rental prices in Yerevan now compete with New York.”

This disruption in the housing market has triggered calls for more regulatory oversight and more protection for renters' rights. Such regulations are actually already in place, however, since the Armenian Revenue Service considers rental income to be a form of taxable employment, renters and landlords often eschew rental contracts altogether in favor of verbal agreements which often leave both parties legally unprotected.

Elodie Dernigorossian, a French-Armenian repatriate was told by her landlord to agree to a 25-percent hike in her rent or move out. When she finally agreed given the difficulty of finding another place to live, the landlord told her that the price had now doubled. He had already lined up a visit for new potential renters.

She, along with other renters now facing eviction have teamed up to fight back against what they see at the short-sighted greed of certain landlords. “It's not fair to long-time residents to be thrown out into the streets for the landlords' short-term gain,” she complained. This group has been posting examples of absurdly priced rental units online in an effort to shame their owners and galvanize local support. Others have also formed groups to connect renters to landlords committed to maintaining market rates.



A demonstration in Yerevan against the war (Raffi Elliott photo)

## Supply Chains Disrupted

Skyrocketing housing costs are not the only Ukraine War-related turbulence that Armenians must now contend with. Major disruptions to global supply chains have compounded the effects of COVID-induced inflation being felt in Armenia, as concern rises over availability of basic food staples like cooking oil and flour, which are mostly imported from Russia and Ukraine. In an effort to curb the effects of inflation, which is expected to reach 6.5 percent this year, the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) has raised its benchmark interest rate to 9.25 percent — a 1.25 percent hike. The CBA also slashed its GDP growth estimate from 5.3 percent to 1.4 percent due to the war.

On Tuesday, March 22, Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan announced measures to ease import restrictions on supplies as well as an agreement with other member-states of the Eurasian Economic Union to drop customs duties altogether on a wide range of goods. He also suggested that ongoing Western sanctions on Russia could provide Armenian manufacturers with new opportunities, but warned “expect an increase of exports to Russia, but a drop in profitability.”

The ruble's spectacular collapse is expected to reverberate in Armenia, too, since remittances from workers in Russia bring in an estimated \$549 million annually into the country, though this is usually in rubles. But the ruble's devaluation may also hurt Armenian exports as Armenian products would face fierce local competition.

Either way, the government has welcomed the influx of new Russians with open arms, partially in an attempt to balance the negative economic outcomes with a potential gain in productivity and economic performance which these highly skilled professionals offer.

The Economy Ministry has already developed a platform to help incoming Russian IT and business professionals fast track work-related paperwork and find them employment in the country's burgeoning tech sector. Ironically, despite a history of chronic underemployment and low wages, recent economic growth — particularly in information technology — has created a skilled workforce shortage, which many employers are now eager to fill with these new arrivals. Some are even trying to lure new skilled workers outside of Yerevan, like American entrepreneur Todd Fabacher, who is building an entire new neighborhood in Armenia's historic city of Gyumri to house tech workers at his IT services company Digital Pomegranate.

This hoped-for economic balancing effect is already being felt in Yerevan. Lena Seropyan, who works in one of the city's trendier nightlife spots, said that every third

customer she serves is Russian. “They often order more expensive cocktails on the menu too,” she added. Indeed, young Russians patrons can be seen lounging at cafes or enjoying meals at fashionable eateries around town.

Karen Margaryan, president of MBG hospitality group which operates several high-end restaurants in Armenia, welcomed this trend in a statement to the *Mirror-Spectator*. “Of course we're happy with this flow of guests. This is the healthiest our industry has been since the war and COVID pandemic both hit in 2020.” He noted how his restaurants have started serving breakfast earlier to accommodate their Russian patrons' working schedule.

Elena Kozhemyakina, a long-time Yerevan resident and herself an ethnic Russian, also said she hoped that these new arrivals will enrich Armenian society.

“I expect that at least part of them will stay and become part of this collaboration to bring in new ideas and perspectives, but of course, we also expect them to respect Armenian culture. We like our rhythm without any snobbery or imperialist mentality, so let them only pack useful habits in their suitcases” she said.

These newcomers arguably already are contributing to Armenian society. As the Armenian government continues skillfully avoiding entanglement in the ongoing war, young Russians have been participating in larger numbers in a series of grass-roots anti-war protests held in the Armenian capital. At a particularly large rally on Sunday, an exiled Russian journalist explained that she felt “the same kind of shame at what my country is doing now that Germans must have felt when faced with the consequences of their actions in the Second World War.” She, along with hundreds of other young Russians, marched down Yerevan's main Mashtots Boulevard chanting “No War” and “Down with Putin.”

For Armenians the prospect of taking a public stance on this ongoing conflict has been uncomfortable. Some have cited fear of provoking Russia upon which Armenia relies for security. Others remain reluctant to back a country whose government they perceive to have either tacitly or overtly with Azerbaijan during its 2020 invasion of Artsakh. Many feel betrayed by a world which ignored their plight while enthusiastically taking up the mantle of support for Ukraine.

Still, for the Armenians taking part in Sunday's anti-war rally, the images of devastation of Ukrainian cities, hospitals and critical infrastructure by an authoritarian neighbor bent on rewriting history make for clear parallels with Artsakh. “Ukrainians are suffering today because the world left us to suffer in 2020” said Sonya Galstyan, one of the participants.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Outdoor Photo Exhibit  
In Tbilisi Dedicated to  
Armenian Genocide

TBILISI (PanARMENIAN.Net) — An outdoor photo exhibition on the Armenian Genocide and cultural genocide was organized this week on a major avenue in Tbilisi, Georgia, near the Tbilisi State University, the Armenian Embassy in Georgia reports.

The exhibition was arranged by the Armenian Community of Georgia, ahead of the 107th anniversary of the Genocide.

The initiative will continue until April 24 with exhibitions expected in other districts of Tbilisi as well.

Maritime Body Welcomes  
Armenia's First Ever  
Permanent Representative

LONDON (PanARMENIAN.Net), Varuzhan Nersesyan has presented his Credentials to the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Kitack Lim, becoming the first permanent representative of Armenia in the organization.

"I was delighted to present credentials to the IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim. It is an honor and responsibility to be the first Permanent Representative of Armenia to IMO, and I am looking forward to building a strong foundation for developing maritime diplomacy," Nersesyan said in a tweet on Monday, March 21.

Nersesyan currently serves as Armenia's Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Le Figaro Deputy Director  
Accuses Aliyev of 'Triple  
Lie'

PARIS (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Deputy director of *Le Figaro* magazine Jean-Christophe Buisson has accused Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's of a "triple lie," after the Azerbaijani leader claimed his army did not target civilians during the Second Karabakh War in fall 2020.

"The incredible triple lie of the Azeri president whose armies bombed schools, churches and hospitals and who enlisted Syrian mercenaries torturing and beheading civilians and Armenian soldiers during the war in Artsakh. Images and testimonials exist," Buisson [tweeted](#) on Friday, March 18.

Since the first day of the war, Azerbaijan targeted civilian infrastructure and peaceful settlements, which left hundreds of people killed and injured. At least 19 of the hundreds of Armenian civilians and servicemen who were taken captive by Azerbaijan during military hostilities in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), have been tortured and killed, which amounts to a war crime, according to the defenders of the rights of Armenian captives in the European Court of Human Rights, Artak Zeynalyan and Siranush Sahakyan.



Students at the Gyumri Russian School

Russian School in Armenia Lines Up  
Students in Support of War in Ukraine

By Satenik Kaghzvantsian

GYUMRI (RFE/RL) — Teenagers attending a Russian school in Armenia have been lined up in letter Z in support of Russia war against Ukraine.

The action organized by the administration of the school in Gyumri reporting to Russia Defense Ministry took place earlier this week and involved children of both Russian and Armenian parents.

Gyumri, in the northwest of Armenia, hosts a Russian military base with some 3,000 servicemen. Children of these servicemen as well as other ethnic Armenian personnel of the base attend the local Russian school.

Some of the children aged 13 and 14 who took part in the action told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that they knew little about the ongoing war in Ukraine. Nor did they know anything about what letter Z stands for, they said.

From day one of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24 the letter Z could be seen on Russian tanks, armored vehicles, trucks and other equipment deployed as part of the war effort as a distinct marking apparently to avoid friendly fire.

Analysts have speculated that along with other markings, including the letter V, it may denote, in Russian, the direction of the onslaught like in Zapad (West) or Vostok (East - letter V). Russia Ministry of Defense explained that those markings denoted "Za Pobedu" ("For Victory"). Whatever the signs mean, it is clear that the letter Z that was most frequently seen in footage during the first few days of the Russian aggression has become a pro-Russian symbol of the war used in many publicity stunts across Russia.

"They gathered us to form Z and made a video," one of the children in Gyumri said.

The action took place in freezing temperatures in the schoolyard. Children said the school administration had also handed to them papers with the letter Z on them to hold during the action.

"They did not precisely explain to us what was it all about. They simply gathered

us outside the school, "one of the action participants said.

An RFE/RL Armenian Service correspondent was not allowed to do video recording inside the two-story building of the school without the permission of the Russian Defense Ministry. For the same reason, the school administration categorically refused to comment on the action with the participation of the school's students. However, some of the ethnic Armenian students agreed to talk on condition that they are not shown on video and that their voices are changed.

"We were all gathered. We have a person who organizes such things, such events in our school. That person gathered us all in the schoolyard and made a video. They gave to children papers with the letter Z written on them. The children were lined up for Z and the video was made, "one of the students said.

Another participant of that action added: "We were told to go outside in 10 minutes after the school bell rings. They made a video recording of [our lining up in Z] and we went back to the school building."

Children also said that they had been told to line up in the yard by high school students who wore military uniforms. Asked whether they could refuse to participate in the action, one of the students said: "Only those attending elementary school could refuse and stay in the classrooms, because they are too small. But those attending between the fifth and eleventh grades were all taken outside."

Levon Barseghyan, chairman of the board of the Asparez Journalists' Club in Gyumri, denounced the kind of publicity stunt involving children. He said that parents have a reason for concern because their children are being used for Russian propaganda purposes.

"That [Z] event shows that the Russian Federation will stop at nothing in its propaganda effort and that nothing is wrong for them. They use children to justify war. I think the parents of these children have something to think about," Barseghian said.

Barseghyan, a former member of Gyumri's municipal assembly, said he did not rule out that Russia may organize other similar propaganda events in Armenia. He urged the country authorities to take some steps to make sure such events are not associated with Armenia.

"I think that Armenian authorities should have some conversation with the commanders at the [Russian military] base to urge them to stay away from involving children in such things. If today they organize some marches, demonstrations in support of the aggressive war in front of the embassy, tomorrow they may start posting propaganda posters on cars, defending the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine. The traffic police must do something about it and the Armenian authorities in general must do something in this regard. You cannot just sit and wait for what will happen to those at the [Russian military] base. Go to your military unit and show your joy there. Do not get the city involved in it, do not get our country involved in your aggressive war," Barseghyan said.

A small pro-Moscow rally was organized in front of the Russian Embassy in Yerevan on Monday. About a week ago leaders of the Kremlin propaganda machine, including Russia Today's ethnic Armenian editor-in-chief Margarita Simonian, posted a video on their social media showing a statue of Mother Armenia overlooking capital Yerevan with red lights at its foot forming the letter Z. The other symbol of the Russian invasion, the letter V, is also seen at the end of that video.

Days after the posting of the video it is still unclear who made it. Yerevan authorities said they have nothing to do with the action called "In Support of the Russian Military". They said they know nothing about it and that the municipality did not give permission for holding such actions.

Despite hosting a Russian military base and being a member of the Russian-led defense alliance, Armenia has so far demonstrated a largely neutral position on the war in Ukraine.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Reflection During Lent with Alan Hovhanness

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — Music occupies a very special place during Lent. In Germany concerts, held mainly in churches, traditionally offer performances of music by Johann Sebastian Bach, the St. John and St. Matthew Passions in particular. In Glasgow, Scotland, musicians join with other artists during the 40-day period in a festival organized in collaboration with the Catholic Church. Known as LentFest, this year it included a concert by international pianist Alessandra Pompili, known also for her dedication to the music of Alan Hovhanness. In her piano recital, titled “Celebrate Hope,” on March 13, the Armenian composer’s work played a central role.

LentFest was inaugurated in 2006 on the initiative of then Archbishop Mario Conti, as a festival of art events that take place from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Held in Glasgow, it has become the most comprehensive festival of its type in Great Britain. In a short interview published in *Catholic Life* in 2014, its artistic director, Stephen Callaghan, explained that the aim of LentFest was to “encourage a stronger co-operation between artists and the Church,” which has a history of supporting the arts.

Through the initiative they hope also to encourage younger artists, “to present a vision that can be a source of reflection also for non-Catholics ... to portray our faith and identity in a credible manner.” LentFest is an expression of a movement resisting aggressive secularism, and seeking to strengthen identity through the arts in various forms: theatre, music and the visual arts. Now it has become an important cultural event in Scotland, and received endorsement from Pontifical Council for Culture in 2012.

## Music from Past and Present

As Pompili described it, the rationale for her program was pretty simple: to present examples from three major periods (baroque/romantic/contemporary), thus offering musical variety. She started with a piece by Antonio Vivaldi, *Concerto 3 N. 7*, in an unusual transcription for keyboard. “The Vivaldi transcriptions we usually hear of are those by J. S. Bach, who transcribed for keyboard a few instrumental concertos of baroque composers,” she explained. “But the one I presented is not by Bach; rather, it is part of the Anne Dawson’s manuscript music book, which is kept in Manchester Public Library. Who was Anne Dawson? We do not know anything of this Englishwoman who lived in the XVIII century. So,

this transcription of a well-known Vivaldi violin concerto is an unknown gem and unique in its genre (it is not one of those transcribed by Bach).”

She followed with two *Venetian Gondellieder* by Felix Mendelssohn, and online audiences could follow the music with visual images of gondolas moving slowly along the canals of Venice.

Alan Hovhanness occupied center stage in the program. Pompili is known as an advocate of his music, and has presented some of his works as premieres. She was the featured artist at an event commemorating Hovhanness’s 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 17, 2021, which was organized by the Armenian Cultural Foundation, Amaras Art Alliance and Friends of Armenian Culture Society. (See (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/04/22/alan-hovhanness-armenian-composer-universal-spirit/>))

Here for the recital at LentFest she performed his *Sonata Cougar Mountain, Opus 39*. She gave the European premiere of the composition in 2009 and it has remained a staple in her repertoire because, she said, “it is utterly mesmerizing.” The composition unfolds in several movements, *Adagio, Mountain Lament, Mountain Slumber Song* and *Cougar Mountain Dance*, again accompanied visually by magnificent landscapes,

woodlands and waterfalls. This little-known composition, the pianist explained, was written in 1985 when Hovhanness was living in Seattle. “Cougar Mountain is in the vicinity of the city,” she said, “and must have been a favorite of the composer — Hovhanness loved mountains, as he thought they were the locations where man could more easily approach God.” Compositionally, she considers *Cougar Mountain*, to be strictly speaking, more a suite than a sonata: “What I find fascinating is the underlying anthropomorphism: the mountain has a lament, sings a lullaby and finally dances.”

The concert concluded with two short pieces, by Domenico Zipoli, *Gavotte in d minor*, and Giovanni Battista Pescetti, *Allegretto in c major*. Zipoli became the organist at the Church del Gesù in Rome, the central church of the Jesuits. Although as a talented composer he could have had a stellar career in Rome, he decided to become a Jesuit and go as a missionary in Argentina where he taught music in the Jesuit mission until his death.

