

# Blinken Tells Aliyev To Unblock Karabakh Road

WASHINGTON (RFE/RL) — US Secretary of State Antony Blinken phoned Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on Monday, January 23, to call for an immediate end to Azerbaijan’s six-week blockade of the sole road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and the outside world.

“I urged President Aliyev to immediately restore commercial traffic on the Lachin corridor,” Blinken tweeted after the call.

“Each day it remains blocked risks a humanitarian crisis and un-



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (Reuters photo)

dermines the steps that Armenia and Azerbaijan have taken towards peace,” he said. “The US is committed to supporting these efforts.”

A separate statement released by the US State Department said Blinken also “encouraged President Aliyev to redouble efforts in bilateral peace discussions with Armenia.”

Blinken spoke with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan by phone on January 18. He was reported to express “deep concern for the worsening humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

The United States has repeatedly called for the lifting of the blockade. Azerbaijan has also faced similar calls by the European Union and Russia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov raised the issue with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov in a January 17 phone call.

Baku has dismissed these appeals, saying that Azerbaijani government-backed activists who blocked the vital road on December 12 have the right to protest against “illegal” mining operations in Karabakh.

Armenia maintains that the blockade constitutes a gross violation of the Russian-brokered

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The soldiers celebrating New Year’s Eve only a few weeks earlier

# Questions Unanswered After Armenian Soldiers’ Deaths

YEREVAN (Azatutyun/news.am) — The Armenian authorities continued to face tough questions from human rights activists and other critics on Friday, January 20, one day after 15 soldiers died at their military barracks destroyed by a major fire.

According to the Armenian Defense Ministry, the fire erupted early on Thursday at the makeshift barracks in a border village in eastern Gegharkunik province that housed 22 soldiers of an engineer-sapper company.

The soldiers who died were: Aram Manukyan, 20, from Lori; Volodya Nersisyan, 19, from Aragatsotn; Gor Martirosyan, 19, from Tavush; Rostom Asryan, 19, from Lori; Mushegh Hambarchyan, 19, from Ararat; Taron Gharibyan, 20, from Ararat; Pavlik Abazyan, 19, from Tavush; David Sargsyan, 19, from Aragatsotn; Hrachya Grigoryan, 19, from Yerevan; Narek Avagyan, 19, from Yerevan; Gagik Barseghyan,

19, from Kotayk; Misha Dumikyan, 19, from Lori; Hayk Kirakosyan, 19, from Armavir; Sergey Gevorgov, 19, from Ararat and Hamlet Davtyan, 19, from Gegharkunik.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Defense Minister Suren Papikyan said hours later that it was sparked by an officer who poured gasoline into a woodstove in breach of the military’s fire-safety rules.

Armenia’s chief military prosecutor, Grigor Elizbaryan, echoed that theory in an interview with Armenian Public Television aired on Thursday evening. But he said at the same time that forensic tests will determine whether the blaze was caused by gasoline or less flammable diesel.

Another junior military officer serving in the village insisted that no gasoline was stored in or just outside the two-room village house turned into the barracks.

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# TCA Continues Artsakh Crisis Aid Campaign

*How Much Longer Must the People of Artsakh Suffer?*

WATERTOWN — The Armenians of Artsakh have been suffering direly due to the Azerbaijani blockade since December 12. After over a month, though this humanitarian crisis worsens, nominal international efforts to lift the blockade have not yet changed anything. The Artsakh government has implemented a rationing regime and has appealed to Armenians throughout the world for help.

The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) of the United States and Canada has responded to that appeal and sent \$10,300 immediately. A letter of January 20 from Artsakh President Arayik Harutyunyan confirms that this amount was shared among 103 families of victims. The aid was sent by TCA directly into the bank accounts of individual families, enabling them to purchase necessities despite straitened circumstances.

see AID, page 20

# Panel Analyzes Global And Media Indifference To Artsakh Blockade

By Harry Kezelian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BELMONT, MA – On Saturday, January 21, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) hosted a virtual panel discussion to analyze why the current blockade of Artsakh has received such a tepid response in the Western media.

“The Blockade of Artsakh and Global Indifference.”

The four panelists were Prof. Bedross Der Matossian of the University of Nebraska, an expert on Ottoman and modern Middle East history; David L. Phillips, the director of the Program on Peace-Building and Rights at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights; Lara Setrakian, journalist and president

see PANEL, page 10

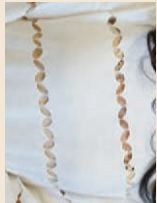
# Author Aslibekyan Wants to Get to the Heart of the Matter

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — Anush Aslibekyan is a multitalented woman, a prolific theater critic, short story writer and playwright who visited the US at the end of 2022 while her play “Mercedes and Zarouhi” appeared in New York. From 2008, Aslibekyan has been a researcher at the theater division of the Art Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, and a lecturer on foreign theater and dramaturgy at the Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinema from

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(ARAM ARKUN PHOTO)



Anush Aslibekyan



**TURKEY**  
**Hrant Dink Assassination Commemorated in Istanbul**



**VIRGINIA**  
**Prominent Genocide Scholar Prof. Roger Smith Dies**



**BULGARIA**  
**Manita Vartan: ‘Bulgaria’s Kim Kardashian’**







ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

## Six More Karabakh Patients Make it to Armenia With ICRC Mediation

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Six more patients were transferred from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on January 21.

Though several dozen patients with serious conditions have been transferred from Artsakh to Armenia, hundreds of others can't undergo surgery as operations have been suspended due to Azerbaijan's blocking of a key corridor connecting Karabakh to Armenia.

Eleven children are currently in neonatal and intensive care units of the children's hospital, while 11 adult patients are in the intensive care unit, four in critical condition.

## Russia Remains in Dialogue With Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kremlin Says

MOSCOW (Panorama.am) — Russia continues to work meticulously in its dialogue with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on January 24, according to TASS.

"As a party to the trilateral agreements and documents that were signed two years ago, Russia continues to fulfill its obligations and carries on with this painstaking and difficult work with both Armenia and Azerbaijan," he pointed out, when asked if the Kremlin supported US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's call for Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to immediately reopen the Lachin corridor to commercial traffic.

## Armenian Ombudswoman Resubmits Resignation

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia's Human Rights Defender Kristinne Grigoryan on Tuesday, January 24, resubmitted her resignation letter to the National Assembly, her office said in a statement. Grigoryan had tendered her resignation the previous day, citing plans to move on to another job.

"According to Article 13 (2) of the Constitutional Law on the Human Rights Defender of Armenia the powers of the Defender cease after the submission of the application for resignation by the latter, no later than if the application for resignation is resubmitted within a