This was Pompili’s fourth time participating in LentFest. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this year’s festival has to take place online. But, fortunately, one can enjoy it after the fact. See <http://www.agap.org.uk/lentfest.html>

## Russia Is Losing Tens of Thousands of Outward-Looking Young Professionals

MIGRATION, from page 1

as workers in Armenia, according to officials. But in the two weeks following the invasion, at least an equal number arrived almost every day in this small country. While thousands have moved on to other destinations, government officials said late last week that about 20,000 remained. Tens of thousands more are looking to start new lives in other countries.

The speed and scale of the exodus are evidence of a seismic shift that the invasion set off inside Russia. Though President Vladimir V. Putin repressed dissent, Russia until last month remained a place where people could travel relatively unfettered overseas, with a mostly uncensored internet that gave a platform to independent media, a thriving tech industry and a world-class arts scene. Life was good, the émigrés said.

For the new arrivals in Armenia, a sense of controlled panic overlays the guilt of leaving their families, friends and homeland, along with the fear of speaking openly and the sorrow of seeing a country they love doing something they hate.

“Most of those who left oppose the war because they are connected to the world and they understand what’s happening,” said Ivan, part-owner of a Cyprus-based video game development firm. He and many other Russian exiles interviewed in Armenia said they did not want to give their full names for fear of repercussions at home.

Loseva and her boyfriend, Roman Zhigalov, a 32-year-old web developer who works for the same company that she does, sat at a table in the crowded cafe with friends who were looking for a place to stay. Dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, she leaned against Zhigalov, closing her eyes as he put his arm around her shoulder.

“A month ago, I didn’t want to move to another country,” she said. “But now, I don’t want to go back. It’s not the country I want to live in anymore.”

At other tables in the small cafe, young Russians tapped on laptops or checked their Apple watches. Some logged into Zoom meetings; others searched for places that they could afford to rent with their savings inaccessible.

But the plunge in the ruble, which at one point had lost about 40 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar, and the soaring housing costs in Armenia, which are priced in dollars, have left some who lived in stylish apartments in Moscow contemplating moves from budget hotels to even cheaper hostels with bunk beds and shared bathrooms.

Most of those who have come to Armenia work in I.T. and other sectors that rely on unfettered internet and international banking links, the country’s economy minister, Vahan Kerobyan, told the *New York Times*.

But among those who have fled Russia are also bloggers, journalists or activists who feared arrest under the country’s draconian new law that makes it a crime even to use the word “war” in connection with Ukraine.

Some of the recent Russian arrivals in Armenia said they have contracts that will pay them for at least a couple of months of working remotely if they can find a way to get the money. Others said they had been relocated to Armenia by U.S. and other I.T. firms, which continue to pay their salaries. But many have been left scrambling to access enough money to scrape together apartment deposits.

Visa, Mastercard and PayPal have all cut ties with Russia, leaving only the Russian Mir bank card, which is accepted in Armenia and a very few other countries, for electronic payments.

Mira, 26, who works at an aid agency, said the night before she and her boyfriend left Moscow, they went from A.T.M. to A.T.M. for three hours, unsuccessfully trying to withdraw dollars. At every cash machine, people with bodyguards would push to the front of the line and withdraw \$5,000 at a time until the machines were empty, she recalled.

“We couldn’t say anything because it felt really dangerous,” she said.

Tens of thousands of other Russian exiles have traveled to Georgia and Turkey. But Armenia, a former Soviet republic which has remained neutral in the conflict, has offered the softest landing. Unlike the reception in Georgia, none of the Russians interviewed said they had encountered hos-

tility. Here, they can enter the country without visas or even passports and stay up to six months, and Russian is widely spoken.

For some, the anguish of leaving their country is compounded by the feeling that the world increasingly equates all Russians with their president.

“I want to be with the rest of the world, not with Russia,” said Zhigalov, the web developer. “But we cannot be with the rest of the world because it feels like being Russian now is seen as a bad thing.”

Maria, a 30-year-old Russian travel guide editor who had arrived in Armenia the previous week, also worried about the hostility.

“What do people in America think of Russians?” she asked earnestly. “Do they hate us?”

Maria said she had been involved in anti-government protests in Russia in 2018.

“I was so scared,” she said of her decision to leave with her husband, a manager of a sports training center. “I was afraid of being arrested if I went out to protest. And to live there and do nothing, I don’t want to live like that.”

Most of the Russians interviewed said they left because crushing international sanctions had made it impossible to work for companies from other countries or with foreign clients, or because they feared that Russia could close its borders.

Like many of the men who left, her husband, Evgeny, feared that he could be conscripted and forced to fight in Ukraine. The couple scrambled to find a flight out of Moscow after most airlines had cut ties with Russia, eventually spending almost all the money they had on tickets for a flight to Yerevan.

Many of those who left are entrepreneurs or freelancers in industries that relied on foreign clients, who have cut ties with them, even for work outside of Russia.

“They just tell us, ‘Sorry guys. We hope to work together in the future but right now, we cannot,’” Ivan, the video game developer, said of his European partners.

At another cafe, 35-year-old Alex, his blond hair pulled back with a hair tie and arms tattooed with milestones in his life, said he spent four hours at the Moscow air-

port while his flight was delayed, drinking gin and tonics.

“I just got drunk in the airport to get some courage,” he said. “I probably should have left earlier, but I’m in love with my country.”

Alex, who did not want to say what industry he worked in, said he cried as he listened to voice messages from Ukrainian friends who had been called up to fight.

“These guys were sitting around, smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, playing music,” he said. “The next day, they had to go get a gun and defend their country. These were people who had never held a gun before. It’s horrible.”

For many Russians, there is also the pain of a generational divide with parents and grandparents who grew up in the former Soviet Union.

“My parents, my grandma and grandpa are watching TV and totally believing the TV line so it hurts to speak with them,” said Mira, the aid worker. “At one point, I realized I loved them too much to argue. So I said, let’s not talk about it.”

“I don’t have any stable ground under my feet,” she said. “We are here now, but we don’t know where we will be in a week or a month, or even tomorrow.”

At the Yerevan airport last week, Viktoria Poymenova, 22, and her boyfriend, Bulat Mustafin, 24, from the Russian city of Mineralnye Vody, wheeled out a tower of suitcases, bulging backpacks and two small carriers holding their small rescue dog, Mukha, and their tortoiseshell cat, Kisya.

Mustafin, an engineer, worked as a technician for film projectors in cinemas, which are now unable to show films from Hollywood studios, since they have cut ties with Russia.

Poymenova teaches web programming for a Cyprus-based online school. Their plan was to find an affordable apartment in Georgia.

“If we don’t find one, we will come back here. And if we don’t find one here, we will go to Turkey. And if there is nothing, we will go to Serbia,” said Poymenova. “We just want a peaceful life, but it is very hard when your country is making such a disaster.”





# Community News

## AIWA Plans Expansion of Its Scholarship Program to Address Growing Student Needs

BOSTON – Emerging international trends are making a higher education more essential for young people building their careers. At the same time recent conditions have increased the difficulties of obtaining that needed higher education and training.

The coronavirus epidemic of the past two years has forced colleges and universities everywhere to close or to restrict operations, creating obstacles for students to attend classes, apply for admission, or arrange for their support. Armenian students face additional problems, whether it be in the homeland where the Azerbaijani/Armenian conflict has adversely affected all segments of the population in many different ways, or in the Middle East, where deteriorating economic and social conditions create constant hazards. All students everywhere are affected by the high and steeply rising costs of a higher education.

Faced with an ever increasing number of scholarship applications, from needy and talented students from all over the world, the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) is looking into means of expanding its scholarship support. An initial \$15,000 grant from the John Mirak Foundation, to expand scholarships in memory of the late Alice Kanlian Mirak, has spearheaded this effort.

Over \$70,000 was awarded this year in scholarship aid by the AIWA Central Board and Affiliates to graduate and undergraduate students from the United States, Canada, Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and other countries in fields ranging from mathematics and architecture to government, public administration, medicine, art, and design.

The scholarships are funded by endowments as well as annual donations. They may be earmarked to students from a particular area, to those in certain fields of study, or to particular colleges or universities. Many donors have found scholarships a meaningful way to assist and encourage talented students or to remember a loved one through a named scholarship. Every year the need for support far outweighs available funds, and AIWA encourages donations for this important means of encouraging and supporting our young women.

AIWA's scholarship program was initiated with the Agnes K. Missirian Scholarship, established in 1996 in memory of the professor of management at Bentley University who was an early AIWA member and a strong advocate for women's rights. Over the years grants have been added in the names of Ethel Jaferian Duffett, Lucy Kasparian Aharonian (for students in the sciences), Nshan and Margrit Atinizian, Dr. Carolann S. Najarian, Hripsime Parsekian (for a student in

see SCHOLARSHIPS, page 11



At the UN Armenian women exhibit in New York

## From St. Gayane to Grandmaster Danielian

### Armenian Women Highlighted at UN Headquarters

By Haykaram Nahabetyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK — Nearly 18 centuries have passed from the day when Hripsime, Gayane, and other Christian virgins, escaping from Rome's persecution, settled down in Armenia. The representation of the role of women in Armenian history goes as far back as the Ancient and Middle Ages, to Hripsime and Gayane and other martyrs whose names are recorded at the very birth of Christianity in Armenia. The Permanent Representation of Armenia to the United Nations has organized an event dedicated to the role of women in Armenian history and state building in the context of the annual International Women's Day on March 8 and the 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership in the United Nations, which commenced on March 2, 1992. Ever since, the second day of March has been celebrated as Diplomats Day in Armenia.

The exhibition in the hallways of the UN headquarters kicked off on March 8. Its billboards tell the stories of Sts. Hripsime and Gayane, writer and activist Zabel Yesayan (1878-1943), Armenian poet Silva Kaputikyan (1919-2006), chess grandmaster Elna Danielian (currently Europe's chess champion), sisters Sofia and Ruzanna Lalayan, who fought against the Nazis in besieged Leningrad, and many others. Armenian scholar Mkhitar Gosh (12th-13th centuries) highlighted the importance of equality between the sexes in his writings. So did public figure and thinker Shahamir Shahamirian, who underscored the importance of ensuring equality between men and women; in his seminal work *Snare of Glory*. All this was highlighted by Ambassador Mher Margaryan, the Chief of Armenia's Diplomatic Mission at the UN, at the opening of the exhibition.

Did you know that Armenia had a female ambassador about three decades before President Harry Truman appointed Eugenie Anderson to be the first American woman ambassador (1949)? Diana Abgar's (1859-1937) baptismal name was Gayane, perhaps named after St. Gayane. Thanks to her efforts, Japan recognized the

see WOMEN, page 11



One of the billboards at the UN event

## Knights & Daughters Of Vartan Announce Commemoration of Armenian Genocide In Times Square

NEW YORK — The 107th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide will take place in Times Square in New York, on Sunday, April 24, 2-4 p.m.

Special accolades will be given to US President Joe Biden and Members of Congress for standing on the right side of history and affirming the Armenian Genocide through formal recognition.

While over a century has passed since the first genocide of the 20th century that claimed the lives of 1.5 million Armenian martyrs by the Young Turk Party of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Diaspora continues its unyielding efforts to remember, to honor and to educate the world about this catastrophic event in history — a piece of history that not only goes unrecognized to this day by the Turkish government, but is perpetuated with the recent war and ongoing conflicts in Artsakh.

In conjunction with the Times Square Commemoration, the Knights & Daughters of Vartan will again sponsor an annual global essay contest and Young Professionals event, 100 Years & Beyond, for the New York metro area.

The annual Armenian Genocide Commemoration in Times Square is sponsored by the Knights of Vartan and Daughters of Vartan, a national fraternal organization, and co-sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian National Committee of America, Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, Armenian Missionary Association of America, the Armenian Bar Association, Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York, and the Armenian Council of America; participating organizations include the Diocese of the Armenian Church, Prelacy of the Armenian Church, Armenian Missionary Association of America, Armenian Missionary Association, Armenian Evangelical Union, Armenian Catholic Eparchy, and several national Armenian youth organizations.

Founded in 1985 by the late Sam Azadian, a former Brooklyn resident, who lost four siblings during the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian Genocide Commemoration at Times Square has honored the 1.5+ million Armenian lives lost during the horrific events of the 1915 Genocide of the Armenians by the Young Turk Government of the Ottoman Empire. This internationally-recognized annual event, that is free and open to the public, draws thousands of Armenians and non-Armenian participants to commemorate the solemn occasion. The event features speeches and tributes delivered by prominent political figures and civic leaders, officials of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, representatives of major Armenian-American organizations, and distinguished scholars and educators as well as high-ranking Armenian and non-Armenian clergy.





## OBITUARY

## Jerair Nishanian

### *Philanthropist, Son of Genocide Survivors*

WASHINGTON — Jerair Nishanian, a noted philanthropist, husband, father, step-father, grandfather, brother, and uncle, died on March 13. He was 85.

He is survived by his wife Anahid Nishanian, his son and daughter-in-law Tagvor and Shelby Nishanian, daughter and son-in-law Alineh and Brad Templin, step-daughter and son-in-law Natalie and Allen Martirossian, grandchildren Tiffany and Nicholas Martirossian and Julia, William, and Samuel Nishanian, sister Hasmick Nishanian, sister-in-law Ezzat Nishanian, many nieces, nephews, their children and grandchildren.

Jerair Nishanian, the youngest of 5 children, was born on November 29, 1936, in Tehran, Iran. His father (the late Abraham Nishanian) was born in Bursa, Turkey and his mother (the late Maryam Nishanian), in Apin Akoulis, Armenia. They were the only members of their families who had survived the Armenian Genocide. His father was an entrepreneur, and had developed an export business of packaging and shipping Persian carpets to the US and he was devoted to his Armenian identity and to his Armenian heritage and traditions. Abraham Nishanian passed away when Jerair was only two years old, so he and his 4 siblings were raised alone by his mother. She miraculously had survived the Armenian Genocide, as a very young child, with a bullet in her knee, and was found alive among the dead. She was raised at the

American orphanage in the city of Hamedan in Iran. She was a very pious, wise and resourceful lady, who instilled her strong Armenian cultural identity and beliefs into all of her children. Jerair Nishanian has always been deeply influenced by his parents' past, and developed strong feelings for his heritage and ancestral motherland, Armenia.

In June, 1956, he graduated from Alborz High School in Tehran, Iran, with an emphasis in mathematics. He worked for two years; in the mornings teaching math to the six graders at the Abovian Elementary School, and in the afternoons as an office assistant for an Armenian merchant, after which he saved the equivalent of \$500.

Since he could not continue his education in Iran, he decided to continue his education in the United States. Therefore, with the information obtained from the American Library, located in Tehran, he applied for admission to several universities and received acceptance letters from American University, in Washington D.C. for a special program for English language for foreign students, George Washington University in Washington DC, and University of Nebraska in Lincoln, for engineering studies.

Upon receiving his acceptance letters, his older brother, the late Carro Nishanian, purchased an airplane ticket for him, and on November 8, 1958, Jerair Nishanian left Tehran and on November 9, 1958, arrived in Washington.



He attended American University for a six-week course in English for foreign students, and upon completion of the course, he decided to move to Lincoln and register in the School of Civil Engineering at the University of Nebraska. After one semester, he decided to move back to Washington D.C. where he could work and continue his education. He transferred his earned credits to the school of engineering at Howard University (HU), in Washington, DC.

Nishanian started working part-time as a busboy at the Black Angus Restaurant.

On January 27, 1965, he received his bachelor's degree in civil engineering (BSCE), and by then he had advanced to a head-waiter position at his part-time job at the restaurant located in the International Inn Hotel, in Washington DC.

Upon receiving his BSCE and after a brief experience in highway construction and aerospace industry, he obtained an engineering position and resumed employment with the US Government, Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration as a Highway Design, Bridge Design, and then as a structural research engineer.

Nishanian continued his education and in June 1969 he received his master's degree in civil engineering. While working for the Federal Government he continued postgraduate studies at George Washington University in Washington DC, specializing in the Fatigue and Fracture Toughness Characteristics of Metals, and eventually he became project manager for Research Activities of the Federal Highway Administration concerned with the Fracture Toughness and Fatigue Characteristics of Structural Steels used in highway bridges.

While in graduate school working full-time for the federal government, being interested in real estate development, he went into partnership with his close friend, the late Dr. Ara Pezeshkian, and established JAM Enterprises, a Virginia General Part-

nership, and invested in three contiguous single family detached old homes in Kensington Maryland, which he deemed to have the potential for commercial development. Upon obtaining the required zoning for commercial uses, he sold the property for a considerable profit, and with a third person as a partner, formed a new partnership (Jerax Enterprises). In 1970 he, with Jerax Enterprises, invested in a shopping center in Manassas Park, Va., now known as the Manassas Park Shopping Center, which was not fully developed and included additional land providing for future expansion.

He developed several more property enterprises in the ensuing years. Then, in November 1988, after 22 years of service with the federal government, he resigned and concentrated full-time on his personal business endeavors.

Nishanian had semi-retired and had passed on the day to day management and operations of said partnerships and corporations to his son Tagvor G. Nishanian PhD, and daughter Alineh Z. Templin.

Jerair Nishanian was deeply influenced by his parents' past, and developed strong feelings for his heritage and ancestral motherland, Armenia. On November 30, 1993, he established the Jerair Nishanian Foundation, Inc., a section 501(c)(3) nonprofit that was formed to further the education for children and young adults in Armenia.

The Jerair Nishanian Foundation's scholarship program in Gavar State University (GSU) was sparked in 2002, after meeting Member of Parliament Hranoush Hakobyan in Washington. Subsequently, Nishanian and his wife Anahid Nishanian visited Gavar State University in Gegharkunik Province, Armenia, and were impressed to see how much the founder and the rector, the late Dr. Hrant Hakobyan (Dr. Hranoush Hakobyan's father) and his staff had achieved with so very little.

Since its formation in 1993, JNF has been granting scholarships to students in Gavar State University, but since 2011, JNF expanded its scholarship program to include students majoring in engineering and architecture in Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction, in Yerevan. To secure the continuity of the JNF's scholarship program, Nishanian in May 2013, donated \$1,000,000 to the JNF and established an endowment fund.

As of 2007 JNF scholarship program in Armenia is being managed by Diocesan affiliated Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) in New York, NY, and its branch office in Yerevan, Armenia. The JNF currently provides scholarships to over 70 college students in Armenia, and is anticipated to increase the number of the students to 80 within the next two years.

In addition, he contributed to other projects, including the centennial commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in Washington, and the translation and publication of two books by Dr. Taner Akçam.

He received several medals, certificates of appreciation and commendations.

The funeral service took place on March 25 at Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home and Memorial Park, Fairfax, Virginia.

## Karnig Yacoubian

### *Philanthropist, Former AGBU Central Board Member*

Karnig Yacoubian, who served as a member of the AGBU Central Board of Directors and Council of Trustees, died recently at age 92.

His deep imprint on Armenian life can be found across Syria, Lebanon, Canada, and Armenia.

A graduate of the American University of Beirut and a civil engineer by profession, the Syrian-born Yacoubian could be described as a builder, a benefactor and, above all, a highly motivated and dedicated individual. All who crossed paths with him were charmed by his wit and charisma, as well as inspired by his commitment to family.

The scion of a prominent Armenian family with an impressive legacy of dedication and support for the AGBU mission, Yacoubian, along with his wife Anahid, his brother Levon and their respective families, have always held the mission of the organization close to their hearts.

An active AGBU member from an early age, Yacoubian served in many capacities – from Chapter Chair in Damascus to Central Board Member from 1994-2006. From 2006-2017, he was a member of the Council of Trustees and served as one of four AGBU Emeritus Trustees until his passing.

AGBU President Berge Setrakian remarked that Yacoubian belonged to a special circle of inspired leaders who reached the heights of success in their professional lives and attained influence and respect among captains of industry and heads of state. He was decorated with countless high honors, medals, and awards by religious and national leaders for service to country and community, including the Order of the Star of Jordan. Yet his strongest attachment was to his Armenian identity and the Armenian Church, for which he received the St. Gregory the Illuminator



Order, the Mkhitar Heratsi Medal, and the Prince Cilicia Medal.

His volunteerism was matched by his philanthropic legacy, which has been made visibly present with the numerous community projects he and Anahid supported financially - from the AGBU community center in Qamishli, Syria to the renovated offices of the AGBU Center in Montreal, and the headquarters of the Armenian Diocese in Canada. They also funded the installation of a teaching center at the Republican Scientific Medical Library in Armenia and the construction and renovation of the Vaskenian Theological Seminary at Lake Sevan. In Lebanon, their dedication to the Armenian Church inspired them to fund the development of the residential complex of the Holy See of Cilicia in Bikfaya, Lebanon and construction of its seminary in Antelias. Most recently, they financed the building of a new candle-lighting chapel and pontifical mausoleum at Holy Echmiadzin to be completed this year. The Yacoubians have also been distinguished for their steadfast support of education with their commitments to the University of Armenia.

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## IN MEMORIAM

# Sarky Mouradian, Father of Armenian-American Television

MOURADIAN, from page 1

he aided in the preservation of the Western Armenian language in the United States.

Mouradian died in Los Angeles at age 90 on February 10.

## Musical Prodigy

Sarkis Mouradian was born in 1931 in Beirut, and was already involved in music in his teens, writing songs and even making a couple of recordings for the French record label Pathe-Marconi (and according to one article, five recordings for Columbia Records). Early music teachers in Lebanon included such luminaries as Parsegh Ganatchian, the dean of Lebanon's Armenian music community, who was a famed choral composer and disciple of Gomidas, and Onnig Surmelian, a noted violinist who was the brother of Armenian-American writer Leon Surmelian. Mouradian's early interest in singing and composing European-influenced Armenian popular songs eventually presaged the Armenian pop music wave of the late 1960s and 1970s — a wave which he himself helped to bring about, by mentoring the singer Manuel (Menengichian).

It also helped him to get to America. In

was the first of a new era.

Setrag Vartian, an early immigrant from Dikranagerd, had produced three Armenian-language films in the US decades earlier; the relatively popular "Arshin Mal Alan" (1937) was shot in New York and New Jersey, while "Anoush" (1945) and "The Life and Songs of Gomidas Vartabed" (1946), both apparently lost, were made in California. After those projects ran out of steam, it took a new wave of immigration and a new director, Marzpetouni, a newcomer from Iran at the time, to once again attempt a full-length Armenian language motion picture.

"A Debt of Blood" cast Mouradian in the lead role as a freedom fighter from the Shabin-Karahisar region named Baghdo. The black-and-white film holds up surprisingly well for an ethnic minority feature of that era. The goal of making the film was to raise money to fund a more ambitious project telling the story of the defense of Shabin-Karahisar, but this was left unrealized with the premature death of Marzpetouni. Instead, Mouradian would rise to the challenge, taking the place of his mentor as the leading propagator of Armenian-language film in the US.



The "Hye Tones" Band: Nubar (piano), Edik Bulujian (clarinet), Krikor "Koko" Dermendjian (drums), Amas Arakelian (violin), Sarky Mouradian (guitar, vocals).

1952 he entered a songwriting contest at his alma mater, the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music, and the "mambo" he wrote won him a trip to the US as an exchange student. By 1955 he was studying at the Boston Conservatory. But his first love was cinema, and so in 1960, he headed for the coast, at a time when LA's Armenian community was burgeoning in the postwar era, to pursue his dream of making films.

## Getting Started in Hollywood

Mouradian attended the Theatre of Arts Hollywood Acting School and began working in various facets of the film industry. But he was not to make his mark in mainstream Hollywood, though he worked on various projects and no doubt earned a living from the industry. Instead, Mouradian was to become the leading figure in film and television production for the Armenian ethnic market, and specifically, the Armenian-speaking market for whom he produced TV shows, movies, and music predominantly in Western Armenian.

In 1964, Mouradian appeared in his first major Armenian film project, George (Gevorg) Marzpetouni's "A Debt of Blood" (Ariunabardge), based on a short story by Avetis Aharonian. While not the first Armenian-language film made in the US, it



Sarky Mouradian hosting Armenian Teletime Via Youtube

## Filmmaker, Music Impresario

Mouradian's first film was "Baghdasar Aghpar" (1965), based on Hagop Baronian's 1886 comedy. A favorite of the Armenian stage, the story is a satire on marriage and divorce in the Armenian community. The film, in black and white, features the music of Mouradian's own "Hye Tones" orchestra including the title song *Baghdasar Aghpar* and a sequence where a female Armenian nightclub singer performs the well-known kef song "Gneeguh" backed by oud and dumbeg musicians.

The music of the Hye Tones represented a unique place in Armenian-American popular music. Coming before the pop music explosion of the 70s and 80s, but composed of then-recent immigrants, their music shows influences from the style played by East Coast bands as well as the more Continental European tastes of the newcomers, the Eastern Armenian flavor of LA's large "Russahye" community, and Mouradian's own songwriting.

Mouradian was a champion of Armenian music and at the same time the music scene influenced his films, as seen in his relationship with the singer Manuel.

Born Manuel Menengichian in 1941 in Beirut, Manuel had a career in the 1960s singing French chansons in the style of

Charles Aznavour, with whom he even studied for a time. Manuel's recordings made in Lebanon in French, including the song *Tammy*, (written by Lebanese composer Elias Rahbani) were extremely popular throughout the Middle East and he even toured the Soviet Union and Soviet Armenia around 1967-68. By 1970, he was in the US, where he encountered Mouradian. But in the meantime, back in Beirut, Adiss Harmandian had started a trend of Armenian crooners who got their start in French music switching to Armenian lyrics, which gave birth to modern Armenian pop music. Mouradian convinced Manuel that he needed to do the same. But where was Manuel going to get Continental ballads written in the Armenian language? Sarky Mouradian was going to write them.

And so it was that *Tears of Happiness* (Yerchangoutyan Artsounkner) was born. The album, featuring Manuel was released in 1973, the same year the film was made, and advertised as "music from the motion picture." Six of the 10 songs on the album were written by Mouradian, one being an Armenian version of *Tammy*. Manuel was marketed as a star and the liner notes were composed solely of clippings from American newspapers praising his crooning abilities. The film, a melodramatic love story about a singing sensation (played by Manuel, of course), was released in 1974 and was even screened in Beirut, where Mouradian and Manuel were invited to attend the premiere and greeted by adoring crowds.

Manuel's good looks, onscreen charm and singing voice were again utilized in "Sons of Sassoun" (1975) which was released in English and Armenian versions. Manuel played a fedayee fighting the power of the Ottoman Empire in 1908 in the Shenhik village of Sassoun, while his love interest was portrayed by American actress Lana Wood, and the Turkish governor was played by Peter Lorre, Jr. Mouradian's final film of the era was another melodramatic love story starring Manuel, "Promise of Love" (1978), which also depicted the immigration of Beirut Armenians to the United States.

In 1982, Mouradian directed the only English-language film version of Franz Werfel's "The 40 Days of Musa Dagh." The movie rights had been bought by MGM in the 1930s, but production (which was reportedly to star Clark Gable), was shut down by the diplomatic intervention of the Turkish government. John Kurkjian eventually bought the rights and produced Mouradian's film. The film did not find much success outside of the Armenian community and was widely panned by critics. In 2002, Mouradian directed his final



Manuel's 1973 album "Tears of Happiness," produced and composed by Sarky Mouradian





IN MEMORIAM

Armenian-language film, “Alicia,” featuring, for the first time in one of his productions, actors from the more recent wave of immigration out of post-Soviet Armenia.

Armenian Teletime

Mouradian’s most lasting legacy was arguably Armenian Teletime. Serving the burgeoning Armenian-speaking community of the Los Angeles area, which swelled to unheard of numbers after the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Armenian Teletime was groundbreaking in ethnic media for the Armenian community.

Previous generations of Armenian immigrants had established newspapers, ra-

Teletime,” which broadcast local Armenian community news and advertisements, along with music videos and Mouradian’s interviews with famous Armenians. It started as a one-hour program on Channel 18 (international programming) in Los Angeles and Channel 38 in San Francisco/Fresno. It became a two-hour program, and eventually aired every Saturday and Sunday morning until Channel 18 started cutting back their international programming in 2017.

Mouradian funded 90 percent of the costs of running the program himself. In 2021, he made the move to YouTube where he began posting classic clips from over the years, as well as producing 30-minute seg-

“Sarky Mouradian shaped my childhood, and the childhood of countless others. We grew up on weekends hearing his soothing voice, the theme song of his television program on. This welcomed us into our living rooms where we sat down with our families and watched him over breakfast. This was our weekends.

“I thought this experience was unique to my sister and I, until I grew older and heard similar stories— from my wife and from other Armenians. If you weren’t a child of those times, you followed his broadcast and it’s where you stayed connected to the Armenian community.

“Sarky Mouradian was a trailblazer— beyond his defining work in television, he directed a number of feature films that broke ground. ‘The Forty Days of Musa Dagh,’ for instance, is still the only film adaptation of Franz Werfel’s novel.

“Inspirational. Multitalented. Revolutionary. These are just a handful of words to describe a giant in our culture.

“This is a monumental loss, but we’re so glad we had the pleasure of hosting him twice at Armenian Film Society. We organized the first public screening of Sons of Sassoun in over 40 years at our beloved Abril Books in Glendale. We know this meant a lot to him, but it meant more to us. As an organization dedicated to acknowledging the achievements of Armenians in film, and recognizing great Armenian filmmakers, he stands at the very top of that list.”

Karaoghlanian’s tribute, from someone who grew up with Mouradian and knew him personally, is perhaps the best way to understand his impact. It was to inspire people like Karaoghlanian and to pass on the Armenian culture that undoubtedly motivated Mouradian in his career.



Manuel with Lana Wood in Mouradian’s Film “Sons of Sassoun”

dio shows, record labels, book publishing houses and so on. But Armenian language content had decreased since the 1950s, and television was seemingly not on anyone’s radar, other than rare specials such as “Mannix” having an episode with Armenian language spoken, or the Armenian community in Detroit producing a program to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Genocide in 1965.

Mouradian changed all that when he started the first “Armenian Time” television program in LA in 1967 on Channel 40, at the time an English-Spanish bilingual station; the following year he switched over to Channel 22 KWHY, which broadcast stock market coverage during the week and foreign-language content on the weekends. In the 60s, the Armenian news announcer was Larry Zarian, who later became mayor of Glendale. Finally in 1978, Mouradian started the long-lived program “Armenian

ments called “Armenian Teletime LIVE,” where he continued interviewing Armenian celebrities and community members. His last live segment had aired on YouTube in November.

Leaving Behind a Legacy

A generation born and raised in LA to the Armenian immigrant parents of the 1970s, grew up with Sarky Mouradian as a constant presence on their parents’ TV screens, a reminder of their roots and maybe more importantly, a means to keep alive the spoken Armenian language in the Diaspora (the now-endangered Western variant in particular).

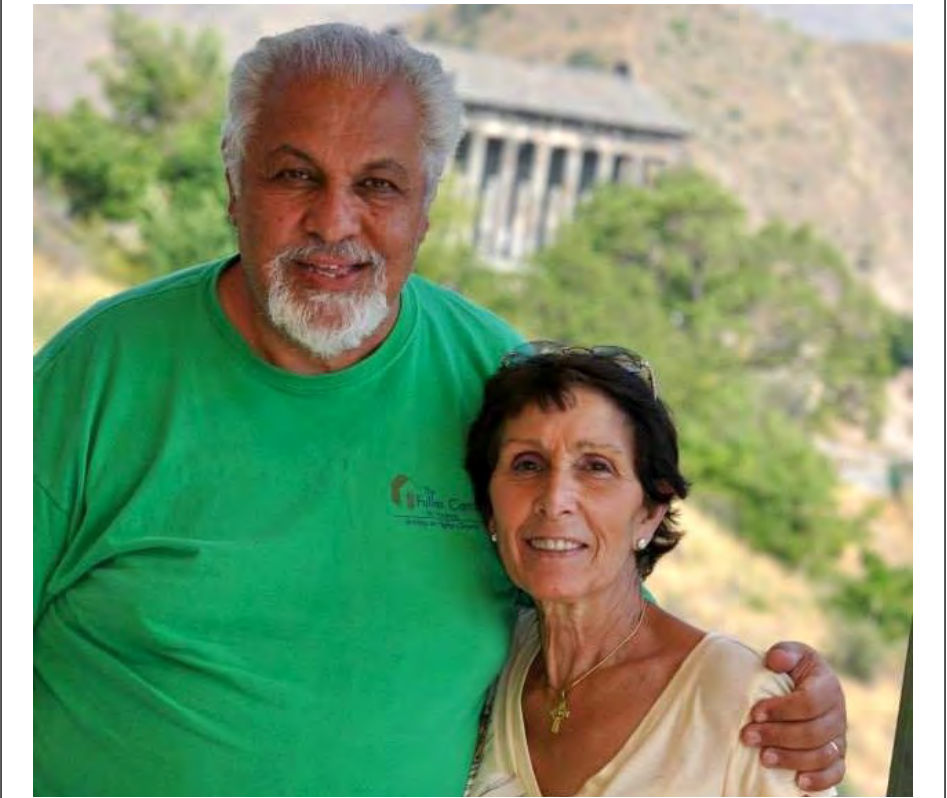
He was also an inspiration to young Armenians pursuing a career in the film industry. Armen Karaoghlanian, who with his wife Mary founded the Armenian Film Society in 2015 in Los Angeles, offered the following statement:

# Sona Manuelian’s Legacy Helps Two Families Obtain Homes

YEREVAN — Last year, the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia (FCHA) experienced excruciating pain — the loss of a long-time friend, a veteran volunteer team leader, an ambassador of the mission, and just a human being who dedicated her love, efforts, and willingness to support destitute families in Armenia over a decade. Her love, dedication, and energy to help others were contagious, and her constant support has transformed the lives of hundreds of families.

“Sona was a person whose kindness and love towards Armenia and Armenian people can’t be described through words. Her dedication and the way how she inspired others to join our mission were stupendous. She will always be alive in our hearts,” said Ashot Yeghiazaryan, FCHA President

Sona’s husband, Leo Manuelian, who together with Sona, dedicated his life to FCHA mission of helping underprivileged families in dire need of decent housing, decided to honor her memory by giving a new and better life to families that have been deprived of living a deserving life for many years, asked people to donate to FCHA mission in lieu of flowers. Owing to generous donations from many people, two families will feel the jubilation of living a deserving life.



The late Sona Manuelian with her husband, Leo

One of the families, the Aghamalyans, lives in a metal container. Valerik, the father of the family was born in Kirovabad; his father was a professional welding specialist, who was once invited to work in Spitak. During the 1988 earthquake, Valerik was 5 years old, and his twin brothers were 3 years old. They lived in Spitak, on the top floor of a five-story building. Fortunately, the family has not experienced a loss of a family member; however, their health was affected badly. As a result, his mother had to live with one kidney and his father suffered a spinal injury; his health never bounced back, and he passed away in 2002.

The only relative they had in Armenia was Valerik’s aunt who lived in Artashavan village of the Aragatsotn region, and they had to move to the village, settle in a metal container. Since then, they have lived there.

Valerik is a janitor at school, and his wife is a preschool teacher. The house will be built for the family from scratch, as they could not build even the foundation of the house due to health and financial problems.

Hopefully, by the end of the year, the family will live in a decent house with all necessities. We are sure that Sona is watching over us, and she will be happy to see more families’ life transformations.

Giragosian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Applications for Service Armenia 2022 Program Available

BERKELEY, CA — Applications are now available for The Paros Foundation’s Service Armenia 2022 Program. The Program will run from July 3 to July 24, 2022 and enables young people to travel and tour Armenia, while engaging in meaningful service projects benefiting Armenia and her people.

“I am looking forward to a fun and meaningful Service Armenia 2022 program this summer,” said Peter Abajian, executive director of the Paros Foundation. “It is quite exciting to see students from throughout the country develop friendships with one another while working on important service projects in Armenia.”

Throughout the Program, participants will tour historic, religious, and cultural sites in Armenia with experienced, English-speaking staff and guides. Safe and well located accommodations and transportation combined with interesting cultural and educational activities will ensure all will have an engaging and memorable experience. The program is open to both Armenian and American young people wishing to participate in this once in a lifetime opportunity. Knowledge of the Armenian language is not required. Join us and create a lifetime of great memories and friends. The deadline to submit the completed application is April 15, 2022.

More information including photos, video and the application form can be found at <http://www.parosfoundation.org> or via Facebook and Instagram. For more information, contact Abajian via e-mail [peter@parosfoundation.org](mailto:peter@parosfoundation.org)



Villanova Receives \$10 Million Gift From Hovnanian Family Foundation

VILLANOVA, Pa. — Villanova University President the Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, PhD, on March 7 announced a \$10 million gift from The H. Hovnanian Family Foundation to support academic initiatives, including the continued modernization of Falvey Library. The gift will also establish an endowed chair in the DiLella Center for Real Estate within the Villanova School of Business, as well as a new university-wide speaker series focused on the thoughtful and civil exchange of ideas on current issues. In recognition of this gift, a building on campus will be named “Hovnanian Hall.”

“I am extremely grateful to the Hovnanian Family Foundation for this gift, which demonstrates its confidence in Villanova’s mission and desire to continue to move the University forward,” said Donohue. “The foundation’s generosity will have a significant impact on key priorities of our strategic plan, Rooted. Restless., and provide critical funding to our academic enterprise.”

“Three generations of our family have had the honor of attending Villanova — an institution whose educational quality has never been compromised and whose focus on traditional values has ensured its graduates represent the best of what this great country of ours can rely on to be our nation’s future leaders,” said Siran H. Sahakian, who serves as vice president of her family’s foundation, The H. Hovnanian Family Foundation. “Through this gift, we hope to further enhance the academic experience for all Villanova students and support the University’s vision for the future.”

This gift will directly impact the academic experience of Villanova students and faculty by:

Supporting the continued evolution of Falvey Library and its efforts to advance the university’s research and scholarly goals, as well as supporting the changing needs.

Establishing a Hovnanian Family Endowed Chair to lead the Daniel M. DiLella Center for Real Estate within the Villanova School of Business.

Creating a university-wide speaker series that presents discourse on critical issues of our time and can serve as a model for the thoughtful and civil exchange of ideas.

“We are so pleased to see the Hovnanian legacy continue at Villanova through this generous gift from the family’s foundation,” said Mike O’Neill, Senior Vice President for University Advancement. “We could not be more grateful to Siran and her family for making such a visionary gift in honor of her father, Hirair, who was a proud Villanova alumnus. I know this gift — with its emphasis on key academic-focused initiatives — will give back to our community and to many Villanovans for generations to come.”

The H. Hovnanian Family Foundation was founded by the late Hirair Hovnanian to support charitable causes relating to Armenian culture and education, as well as organizations in the Unites States focused on education, healthcare and real estate development training. Hirair Hovnanian graduated from Villanova University in 1956 with a BS in Civil Engineering. He would go on to build one of the most successful privately held land and housing development companies in the U.S. Hovnanian also dedicated his time and efforts to the betterment of society and to the Armenian-American community.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian Women Highlighted at UN Headquarters

WOMEN, from page 6  
independence of the first Armenian Republic (1918-1920). After that, Prime Minister Ohanian appointed her to be Armenia’s Ambassador to Japan. According to many sources, she is the first female ambassador in the history of Armenia and the world.  
“In 1918, the Republic of Armenia was one of the few states in the world to entitle women with not only the right to vote but also to be elected, with three women becoming members of parliament of the first Armenian Republic. At present, the Armenian Parliament has achieved a record of 35 percent of women in its legislature - a major step towards advancing gender equality and women empowerment in politics,” noted Margaryan.  
For the last two years, Margaryan chaired the 64th and 65th sessions of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.  
The Armenian exhibit will last for another week.



Ambassador Mher Margaryan speaking at the UN exhibit on Armenian women



At the UN Armenian women exhibit in New York

## AIWA Plans Expansion of Its Scholarship Program

SCHOLARSHIPS, from page 6  
the field of International Relations), Mary V. Toumayan, Azniv Melidonian Renjilian, and Rose A. Hovannesian. Last year the Eva and Jack Medzorian Scholarship was endowed, specifically to benefit annually applicants from Armenia, specifically from the Tavush region.  
The AIWA-Los Angeles Affiliate awards annually five to six Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships of \$5,000 each to California residents, and the New England affiliate has established the Olga Proudian Scholarship of \$1,000 annually to a student in the field of diplomacy.  
AIWA scholarships ranging in value from \$500 to \$5,000 are awarded to full-time female students of Armenian descent attending accredited colleges or universities. Students from the United States or abroad entering their junior or senior year in college, as well as graduate students, are eligible to apply for the awards, which are based on merit as well as financial need.  
The application for all of these awards is now available through AIWA’s digital scholarship portal whose link can be found on the AIWA website: [www.aiwainternational.org](http://www.aiwainternational.org).  
General information about AIWA and its network of Armenian women who come together to connect and elevate women globally can be found on the website or by contacting AIWA at: [info@aiwainternational.org](mailto:info@aiwainternational.org).

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Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter

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THE MATTER OF AIRPLANES

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Keynote speaker

DR. RICHARD G. HOVANNISIAN

Past Holder of the

Armenian Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Armenian History at UCLA and Presidential Fellow at Chapman University

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# Arts & Culture

## Novelist Artsvi Shahbazyan Bridges Cultures, Creates Worlds

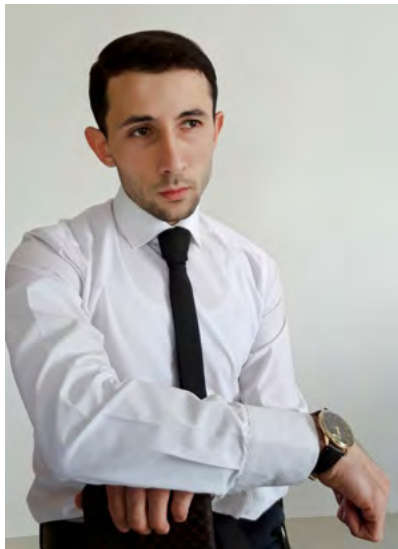
By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / SAMARA, Russia — Russian poet and writer Artsvi Shahbazyan was born in 1992 in Kirovakan (now Vanadzor, Armenia), to an athlete and a reserve officer. In 2000, his family moved to Samara, Russia. As a teenager, Artsvi went in for sports and won the ninth open All-Russian boxing tournament among youngsters. As a teenager, he participated in literary competitions and repeatedly won places of honor.

Artsvi graduated from the Nyanov Samara State Regional Academy, Faculty of Philosophy. In 2008, his first collection of poems was published.

Shahbazyan is the author of a number of journalistic and philosophical articles, including “Contrasting Evil to the best of the Worlds of G. W. Leibniz,” which was included in the annual publication of the Samara State Regional Academy. His first novel, *The Apotheosis of Fate*, was published in 2020. Artsvi teaches history and prepares his new novel for publication, and is already working on a third book in the genre of modern prose.



Artsvi, Umberto Eco’s definition of a historical novel, which singled out three varieties of this genre. In my opinion, *The Apotheosis of Fate* refers to his third definition — to novels where figures familiar from popular encyclopedias are not necessarily brought to the stage. The action in your novel takes place not in Russia, Armenia, or other countries close to you, but in Germany, and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when, as the hero says, “A certain Luther made a big fuss.” But we can assume that history is just background for you, and the very development of faith, the spiritual self-awareness of a person, are much more important.

Answering the first question, I can’t help but pay tribute to Umberto Eco, from whom I learned the most difficult thing: maintaining a single style in the complex context of the historical novel. If we take the analysis seriously, we can see in the novel *The Apotheosis of Fate* the second definition of Professor Eco, where

see NOVELIST, page 13



Tatev Amiryan

## Inspiring 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert of Musical Armenia Takes Place at Carnegie Hall

By Florence Avakian

NEW YORK — To a full house at the Weill Hall of Carnegie Hall, the 37th anniversary concert of the Armenian Prelacy’s Musical Armenia was celebrated on Sunday afternoon, March 6, with four outstanding artists performing — composer and pianist Tatev Amiryan, singer Anna Hayrapetyan, cellist Laura Navasardian and pianist Lilit Navasardian.

This year’s event was organized by the Eastern Armenian Prelacy Ladies Guild, the Musical Armenia Committee and generous patrons. The annual tribute which was initiated by Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian in 1982, has launched several musical careers onto the world stage.

In his moving message, Prelate of the Eastern Armenian Prelacy Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, who has always encouraged and furthered Armenian culture, emphasized the universality and understanding of music to all. “Perhaps, it is music in a sublime way that has a universal force that has given a colossus’ voice like Komitas or Aram Khachaturian to even a small nation” like Armenia.

“Perseverance,” the Prelate continued, “is perhaps one of the most underrated measures of success. As Musical Armenia begins its fifth decade, we look back with humble joy at our achievement and look forward with optimism and resolve to continue promoting our youthful talents.”

Composer and pianist Tatev Amiryan, dressed in a flowing burgundy colored gown, warmly welcomed the large crowd on behalf of Archbishop Tanielian who was unable to be present. Representing the Prelate was the Prelacy Vicar, Very Rev. Sahag Yemishian.

Beginning the program with her compositions, which comprised the first half of the concert, Amiryan masterfully played several solos including *Waiting for the Dawn*, inspired by a poem by Paruyr Sevak and dedicated to the life of the legendary Komitas and his suffering.

Though sorrowful, there was a lyrical sense of optimism that eventually overrode the depressed feeling.

Several of Amiryan’s other musical themes, including *Tristesse* (Sorrow) — also see CONCERT, page 15



Laura and Lilit Navasardian

## Dr. Tonoyan to Speak on Russian Press Coverage of Karabakh War

FRESNO — Dr. Artyom Tonoyan will make a presentation titled “Black Garden Aflame: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Soviet and Russian Press” on Thursday, March 31, at 7 p.m. (Pacific time)/10 p.m. (Eastern time). The presentation is part of the Spring 2022 Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program.

For a few brief weeks in fall 2020, Western media buzzed with news of the intense war in Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-populated region that declared independence from Azerbaijan in 1991. The conflict had been “frozen” since 1994, so the



Dr. Artyom Tonoyan

new outbreak of violence caught many journalists unawares.

By contrast, this conflict has been a mainstay in the Soviet, then Russian press. The sheer volume of published material

— including eyewitness accounts, interviews with notable figures, and incisive, well-researched analyses — far exceeds anything produced by Western media.

Moscow’s knowledge of the region is as strong as it is permanent, dictated mainly by geopolitical interests. The present collection of articles — carefully translated, edited, and culled from a vast repository of Russian-language press curated by East View — presents in book form (*Black Garden Aflame*) for the first time in English some of the most important material that has appeared from 1988 to the present.

By bringing together this unique collection, East View Press aims to provide readers with the immediate context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the lens of Moscow, along with some insight into its complex historical, political and ethnic underpinnings.

Dr. Artyom Tonoyan was born and grew up in Gyumri, Armenia and now makes his home in Minneapolis, where he was a research associate at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (2015-2021). A sociologist by training, his research focuses on the intersection of religion and nationalism in Russia and the South Caucasus. Presently, he is guest-editing the Journal of Law and Religion (Cambridge University Press) for a forthcoming symposium on religion and law in Russia. He received his PhD from Baylor University, where he held a lectureship at the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies and the Department of Political Science (2006-2012).

Zoom Registration Link is <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiestonoyan>

For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, visit <https://fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies>.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Novelist Artsvi Shahbazyan Bridges Cultures, Creates Worlds

NOVELIST, from page 12

fictional intrigue develops against the background of quasi-historical details, and the heroes act “according to universal motives,” as well as the third one, where the actions of the heroes could only be committed in the historical period described.

If I said that the era has nothing to do with it, and the most important thing is the internal elements that the main characters must fight, then this would be a mistake on my part. The historical novel by its very nature has a complex structure, in which it is necessary to consider the main idea (theme) of the book in all its political, socio-cultural and religious completeness. Nevertheless, people have always been people: they fought with their weaknesses, fears and persistently rushed towards the light.

**The inspiration for your debut novel (which, by the way, I read in one sitting) was the Bible. In the afterword, you write that the Bible “is the greatest of all books, capable of accommodating the entire Universe” and further: “In it Someone called God will be revealed to you.” As a Christian, philosopher, and writer, what was the need for you in our troubled times to turn to biblical realities?**

The Bible will never lose its relevance, because the world has not yet come up with such problems for people that cannot be answered in the Holy Scriptures. Any book, in my opinion, should be useful beyond what we call aesthetic pleasure. Nowadays, people are reveling more and more in entertainment, and every year everything old ceases to amaze, but eternal truths will outlive all who ridicule them. Troubled times do not scare you when you know that God himself is on your side.

**As the hero of your novel says: “Sometimes it seems that we Christians suffer more than we live.” This is especially close for us, Christians of the East, now facing new challenges and trials. But I think in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity needs to be re-evaluated around the world. One cannot but agree with the words of your hero Fabian: “We have lost the true faith.... We failed Him... We killed Him, and now we carry the crucifix around our necks, heavy under the burden of sin.”**

Suffering is an integral part of our life, and this cannot be denied. Even at birth, the child already suffers when he comes into the world. Then, growing up, by the sweat of his brow he earns a piece of bread. Isn't that suffering? And what about diseases? Wars? The only difference is that the believer knows why he is suffering. Christianity needs to be re-evaluated, that's right. We can drive supercars, dress fashionably, or move to live on Mars, but it's worth considering that the soul will move there with us. It will also excite and disturb the hearts, as it did in primitive society, in the Middle Ages, in New and Modern times. Humanity has an extremely difficult fate, but there are movements only in two directions: from darkness to light, or vice versa. The choice is given to everyone.

**Have you noticed that what is happening between your characters — the Christian preacher Edwin Neumann and the cruel pagan Melvin Geller, is very reminiscent of the story between Gregory the Illuminator and King Trdat?**

Our spiritual forefathers, as Christian pioneers, were tormented and killed. The martyrdom of the Armenians of pagan times is like a blossoming garden: this is Saint Sandukht, Sukias, and the holy virgin Hripsime. The adoption of Christianity by Armenia in 301 was of great importance, much more important than what is described in my book. As for the novel, its characters Edwin Neumann, Fabian Sarto and Melvin Geller



are fictional, but help to see three different roads to repentance. Yes, of course, there are many similarities between the history of the adoption of Christianity in Armenia and the awakening of the pagan city of Finsterwalde, only the scale is different.

**And the conversations of Edwin and Fabian somehow reminded me of the conversations of Pontius Pilate and Yeshua from Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*. And in general, what else inspires you besides the Bible?**

*The Master and Margarita* impresses me with its high-profile story. I believe that the conversations between Edwin and Fabian do not have the degree of provocativeness that Bulgakov's novel has, and can be painlessly instilled in even the most conservative Christians. I am inspired by many people, many phenomena, things and moments of life. If you are inspired by one thing, then you will have to absorb it from a meager supply. The world is huge, and the people around are so different. There is always food for thought and there is always something to write about. Before taking on a manuscript, I listen to the classics, filled with meaning; I read several books at the same time, absorbing all the best; I drink strong coffee: in writing it is my old “ally.”

**You wrote on your blog that there are many references and symbols hidden in the novel that cannot be seen by superficial reading. Is it worth analyzing symbols at all? After all, they say that by such an analysis you “kill” a symbol.**

I would like to make it clear that I am not advising my readers to arm themselves with dictionaries of semiotics or delve into exegesis. My main goal was only to hint that I take a responsible approach to writing texts, and what at first glance seems like a banal may hide a real revelation.

**The hero of your novel says: “Childhood gives you endless possibilities, and how you spend it depends on how you get along with fate in the future.” What was**

**your childhood like?**

Until 2000, I lived in Armenia, in the city of Kirovakan (now Vanadzor). We have a large ancestral home there, divided into three sections, where three families lived. The heads of the families were three brothers: Hamlet, Zhora and my father Hrayr. The house was built on a rocky slope, and the construction was started by my grandfather. I lived in this house until I was 7 years old. We had a large yard where I, my older brothers and friends spent a lot of time. A sloping staircase led down from the yard to a cherry orchard, and right next to it, a thick trunk of an apricot tree rose directly from the cliff. Its fruits hung just in the yard, next to the gazebo, and you could easily pick them. I remember my childhood in Armenia

as being in paradise, probably because the problems of adults were still completely unknown to me. Now I know that those were the hungry post-war years. Of this, I remember only one detail: I was not allowed to go out with a piece of bread, so as not to be stared at by neighborhood children.

Then we moved to Russia, where I went to first grade. A few months later, I got used to the Russian mentality, made friends and spent my childhood in a new environment as interesting as it was in Armenia.

**Have you ever wanted to write a novel about Armenia? I think that the philosophical generalization and interpretation of what it means to be an Armenian is always relevant, about which Movses Khorenatsi wrote back in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the topic was touched upon by other major Armenian writers as well.**

I will write a big book about Armenia. Most likely it will be in my old age, when, perhaps, I will be able to penetrate, feel into the nature of my origin, understand personally and be able to convey at least a small grain of the value and beauty that the Armenian soul hides. At the moment, I am still too young and not enlightened enough to take on such a responsibility at the beginning of the writing journey.

**In your afterword, you refer to the books as “amazing people.” About your hero you say: “Nothing has pleased him so much for a long time as an interlocutor, from whom there is plenty of both sense and use.” Your book has become such an interlocutor for me. I wish you to reveal as many amazing books-humans as possible for yourself and for readers.**

Good books become our real friends, we can turn to them for advice, we can rely on them in difficult moments of life. They are not able to replace people, but with the help of books we can be sure that the rich heritage of human knowledge, experience and wisdom will be passed on to the next generations. In this way, we can keep the faith that our children will bypass the paths of temptation and walk uncomplainingly on a difficult, thorny, but sure path.

Thank you for these interesting questions! Most of them surprised me. Taking this opportunity, I want to say that a new book will be published soon, where events unfold in modern Italy. I am full of hope that this novel will win the hearts of many readers. I hug everyone tightly and with trembling love convey warm greetings to my sunny Armenia and my compatriots worldwide.

## A Body Is a Bridge, a Body Is Water: Armenian/Indian Art Show + Pop Up in LA

LOS ANGELES — A Body Is a Bridge, a Body Is Water is a show celebrating the connection between artists Natalia Ira Sookias' and Shriya Samavai Manian's respective Eastern heritages with their lives and art practices in the West. Heavy Manners Library is transformed into a space of Armenian and Indian comforts and traditions, featuring handmade ceramics by Sooki Studio and garments made from saris by SAMAVAI. As diasporic individuals, Sookias and Samavai Manian use their memories of times spent in their traditions with grandparents and cherished family members to create a bridge over the ocean between then and now. We invite you to think about the objects in your home and how they connect to those who came before you and those who may come afterward.

SAMAVAI is a label founded by Shriya Samavai Manian and based in Los Angeles. Shriya is interested in exploring how heritage and history can be passed down through textiles. All garments are made from vintage saris and other South Asian textiles and are cut and sewn in India and the United States.

Sooki Studio is part making space, part educational space run by Armenian artist & educator, Natalia Sookias. Her ceramics are a vehicle to both connect with her ancestors and create good quality goods for her community. Her work is made with the intention to last generations.

A spring collection release and weekend pop up of ceramics and garments at Heavy Manners Library by SAMAVAI & Sooki Studio.

Heavy Manners Library, 1200 North Alvarado Street, Los Angeles, with the weekend pop up: March 25 - 27, 11-7 p.m.





ARTS & CULTURE

# Books

## *Transition Economies: Transformation, Development and Society in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*

by Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Anyone interested in the post-Soviet space — whether general reader, sociologist or seasoned economist — will find something of interest in Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan’s *Transition Economies*. Gevorkyan goes over in detail the changes that have affected both the former republics of the USSR and their Eastern bloc counterparts (Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland etc...) who transitioned from planned to market economies between the 1990s and today. Gevorkyan clearly explains from the beginning that this vast region includes 29 countries, each one with a distinct culture and traditions that have affected how successfully they have made this transition. In Chapter Two, Gevorkyan discusses what the transition from one type of economy to another was originally supposed to look like conceptually and asks what constitutes a successful change: Is it simply economic change or does it include broader societal changes?

Another great strength of the book is that Gevorkyan accompanies his findings by detailed prose commentary. Along with contemporary statistics and findings, he also provides a historic overview of the development of socialism itself and the performance of Soviet and Eastern-bloc socialist economies over the past century. The author literally goes back to the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Bolsheviks, through the NEP and five-year plans. Not surprisingly, he finds that these economies did sensibly better than they are often credited with in the West, while falling short of expectations set by the Supreme Soviet and other planners who were unable to develop the hoped-for socialist paradise

at the turn and middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. In counterpoint, he also notes that economic output in some of the countries analyzed dropped more than 40 percent after the fall of the USSR and command economies, and that it has taken some 30 years for several of the countries examined to reach their previous levels. Unlike some economists, Gevorkyan does not gloss over the extreme poverty that

some of these countries were thrown into during the transition to capitalism or the social problems that accompanied the latter, including the crumbling of traditional family structures and mass emigration. In the last two chapters of “Transition Economies,” he notes that factors such as high domestic demand and an increase in commodity prices have helped to regulate and improve some local economies, though others have still not reached hoped-for levels of development.

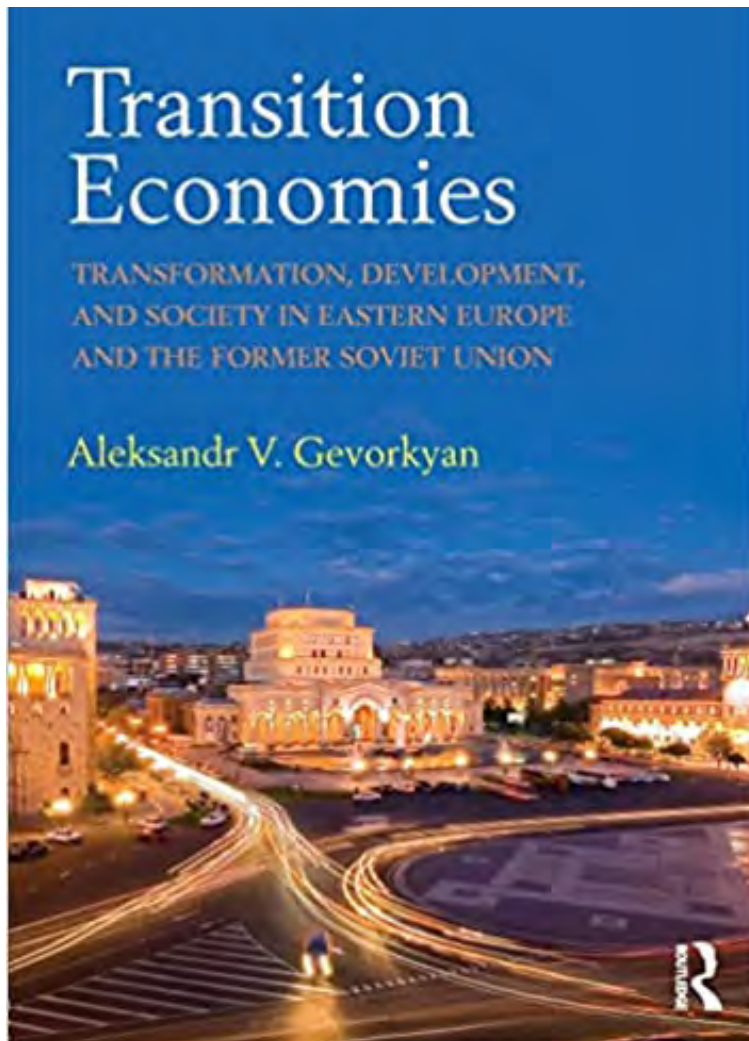
A professor of economics at St. John’s University in Queens, Gevorkyan has an interest in diasporas and the diaspora-homeland relationship which he does his best to try to quantify. Chapter 8 will be of particular interest to Armenian readers in the West, used to supporting the Republic of Armenia through a variety of remittances and economic/social aid foundations (the Armenia Fund, AGBU etc.) but unable to quantify how effective their aid has been overall, nor for that matter how the help delivered to Armenia these past three decades fares in comparison to that provided by other diasporas to their home countries. Gevorkyan both analyzes and has developed all sorts of fascinating indices including “average personal remittance inflows” and mapping the average GDP per capita against the average per capita “FDI + remittances.” Along the way he notes that diaspora business networks, for example, are at the source of over 60 percent of multinational enterprises in Armenia! He also has developed a remarkable “home country-to diaspora effectiveness approximation.” For the record, Armenia scores a quite decent 3.5 out of 5 maximum, roughly the same as Albania, the Czech Republic and Poland, far outpacing former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan (1.5) and Georgia (2.5), but lagging behind both Bulgaria and Serbia, countries which score a 4.5/5.0.

In his conclusion to *Transition Economies*, Gevorkyan writes that “...unlike the goals of the socialist decades and unlike the aspirations of the early free-market reforms era, there appears to be no finite destination to today’s transformational journeys. What seems to be emerging in the post-socialist space of CEE and FSU is a type of mixed construct embracing both socialist and capitalist economic models. How exactly that may play out is left to speculative views of the formerly socialist societies’ future. The challenge for them remains to ensure a clear and sustainable present.” Maybe in a future volume, Gevorkyan can consider possible roads and concrete policies for these countries to take to help ensure a viable present and prosperous future.

Link-to-buy:

[www.routledge.com/Transition-Economies-Transformation-Development-and-Society-in-Eastern/Gevorkyan/p/book/9781138831131](http://www.routledge.com/Transition-Economies-Transformation-Development-and-Society-in-Eastern/Gevorkyan/p/book/9781138831131)

*Transition Economies: Transformation, Development, and Society in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, by Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, New York, Routledge, 2018, 292 pp., \$49.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-83113-1 <https://goo.gl/jSN65c>



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## Richard Melik Simonian Charitable Trust Scholarship

The Scholarship Committee for the Richard M. Simonian Scholarship is pleased to announce the establishment of this scholarship, open to students of Armenian descent living in or attending school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Awards may be used towards college, graduate school, or higher educational programs.

Application deadline is April 15, 2022. Awards will be determined on or about May 23, 2022.

Requests for applications may be made to Christopher Mitchell at (508) 792-2800 or [Cmitchell@chwmlaw.com](mailto:Cmitchell@chwmlaw.com).





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Celebration of Clarinet Concert Features Boris Allakhverdyan, Alin Allakhverdyan



Boris Allakhverdyan and Alin Allakhverdyan

FRESNO — The Fresno State Department of Music, the College of Arts & Humanities, and the Armenian Studies Program present “Celebration of Clarinet Featuring Boris Allakhverdyan and Alin Allakhverdyan Piano Concert,” taking place at 6 p.m. on Saturday, April 2 in the Concert Hall on the Fresno State campus.

Boris Allakhverdyan was appointed principal clarinet of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2016. He previously served as principal clarinet of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and the associate principal clarinet of the Kansas City Symphony. Allakhverdyan is a founding member of the Prima Trio, and the Grand Prize and the Gold Medal winner of the prestigious 2007 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. The *New York Times* called his performance “inspired,” “gorgeous” and “superlative” and the *Los Angeles Times* praised his “energetic, vibrant solos.”

Pianist Alin Melik-Adamyian Allakhverdyan is a prize-winning collaborative artist, soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. A native of Southern California, Melik-Adamyian began her piano studies at the age of 4 and has since performed throughout the United States. Praised for a “sensitivity unique in the piano world” (The Musical Gourmet), Melik-Adamyian was the grand prize winner of the YMF/ ASCAP Leiber & Stoller Scholarship, first prize winner at the Los Angeles Liszt International Competition, first prize winner at the William Grant Still Young Artists Competition, and grand prize winner at the Redlands Bowl Young Artists Competition. She is currently a full-time staff pianist at El Camino College in Torrance, California.

General tickets for the concert are available for \$15 per person and for seniors \$12 per person. The concert is free for Fresno State students.

## Inspiring Concert of Musical Armenia Takes Place at Carnegie Hall

CONCERT, from page 12

dedicated to Komitas, *When You Left*, *Danse Triste*, a lyrical homage to composer Edvard Mirzoyan, *Hiraeth*, grief for lost places, and *Last Lullaby* based on a Ruben Sevak poem reflecting a mother’s heart-break as she rocks her young son to sleep for the last time during the 1909 massacre, reflected the overwhelming sadness of Armenia’s history infused in these compositions.

For the piece, *Last Lullaby*, soprano Anna Hayrapetyan, garbed in a bright red gown, sang in a nuanced performance, with impressive breath control, expressing the mother’s soul-searing grief. In the work *When You Left*, the singer again displayed her strong vocal ability, singing from the highest forte to the lowest pianissimo with no strain and great emotion.

Amiryan emphasized her strong Armenian feelings in the delicate and lilting *Cradle Song*, dedicated to her youth and upbringing. The cheerful *Ortus*, based on the melodic tonality and rhythmic flow of *Shogher Jan* by Komitas, created a “parallel between a woman’s image and the sun, as an origin of life and beauty.”

And *Spring in the Mountains* again brought to life the composer’s childhood in the glorious natural mountainous landscape of rural Armenia. The piece reflected the beauty of nature, and the season of spring as a “universal celebration of life.”

Amiryan is an award-winning composer and pianist whose works have been presented in Armenia, Russia, the United States, Japan and Israel, and throughout Europe. She has performed extensively, as well as presented lectures-recitals at international conferences and festivals in the United States and England. She has both B.A. and M.A. degrees in composition and musicology from Yerevan’s Komitas State Conservatory, and is a member of the Union of Composers of the Republic of Armenia.

Soprano Anna Hayrapetyan has performed in solo and ensemble concerts in Armenia, the United States, England, and South America. She has a B.A. from the



The musicians

Sydney Conservatorium of Music (Australia), an M.A. degree from the University of Connecticut where she was invited as a professor-in-residence, and at Southern Connecticut State University. She has had lead roles in “Rigoletto,” “The Barber of Seville,” “Eugene Onegin,” and Tigranian’s “Anush.”

Following the intermission, cellist Laura Navasardian and pianist Lilit Navasardian took center stage, displaying their vibrant and top notch musical mastery. They played with great musicianship a difficult program by three world noted composers - Komitas, Brahms and Tchaikovsky.

Both performers dressed in basic black brought to life *Tsirani Tsar* (Apricot Tree) by Komitas, a beloved agricultural folk tune, replicating national forms and rhythms. Infused with Armenian material, Komitas’ music is regarded by many as the foundation of Armenian music which “raised the standard of Western art music” not only in Armenia but internationally. And the Navasardians played with great feeling and superb vibrancy the charming song.

Brahms powerful *Sonata No. 2 in F major*, Op. 99, is a powerful composition in four movements evoking strong emotions of bold turmoil pitted against lyrical, me-

lodic lightness. Both artists played together with great understanding and synchronism, bring out the full strength of the work.

Tchaikovsky’s *Pezzo capriccioso*, Op. 62, is another masterpiece originally composed for cello and orchestra, a sober piece dedicated to the composer’s dying friend. It was conducted by Tchaikovsky with the orchestra in a first performance in 1889 at a special concert of the Russian Musical Society. Again Laura Navasardian and Lilit Navasardian displayed their great musicianship, complimenting each other in this evocative work.

Greeted with a standing ovation, Laura and Lilit Navasardian played an encore, *Concerto Polonaise*, Op. 14, a resonant concert work by David Popper, a Bohemian cellist and composer.

Laura Navasardian, a native New Yorker, started playing the cello at age 6. She was the first-prizewinner at the New York Music Competition, and winner of the Grand Prize Virtuoso International Music Competition in Salzburg, Austria, both in 2016, when she was only 12 years old. As a winner of the Kaufman Music Center Concerto Competition at Merkin Concert Hall, she performed a concerto with the Kaufman Music Center Orchestra in New York. She

has also performed as a soloist with the Boston Pops at Boston’s Symphony Hall. A high school graduating senior, she will be studying at Juilliard in the fall.

Lilit Navasardian, born in Yerevan, studied at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan, and at the Moscow Conservatory. Receiving a doctor’s degree from Moscow’s Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music in piano teaching and performance, she is a laureate of the Busoni International Competition in Bolzano, Italy. As a soloist and chamber musician, she has performed in Armenia, Russia, the United States, Canada, Italy and Lebanon. Her chamber music appearances include guest invitations with the Chamber Orchestras of San Francisco, St. Petersburg, and Yerevan.

Following the performances, the four artists came onto the stage, all receiving multiple flower bouquets, and a long standing and cheering ovation. Several audience members greeted the performers in the concert lobby taking photos and again congratulating them.

Involved in this worthy project were Musical Armenia Committee members Julie Kedersha, Sophie Khachatryan, Annita Nerses, Varsenne Sarkissian and Levon Tatevossian.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## Lenten Recipes From TheArmenianKitchen.com

“In the Armenian Church, Lent is a time of joyfulness and purification through repentance. The Western Church’s less-strict Lenten practice excludes meat from the diet. The stricter Lenten diet of the Eastern Church excludes meat, fish, poultry, dairy, dairy products or eggs,” says Robyn Kalajian, the co-creator of TheArmenianKitchen.com website and influential food blog. She offers these two traditional recipes:

Topik/թոփիկ (or topik) is a delicious vegan mezze or appetizer. It’s considered a specialty of Armenians from Istanbul (or bolsahyes). It’s often served at Michink (the middle of Lent). “Earlier, I wrote about topik (“stuffed ball”), says Robyn, “and linked my story to Lebanese blogger Joumana Accad’s website (<http://www.tasteofbeirut.com/2009/12/chick-pea-appetizer-topik/> TasteofBeirut.com) since she’d already gone to the trouble of preparing the recipe and posting it so beautifully. I haven’t tried Joumana’s authentic version of topik, but I gave it some serious thought with the return of Lent this year.”

Joumana adds, “Topik contains no dairy nor meat, is composed of chickpeas, onions, tahini and spices, and is livened up by currants and nuts. Preparation can take 36 hours, so it requires some planning. Perfect for a party or a celebration, it’s a contrast of flavors, the lemon against the chickpea paste, the olive oil to spice up the ensemble; the stuffing is sweet with onions and currants. It’s worth the effort and time,” she adds.

Robyn says, “My counterpart in Yerevan, Sonia Tashjian, e-mailed me her simpler, less time-consuming version that I modified below. Sonia, an Armenian food expert and enthusiast, is an endless source of easy-to-prepare recipes from many Armenian regions. Her topik method sounded more my speed, in that the ingredients are mixed together without the tedious shaping and stuffing. It’s still some work, but not as daunting for the time-constrained cook. My husband Doug says this version reminded him of a combination of hummus and midia dolma – minus the mussels; I loved the sweetness of the currants and tartness of the lemon juice, but feel a pinch of cinnamon would have enhanced the flavor a little more,” adds Robyn. (See her Midia Dolma: Armenian Stuffed Mussels at: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/nobody-can-out-mussel-armenians/amp/>).

### Topik

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 16 oz chickpeas (garbanzo beans), drained, rinsed, skins removed
- 2 small red potatoes (boiled, peeled, and cut in half)
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, to taste
- 1/4 cup tahini
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon red (cayenne) pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried mint
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup pine nuts, chopped
- 1/4 cup currants
- Dash of cinnamon, optional

#### PREPARATION:

In a skillet, sauté the onions in hot oil until softened. Set aside. Process the chickpeas and cooked potatoes in a food processor using the metal “S” blade.

Place the ground chickpeas, potatoes, and remaining ingredients in a large mixing bowl; mix well. Using your hands, knead the ingredients together, making

sure the mixture holds together.

NOTE: Keep a bowl of water nearby to dip your hands in, if the mixture feels a little dry. Shape the mixture into 21 ping pong sized balls.

Cut 21 (6”x6”) squares out of two-ply cheesecloth, and 21 (10”) strands of kitchen twine. Wrap each ball in a cheesecloth and tied the top with a piece of twine. Cook several topik at a time in a pot of salted, gently boiling water until they float to the top -- about 5 to 7 minutes. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil and squeeze of fresh lemon.

For this recipe, go to: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/topik-easy-version/>

\*“As Armenians commemorate the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we exchange the joy with our family and friends by re-enacting the amazing discovery of the emptied tomb on that first Easter. Traditionally, we use onion skins to dye boiled eggs a rich red color (signifying the blood of Christ). The exterior of the hardboiled egg represents the tomb which contained the crucified Body of our Lord. Holding the egg in our right hand, we greet one another saying, ‘Christ is risen from the dead!’ and the others answer, ‘Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ!’ Then, one person strikes the top of the other person’s egg to re-create the sound of that ‘crack’ which opened the tomb. As we remove the shell, we see the egg white which recalls the burial shroud. Then, we remove the shroud to reveal the golden joy of Life, Hope and Resurrection symbolized by the yolk.” - The Tradition of Cracking Easter Eggs Amongst Armenians by Rev. Dr. George A. Leylegian

### Sonia Tashjian’s Carrot (or Apple) Lenten Cake

“Limitations bring inspiration, ingenuity and creativity. Cooking during Lent with only a few restricted ingredients challenges our creativity. In this way, deprivation leads to blessings, opening our minds to new ideas. Lenten dishes such as this special cake from Sonia Tashjian can transform a simple meal symbolizing denial into something delightful. I’ve noted that apple juice and applesauce may be substituted for the carrot juice and puree in this recipe,” says Robyn Kalajian.

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup carrot juice (or apple juice with no sugar added)
- 1 cup carrot puree (unsweetened applesauce)
- 1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans)
- 1/2 cup raisins
- Garnish: 1/2 cup sesame seeds

#### PREPARATION:

In a large bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and cinnamon. Next, stir in the oil, carrot (or apple) juice and carrot puree (or apple sauce).

After the cake dough is formed, stir in the chopped nuts and raisins. Lightly oil a baking tray or cake pan large enough to hold the dough, such as a 9 x 13 pan. Flatten dough with wet hands, then sprinkle sesame seeds on the top.

Preheat the oven to 350°F and bake in the center rack of the oven for 35 to 45 minutes.

For this recipe, go to: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/carrot-or-apple-lenten-cake-from-sonia/>

Also see:

<https://thearmeniankitchen.com/lent-and-lenten-recipes/>

<https://thearmeniankitchen.com/category/meatless-lenten-dishes/>

<https://thearmeniankitchen.com/tag/sonia-tashjian/>

<https://twitter.com/sontash75>

<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayetdiarbekir/cityof-diyarbakir/religion/festivals.html>

<https://www.justapinch.com/recipes/dessert/dessert-cake/nistisimo-cake-during-lent-or-when-ever-you.html>

<https://www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/scrumptious-lenten-apple-pie-recipe-greek-milopita/>

<https://www.armenianmuseum.org/armenian-recipes/my-familys-musa-daghisi-version-of-tabbouleh-sarma-gurgood>

<https://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/opinion/columns/2022/03/lent-food-traditions-and-history/>

Robyn Kalajian is a retired culinary teacher whose passion for cooking and knowledge of Armenian and Middle Eastern cuisine has earned her an international following as creator and chief cook of the site. Her husband and sous-chef Douglas is an author and retired journalist who has written extensively about Armenian food and culture. “Our website aims to capture and preserve the recipes Armenian grandmothers never had time to write down.

It is a big job that’s getting bigger as Armenian cuisine evolves around the world. We celebrate the talented people who prepare and enjoy this wonderful food by sharing stories told around the Armenian dinner table. We hope you enjoy our instructive how-to-make videos and visit our website for more recipes soon,” says Robyn. Go to: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/>

[https://www.pinterest.com/TheArmenianKitchen/\\_saved/](https://www.pinterest.com/TheArmenianKitchen/_saved/)

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/TheArmenianKitchen/posts/>

<https://www.instagram.com/cookeatkef/>

For how-to-make videos and more, see: <https://www.youtube.com/c/dkalajian-TAK/videos>

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Spotlight on Rouben Mamoulian at UCLA

LOS ANGELES — The UCLA Film & Television Archive presents two restored films by legendary Armenian American film director Rouben Mamoulian on Saturday, April 16 at 7:30 p.m. at the Billy Wilder Theater. “Applause” (1929) and “Love Me Tonight” (1932) are among eight Mamoulian films restored by the Archive and the double-feature will be presented as part of Archive Treasures, funded by the Hugh M. Hefner Classic American Film Program, which showcases screen gems from the Archive’s extensive holdings.

The Mamoulian screening is supported by community partner, Armenian Film Foundation, which is marking the influential director’s contributions to film this year. The program is also supported by the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA.

“The Archive is honored to partner with the Armenian Film Foundation to celebrate the remarkable achievements of Rouben Mamoulian, a filmmaker and artist whose made a tremendous impact on Hollywood,” said Archive Director May Hong HaDuong.

“Rouben Mamoulian was an innovator who set the bar for decades of film directors to follow. It’s wonderful to see these two restored films on the big screen,” said Dr. Carla Garapedian of the Armenian Film Foundation.

Born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1897, Rouben Mamoulian came to America in 1923 seeking a suitable outlet for his nascent aesthetic vision. Following in the footsteps of his mother, a director for the Armenian stage, Mamoulian trained at the Moscow Stage Theater where naturalism was de rigueur, a style that the young director did not appreciate. “I discovered I had no affinity for naturalism on stage,” he later said. “My aim always was rhythm and poetic stylisation.” By 1927, Mamoulian had his

first Broadway hit with *Porgy* which he conceived as “a truly dramatic theater...that would combine all the elements of movement, dancing, acting, music, singing, decor, lighting, color and so on.” Mamoulian soon ventured into Hollywood with his first effort for Paramount, hailed as a liberating leap forward for its imaginative combination of sound and camera movement. Mamoulian quickly earned a reputation as an innovator who could be trusted with a studio’s most valuable assets, whether Greta Garbo at MGM (*Queen Christina*, 1933) or three-color Technicolor at RKO (*Becky Sharp*, 1935). Throughout his career he remained a prowling (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1931). As critic Tom Milne suggested, every Mamoulian film could be considered a musical, “choreographed rather than directed.”

“Applause” is a showcase for the acting and singing talents of 29-year-old Helen Morgan in her film debut, playing a faded burlesque queen. Also making his screen debut was director Rouben Mamoulian, whose depiction of the vulgar, entertaining realities of burlesque is as impressive today as it was in 1929, when it established his reputation as an innovative film director.

*Love Me Tonight* is an enchanting tale of an amorous tailor (Maurice Chevalier) who woos a lovelorn princess (Jeanette MacDonald). It brims with wit and lyricism as Mamoulian has fun with some of his favorites themes: sex and seduction. Featuring irresistible songs by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart inventively integrated into the story, “*Love Me Tonight*” is Mamoulian’s masterpiece.

For details, updates, registration information and important health guidelines, visit [cinema.ucla.edu](http://cinema.ucla.edu).

For more information, contact Marisa Soto at [msoto@cinema.ucla.edu](mailto:msoto@cinema.ucla.edu).

## Aznavoorian Duo to release ‘Gems From Armenia’ Album in April

CHICAGO — On Friday, April 8, sisters Ani (cello) and Marta (piano) Aznavoorian will release their debut duo album, “Gems from Armenia,” on Cedille Records, *Broadway World* reports.

The Aznavoorian Duo celebrates the sounds of their ancestral homeland through a panoramic survey of Armenian classical music. The duo will perform a recital featuring works from the album on Sunday, May 15, at 3 p.m. at Nichols Hall at the Music Institute of Chicago in Evanston.

The Aznavoorian Duo comments, “The idea for this CD sprung out of gratitude to the proud and soulful people of Armenia and our homage to the historical challenges they have overcome and continue to engage with.”

In the liner notes, Gary Peter Rejebian writes, “‘Gems from Armenia’ voices a range of opposing emotions across three periods of time: some ringing clear in their own right, others but a whisper of other peaks and valleys in the Armenian story.

The album opens with five folk songs arranged by Komitas. Rejebian says, “Komitas strove not merely to capture melodic tunes, but to evoke the very life and heartache of the people who passed down poetic lyrics in song over centuries as he documented them for the ages.”

He continues “Soviet-era composers Aram

Khachaturian, Arno Babajanian, Avet Terterian, and Alexander Arutiunian collectively represent a musical renaissance for the Armenians; a period of greatness analogous to the first millennium ‘Golden Age’ of the Ar-



Ani and Marta Aznavoorian

menian kingdom... Khachaturian’s glorious ode to his hometown (Yerevan) and Babajanian’s tribute to Khachaturian, his mentor (Elegy), speak with impassioned fondness in very different voices. Terterian’s Sonata, first performed in 1956, precedes the symphonies and stage works for which he is best known... As a snapshot of his lively style inspired by memorable folk melodies, Alexander Arutiunian composed his Impromptu in 1948.”

A third era, of contemporary music, is embodied by Serouj Kradjian, Vache Sharafyan, and Peter Boyer. Rejebian shares, “Lebanese-born pianist and composer Kradjian arranged *Sari Siroun Yar* (Beautiful Mountain



# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### CALIFORNIA

**JUNE 5 — Save the date.** The Armenian Assembly of America will mark its 50th anniversary with a program on Sunday, at 5.30 p.m., at the Jonathan Club. This special event will highlight five decades of the Assembly’s influential achievements in advocacy, education, and awareness on Armenian issues. For more information visit <https://www.armenian-assembly.org/>

### CONNECTICUT

**APRIL 23 —** The Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut will hold its annual program, on the 107th anniversary of the Genocide, on Saturday, at 10:30 am. Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection, 1910 Stanley Street, New Britain as an in person event but will also be livestreamed Reception to follow. Livestream link: [bit.ly/34VhGbH](https://bit.ly/34VhGbH). The program will begin with the Martyrs’ Service. Clergy from Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate in the service. The keynote speaker will be Lillian Avedian, journalist and poet who works as a staff writer for the Armenian Weekly. She will speak on “Narrating Genocide: Journalism without facts, Art without truth.”

### MASSACHUSETTS

**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](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**APRIL 4 —** St. James Men’s Club will hold dinner and fellowship jointly with the Trinity Men’s Union on Monday. Speaker Alexandra Vacroux, PhD, will discuss the war in Ukraine. Dr. Vacroux will begin by providing historical context for the war, theories on what President Putin might be seeking, as well as the international response. She is the executive director of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard for 12 years. 6.15 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m., dinner. Losh kebab and kheyma dinner. \$20 per person. St. Hames Armenian Church, Watertown.

**MAY 7 — “We Wait for Your Return — A Love Letter to Armenia,”** evening of photography, storytelling, and music is a theatrical experience will take you on a unique journey from Watertown to Armenia through the intimate stories and evocative imagery of American photographer Winslow Martin. It also includes many photos and memories of Der Dajad Davidian, who set Winslow on his road to Armenia. Northeastern’s Blackman Auditorium, Ell Hall, 342 Huntington Ave, Boston, on Saturday, at 8 p.m. A visual and musical celebration of the beauty and soul of the Armenian people, with music by award-winning composer Astghik Martirosyan. Sponsored by the Northeastern University Department of Music, tickets are available on-line at: <http://www.wewaitforyourreturn.com>

**MAY 19 —** The Armenian Assembly of America Honor Gail Talanian O’Reilly with Distinguished Humanitarian Award at a program at 6 p.m. at Hyatt Regency/Cambridge, 575 Memorial Dr, Cambridge. For tickets, donations or more information, visit <https://www.armenian-assembly.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](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

### RHODE ISLAND

**APRIL 24 — 107th Commemoration of the 1915 Armenian Genocide on Sunday,** at the Armenian Martyrs’ Memorial site at North Burial Ground, Providence at 12:30 p.m. with the participation of the three Armenian churches and organizations. Stepan Piligian is the guest speaker. All are welcome.

### 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.**



Girl)... Sharafyan composed his *Petrified Dance* through multiple iterations of string-piano combinations for Harutyun Khachaturian’s documentary about Armenian street artist Vahan Ananyan.”

“Boyer composed *Mount Ararat* for the Aznavoorian Duo specially for this project as a reflection of how Armenia’s biblical heritage resonated with a composer from a completely

different background,” Rejebian writes.

The Aznavoorian Duo has toured France, Armenia, and Finland, performed at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall, and presented numerous programs in their hometown of Chicago.

They have individually worked with leading contemporary composers including John Harbison, Clarice Assad and Lera Auerbach.





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## EDITORIAL

# Armenia at a Crossroads between Russia and Turkey



**By Edmond Y. Azadian**

While the majority of Armenia's population is concerned over the immediate and short-term impact of Russia's war in Ukraine, historians and analysts look further into the future for developments of historic consequences.

The war launched by Russia against Ukraine and the subsequent international sanctions against that nation have sent shivers through the part of the world economically intertwined with Russia.

In Armenia, that change because of the war has been immediate and harsh. Armenia's gross domestic product (GDP) for next year was forecast to increase by 5.6 percent, but now the central bank has revised that figure to 1.6 percent, in view of the elimination of remittances from Armenians in Russia accounting for 49 percent of money transfers to Armenia, and disruption of the supply chain of food and commodities, which are mostly imported from Russia.

Moscow has set restrictions on grain exports even to Eurasian Economic Union members, of which Armenia is one. Twenty seven percent of Armenia's exports are destined for Russia, and that area will be impacted severely also. However, even in the best-case scenario, the downfall of the Russian currency rate will devastate the market.

There is talk now by the authorities as to how long the current food supplies can last and what the alternatives for Armenia are to prevent deprivation.

On the other hand, a new phenomenon has developed in the country with the flood of Russians and Ukrainians émigrés escaping their homelands. They bring with them their talents and capital. However, the question is how long Armenia's economic infrastructure can sustain this kind of sudden upheaval. Already, the real estate market is overheated.

All the above developments and concerns may be short-term impacts and may settle in time. But the most difficult forecast is the long-term one for the permanent impact that the war in Ukraine can bring to the world, the region and particularly to Armenia.

At least one clue to that impact is Russia's goal for engaging in that war in the first place. Many pundits in the West believe that the impetus for Russian leader Vladimir Putin is to resurrect the former Soviet Union, in one form or another. The conditions Putin proposed to Ukraine in order for his nation to stop the war offer confirmation of that theory. Indeed, among those conditions is the stipulation that a demilitarized Ukraine has to become part of Russia, after accepting that Crimea is part of Russia and Luhansk and Donetsk are independent countries.

Mr. Putin has often publicly expressed his disappointment over Ukraine not being a part of Russia. Therefore, it is not difficult to predict that should Moscow come out triumphant from the current conflict, this push will receive more prominence with all the countries of the "near abroad" or in the zone of influence of the former Soviet Union, including Armenia.

Although the outcome of the war is anyone's guess, the current status of the conflict does not foretell an overall victory for Russia, which is hemorrhaging soldiers, weapons and military hardware, in addition to suffering a catastrophic blow to its economy. In its early days, war strategists believed that this would be a short-term engagement with a resolute victory for Russia, but it looks like peace will come with Moscow and Kyiv sharing equally the dividends of that peace.

While the war is still raging, the parties which anticipate to be affected by its outcome have been positioning themselves to

soften these impacts or, in fact, benefit from the spoils. Thus, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev signed an agreement with President Putin one day before the outbreak of the war, pledging to not engage in any activities which may compromise the interests of the other party, only to signal to the European Union that in case Russian gas does not flow to Europe, the leaders of the EU can depend on Azerbaijani oil.

At the same time, Azerbaijan is shipping to Ukraine all kinds of assistance under the guise of humanitarian aid, thus, returning the favor and arms supplies to Baku by President Volodymyr Zelensky, during the 44-day war it launched against Karabakh.

Turkey, in its turn, while blaming Russia for the war, voting against Moscow's annexation of Crimea and supplying Bayraktar drones to Kyiv, refuses to join the West's sanctions policy against Russia, most probably to reap some benefits from going around these sanctions, as it did during the West's measures against Iran. On top of those political juggling acts, Turkey has emerged as the major mediator between Russia and Ukraine; the first attempt to bring together the foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine did not yield any results, but Turkey's

Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavusoglu is continuing his relentless efforts through shuttle diplomacy between Kyiv and Moscow.

Armenia is caught in the middle of this conundrum. European Union's pledge of a 2.6 billion euros economic aid package and President Joe Biden's prodding of President Erdogan to initiate negotiations with Armenia to improve relations and lift its blockade have encouraged Armenia's westward leaning tendencies, though Yerevan does not enjoy too much leeway to veer towards the West, without offending

Moscow. Thus far, Armenia has fared unscathed with one vote supporting the Russian position at the Council of Europe and abstentions in other fora.

Public manifestations in Armenia are also in line with Yerevan's neutral position. One demonstration was organized by Tigran Khzmalyan's European Party attended by Ukrainian officials condemning the war. The other was held in front of the Russian embassy, during which the old Soviet flag was hoisted, with speakers demanding Armenia become a member of the Union State with Russia. One positive note: the government's tolerance in allowing these two contrasting demonstrations enhances Armenia's democratic credentials.

This issue has been raised recently by pro-Moscow political quarters in the country, first by former President Robert Kocharyan and most recently by oligarch and benefactor Ruben Vardanyan. This movement has the potential to become a strong political trend, should Russia score a decisive victory in the current war. Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko had already dismissively said who cares about Armenia and that eventually it has no place to go but to join Russia as a Union State member.

Armenia's devastating defeat during the 44-day war has impacted people's perceptions negatively with regard to the country's survival as a sovereign state. Some have even posed the question publicly to government officials, asking whether joining Russia is on the agenda and the answer has been no.

Armenia is negotiating with Turkey and thus far, some positive signals have emerged from these talks. For some despondent critics and analysts, Armenia's future is fashioned along black and white lines. They reason that in order for Armenia to survive, it has to make a choice between joining Russia or becoming a Turkish vilayet.

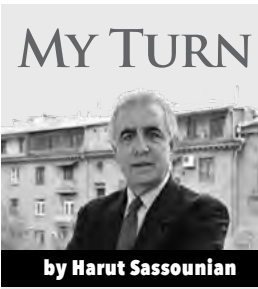
Pietro Shakarian and Benyamin Poghosyan have published a  
*continued on next page*







COMMENTARY



# Only in Armenia: Nikol Pashinyan Sued His own Country in European Court

There might be heads of state who have sued their own governments after they were overthrown or their possessions confiscated, but, I am not aware of any leader in office who continued his pending lawsuit against his own country in a foreign court. We have the incredible case of not one, but two lawsuits filed years ago by Nikol Pashinyan against the Republic of Armenia in the European Court of Human Rights. These two lawsuits were still pending when he became Prime Minister. In addition, Alexander Arzumanyan had also a pending lawsuit against the Republic of Armenia in the European Court at the time of his appointment as ambassador.

No one can fault citizen Pashinyan for filing the two lawsuits, long before he began serving as prime minister in 2018, in order to clear his name after he and his newspaper were found guilty of violating Armenian laws. However, after becoming prime minister, he should have withdrawn the lawsuits from the European Court and filed an appeal with Armenian courts which he has done now four years after assuming his current office. During his January 2022 “press conference,” Pashinyan admitted that he had thought about filing an appeal in Armenian courts. However, he said that he decided to wait until the European Court had made its decision. I believe it would have been more proper to withdraw the lawsuits from the European Court and file the appeal in Armenia.

Armenpress reported on February 16, 2022 that “the Prosecutor-General of Armenia Artur Davtyan filed a motion in the Court of Appeal requesting to overturn the 2010 guilty verdict of Nikol Pashinyan and exonerate him. On January 19, 2010, the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction had found Pashinyan guilty of ‘organizing mass disturbances’ during the March 1, 2008, demonstrations [which resulted in 10 deaths, burned cars and looted stores. After hiding from authorities for 16 months], Pashinyan was sentenced to seven years in prison but served a little less than two years and was released under a general amnesty. On January 18, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgment in the case of Pashinyan vs. Armenia, which Pashinyan had filed when he was an opposition politician. The European Court recognized that Pashinyan’s right to freedom, personal immunity, as well as the right to freedom of peaceful assembly were violated.” The European Court did not award Pashinyan with any amount of money for damages or legal fees.

Interestingly, the Armenian government’s lawyer at the European Court did not present any evidence or objections to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to defend the Armenian court’s 2010 verdict against Pashinyan. It is understandable that a government lawyer would be reluctant to

present evidence of wrongdoing against his own country’s prime minister! The ECHR reaches all its decisions after weighing the plaintiff’s arguments against the evidence presented by the respective government. In this case, the government did not present its side of the story, since the plaintiff and the government were awkwardly on the same side. It is also important to note that the European Court only began to review Pashinyan’s lawsuit in 2019, after he became prime minister in 2018, which means that he had plenty of time to withdraw his petition from the European Court. Regrettably, Pashinyan’s lawsuit in the European Court against Armenia provided scandalous material to the Azeri press, publicizing it with the headline: “Pashinyan defeated Armenia in European Court.”

Pashinyan’s second lawsuit in the European Court of Human Rights against the Republic of Armenia was filed by Dareskizb, the publishing company of his newspaper, *Haykakan Jamanak*. The newspaper had printed on October 14, 2010, an article under the headline: “Seven out of Eight are in the List,” accusing several high-ranking Armenian government officials of involvement in “drug and human trafficking and money laundering crimes.” Three of the accused officials filed a lawsuit in an Armenian court against *Haykakan Jamanak* for defamation. Pashinyan lost the lawsuit and the subsequent appeal.

The European Court decided in 2021 that the applicant’s rights were violated. The Government of Armenia was ordered to pay the publishing company of Pashinyan’s newspaper 9,000 euros in damages, in addition to taxes. Alexander Arzumanyan had also filed a lawsuit against the Republic of Armenia in the European Court before being appointed ambassador to Denmark and Norway in 2017, and additionally to Sweden in 2019. He challenged in the European Court of Human Rights his conviction by an Armenian court for his involvement in the 2008 protests following the presidential elections. He was the head of Levon Ter-Petrosian’s presidential campaign. Prior to that, Arzumanyan was Armenia’s foreign minister. In 2001, he became one of the founding members of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission. Following the 2008 protests, he was arrested and charged with “usurpation of State power.” On June 22, 2009, an Armenian court found him guilty of organizing mass disorder, sentenced him to five years in prison, and freed him immediately due to an amnesty. In 2009, Arzumanyan appealed to the European Court which ruled in 2021 that his rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly have been violated. Just like Pashinyan, Arzumanyan chose not to withdraw his lawsuit from the European Court of Human Rights after becoming an Ambassador. I don’t know why the Armenian government did not make his appointment in 2017 conditional on the withdrawal of his lawsuit. The ECHR ordered the Republic of Armenia to pay Amb. Arzumanyan 9,000 euros for damages and 2,600 euros for legal costs and expenses, in addition to taxes.

I wonder if there is any other country in the world whose prime minister and ambassador had pending lawsuits against their own country in a foreign court at the time of assuming office, obliging the Republic of Armenia to pay them damages and legal fees from their own governmental budget!

from previous page

joint article proscribing three choices for Armenia’s survival as a sovereign state: 1) preservation and protection of the Armenian population on the historical Armenian homeland, 2) Russian-Armenian military harmonization and 3) restriction of Turkish economic penetration and control of the Armenian Republic.

It is questionable how these recommendations may be achieved but most interestingly, the authors provide some statistics which gauge public sentiment and give directions as to which policies have better chances to succeed. Thus, they write: “Recent poll findings from the International Republican Institute reflect the growing popular mood. Forty-six percent of Armenians agree that their country is not going in the right direction, a significant blow to the republic’s sitting leadership. Of those surveyed, 88 percent stated that the top national security threat facing Armenia is the Turkish Republic. Only 5 percent say that Armenian-Turkish dialogue is necessary, while the vast majority say that the government should instead invest its greatest effort in enhancing Armenia’s strategic security alliance with the Russian Federation. The poll findings echo popular sentiments on the streets of Yerevan, as residents express comfort with the regular flights of Russian MiG-29 fighters over the skies of the Armenian capital. By contrast, the government’s proclaimed “new era of peace” with Turkey has invited considerable concern, and even apprehension, among the population, given not only the memory of Turkey’s direct involvement in the 2020 Karabakh war, but also the 1915 Armenian Genocide, which Ankara still denies.”

Considering Armenia is in a federation with Russia, many assume it will survive, if the Russian Federation proves that it is not a crumbling empire as some surmise. But with its meager resources, Armenia cannot command more clout than Belarus or Kazakhstan and will be treated in a cavalier manner by Moscow.

The mirror image can be expected in any structures in the West, again because of Armenia’s economic frailty. One lesson should be Greece-Turkey relations within NATO. There Greece has compromised its sovereignty and is treated like an underdog. Armenia cannot expect to do better.

One thing is certain: there is confusion amongst the public about the political direction Armenia must take to survive. If we believe in historic determinism, this is the perfect replication of a situation which Armenia has faced repeatedly during its long and arduous history. Every time such disarray has arisen, with different groups pulling Armenia’s national policies in different directions, Armenia has lost, with the resultant fatalism merely leaving the hope that Armenia may be revived one day.

It is time for visionary leadership to emerge either from the ranks of the current government or through a combination of forces to be able to chart a realistic and achievable future. Otherwise, we will be lost at a crossroads between Russia and Turkey.

# Turkish Court Keeps Philanthropist in Prison Ahead of Final Verdict in April

By Amberin Zaman

A Turkish court ruled on Monday, March 21, that Osman Kavala, a renowned philanthropist and peace advocate, remain in prison in a long-running trial seen as a bellwether for Turkey’s crippled democracy. The decision has raised worries that Turkey sees its geostrategic influence, highlighted by the conflict in Ukraine, as a free pass for further rights abuses.

A verdict was widely expected at the hearing but was put off until April 22. This was to allow the defense to respond to the prosecutor’s final opinion on behalf of Kavala and others accused of espionage and seeking to overthrow the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Kavala, 64, who has poured millions from his personal fortune into arts, culture and reconciliation between Armenians and Turks and between Turks and Kurds, has been held since October 18, 2017, in a case marked by wild accusations, flimsy evidence and legal acrobatics that lawyers say are designed to keep him behind bars.

Prosecutor Edip Sahiner is seeking aggravated life sentences for Kavala and fellow civil society activist Mucella Yapci, and up to 20 years for six other defendants. He requested that the files of the remaining nine who are being tried in absentia be dealt with separately. They include US academic Henri Barkey. All of the defendants deny the charges.

The prosecution is widely assumed to be taking its cues from Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Turkish strongman has publicly accused Kavala of “financing terrorists” in the 2013 Gezi demonstrations against his government and of receiving support from “the famous Hungarian Jew,” an allusion to Hungarian-born American billionaire George Soros. Though he has yet to show evidence to prove it, Erdogan is said to be convinced that Kavala was involved in the 2016 attempt to violently oust his government.

“This case has been riddled from start to finish with unlawfulness and arbitrariness. This is a politically motivated case,” said Milena Buyum, campaigner for Turkey at Amnesty International who was present at the hearing. “Its purpose appears to be to keep Kavala behind bars, come what may,” she told Al-Monitor.

In December 2019, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ordered Kavala’s immediate release, saying that his rights had been violated by the Turkish state. In 2021, the ECHR repeated the demand for prominent Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas, who was imprisoned in 2016 on thinly evidenced terrorism charges. Its

see KAVALA, page 20





# Balakian's Lyric Voice Resounds in *No Sign*, His New Poetry Volume

POETRY, from page 1

is in the form of a dialogue between an estranged couple, with everything from the geological origins of the earth to current environmental dangers, Hiroshima, war, love and cinema questioned and discussed.

The final fourth section reverts to a medley of poems meditating on history and the present. The Armenian element is strongly present, with the statue of Anahit at the British Museum, Ani “the ruined city,” Hrant Dink, and Armenian Istanbul making their appearances.

## Making Art

Balakian stated, “I have been at this art for a while now. It is my life’s work.” In addition to poetry, he is the author of four books of prose, including a memoir, non-fiction studies and a book of essays. However, he said, “The main river for me is the poetry river, and the others are tributaries off of it. I published my first poems in literary journals around 1974, and pretty much I published one book of poems every five years since 1979, give or take a year. I continue to work in nonfiction forms, especially in the essay, and I have been writing short political pieces in the past decade.”

When asked whether he felt his approach or perspective as a poet may have changed over the years, he said, “I think that what marks a writer’s continued journey is the ongoing exploration of one’s medium, which is for the poet language. How does one as a poet continue to evolve as a maker of inventive forms and to continue to make language that is satisfying and challenging and that passes a writer’s personal test for growth. While your subjects and issues define you as a writer, it’s the language that is essential for your subjects to become art. I don’t want to comment on my work. Critics can do that, but for me, the continued pursuit of my art is the way I measure my own continuation as a poet.”

He further elaborated, declaring: “I think that continuing one’s work as an artist should embody one’s own evolution as a person and I find the complexity of human existence always demanding that pushes forward in one’s own approach to writing whether it be about human relationships, history, culture, the self. All of these preoccupations should lead one into deeper zones of thought and more inventive and realized language. In my work over de-

acades, I can only say that I hope the work reflects human growth and evolution. That is part of the life journey, so readers find different things in the works of writers as they experience a writer’s evolution. The main thing is to keep evolving.”

Balakian did have one caveat for readers, common to most authors. Everything in a poem has not necessarily happened to the poet. His works, though they may express intense personal emotion and often are narrated in the first person, are not autobiographies or memoirs. He said, “They are often complex fusions of personal and imagined experience. If a poem were a memoir, then the poet would have to tell the reader, this is autobiography in verse, but poems are very much embedded in history, in memory, in culture, so that they have my real reality in them, but everything in them is not an autobiographical experience; poems are works of imagination.

His work is threaded with references to history, art, culture, politics, and Balakian said, “This is part of my writerly universe. I don’t think much about cultural references as difficult or not difficult, arcane or contemporary.” He noted that T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound created the new modern era of the poem as a container of culture, intertextuality, history, and so on. And the modern reader (“The Waste Land” was published in 1922) quickly understood that it was her or his job to unpack the poem.

Even with the Armenian material, unfamiliar to many, people can look them up he said, exclaiming: “It couldn’t be easier in the digital age. It is incredible. You can look up anything in two seconds and read about it, like the head of Anahit at the British Museum which is the subject of one of my poems in this book.”

He does, however, note sources in a Notes page when he has used something or relied on something specific from another text. There are six such notations for his long poem for “No Sign.”

Balakian identified one specific structural or formal evolution in his verse. While it is true that every book of poems will have a slightly different shape and kinetics given the poet’s evolution, he observed: “I think starting with “Ziggurat,” which I began writing around 2003, I began to pursue this longer form of a multi-sectioned, multi-

sequenced poem, and I find this very satisfying in that it allows me to pursue more openness, more space. I write about this in my essay called ‘Writing Horizontal.’ And this approach to poetry, to lyric language, is a more expansive way of telling a story while going to a deeper lyric place with language. The long poem has a rich tradition in American literature. I’m trying to push those boundaries. ‘A Train/Ziggurat/Elegy’ and ‘Ozone Journal’ are now joined by the 45-section-long poem in my new book *No Sign* to make a kind of trilogy.”

## The Armenian Element

Balakian has evinced from the very start of his career a special talent of turning even the smallest details of the Armenian experience into items of universal significance, let alone some of the magnificent yet fairly unknown Armenian cultural accomplishments.

Balakian confirmed that the Armenian heritage remains vital for him, asserting, “There continues to be an ongoing preoccupation with Armenian culture and memory and history in this book, as in my other books. As I continue to reencounter Armenian culture, my poems move in the new directions they do. I hope readers will find these both particular and universal. I continue to find rich layers of meaning as I explore the Armenian cultural realities.”

It is not just Armenia that remains an animating source of energy and inspiration for Balakian. His Armenian grandmother Nafina Aroosian — an Armenian Genocide survivor who was the only survivor along with her infant daughters of her large family in Diyarbakir — also returns to appear in several of the fruit and vegetable poems in section two of the book. She was the primary focus of his acclaimed memoir *Black Dog of Fate*. In wonderment, Balakian said, “She just keeps bringing me meaning. My grandmother continues to bring me to places. That seems to be a fact of my life.”

## Covid/Current Politics

As a writer, Balakian is attuned to all types of developments in society. He declared, “I am preoccupied with the fragility of the human species and the planet’s future.” The Covid pandemic affected him as a writer, and there are four poems in the first section of the book that touch upon it in one way or another. The rest of the poems were already finished in 2019 but he said he was able to slip these in at the end

of the publication process.

For Balakian as a writer, the pandemic actually had a positive effect. He explained, “I felt very fortunate to be protected during the pandemic, because my job continued at Colgate University. I taught my classes on Zoom, as all of us did, so I was home, without any worries about job stability, though I, like everyone, was worried about my health. With the lockdown starting in March 2020 a thousand distractions all of a sudden disappeared from my life. You are not running to airports, running out to dinner with friends, or having dinners at your house and hosting guests. All this social life and travel stopped. This of course is a wonderful condition for a writer.” He was able to focus, think and write more poems and prose essays.

It is not only disease, war and climate change, mentioned in his new poems, that affects the future of humans. “I think one thing that is particularly grueling right now is to experience — in a way that may be more extreme than I have ever experienced in my life — the fragility of democracy. We have experienced unprecedented assaults on democracy during the Trump administration and we are experiencing the breakdowns of some democratic countries around the world and reversions to authoritarianism. We are seeing this now. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is a brutal imperialist act of authoritarian aggression against a democratic country and it is devastating to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and also to democracy in a more global sense. It underscores this terrifying movement toward strongmen, authoritarianism and antidemocratic society,” exclaimed Balakian.

As a consequence, Balakian has tried to respond by becoming a founding member of the organization Writers for Democratic Action, which has around 3,000 members worldwide who are working hard for voter registration and in defense of democratic electoral procedures. He proclaimed, “It makes sense to be more activist in this way. I cherish the great parts of American democracy. You can’t take it for granted. You have to fight for it. It’s better to do what you can rather than sitting around, thinking this is so bad.”

*No Sign* is available through the University of Chicago Press website as well as through other major outlets.

# Turkish Court Keeps Philanthropist in Prison Ahead of Final Verdict in April

KAVALA, from page 19

decisions are legally binding for Turkey but in both instances continue to be ignored.

In February, the Council of Europe referred Kavala’s case to the ECHR for its legal opinion on whether Turkey had failed to meet its obligations to comply with the judgement, as it is widely expected to. The Strasbourg-based body has until April 19 to deliver its verdict. The outcome could see Turkey ending up alongside Russia, stripped of its membership, should Kavala not be freed.

An ever-defiant Erdogan told the Council of Europe to take a hike. “We do not recognize those who do not recognize our courts. We expect our own courts to be respected. We are sorry, but we will not respect those who do not respect us.”

In October, Erdogan ordered the ambassadors of 10 countries, including the United States, France and Germany, to be declared persona non grata after they publicly called for Kavala’s release. Though he rescinded the order, “There’s nothing to indicate that anything’s changed,” Buyum noted.

Sure enough, his interior minister, Suleyman Soyly, told the pro-government daily Sabah last week, “Those who seek Kavala’s release by manipulating the laws are also the murderers of children in Ukraine and Syria.”

“Soros is responsible for all children who die in war,” Soyly added.

The conflict in Ukraine could yet change the calculus in a positive way, or ought to, argues Emma Sinclair-Webb, Turkey director for Human Rights Watch. Erdogan boasts that Turkey is a “key country” that can talk to Russia and Ukraine alike. “I want to believe that in the context of Turkey presenting itself as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, Turkey would use this opportunity to clean up its act at the Council of Europe and to focus on ‘how we get back things we lost in terms of our international reputation’ and to demonstrate ‘how different we are from Russia’ instead of engaging in bad-faith tricks,” Sinclair-Webb told Al-Monitor.

“The prosecutor’s call for life imprisonment for Kavala and Yapici takes us exact-

ly in the opposite direction,” Sinclair-Webb added.

Indeed, there is growing worry among human rights defenders that Western governments will display lenience with Turkey as they compete with Moscow for Ankara’s affections in the midst of the Ukraine crisis. “The Council of Europe is a political body and makes political decisions. It may not want to alienate Turkey further, especially since expelling Russia,” said Ramazan Demir, a lawyer for Demirtas. “Turkey is very good at lobbying. It’s very influential,” Demir told Al-Monitor.

The EU began taking a softer approach after its 2016 accord with Ankara under which Turkey serves as a holding pen for millions of Syrian refugees in exchange for billions of euros. “The deal has been a bane for human rights in Turkey,” Buyum said. The EU’s “hypocrisy” has been fully exposed by the Ukraine crisis. “It’s proved that Europe is equipped to host millions of refugees provided they are of the right complexion,” Buyum said.

Marc Pierini, a former EU ambassador to

Ankara and a fellow at Carnegie Europe, contends that behind closed doors, the EU continues to signal its disapproval over Ankara’s thuggish behavior. Pierini reckons it is unlikely to change, and least of all before parliamentary and presidential elections that are due to be held in 2023 as Erdogan falls back on his anti-Western rhetoric to shore up his flagging poll numbers.

“The EU/Western position on this topic may currently look feeble because of uncertainty [over the war in Ukraine] and the need to keep Turkey as much on NATO’s side as possible. However, I think the EU’s rule-of-law anchor is here to stay,” Pierini said. It’s “hard to see how the EU would want to simultaneously apply tough standards to Russia and lenient ones to Turkey,” he added.

On April 15, Ankara has the opportunity to shame cynics when Kavala’s detention status comes up for monthly review and once again on April 22 when a final verdict in the case is handed down. The outcome will clarify which direction Turkey intends to take.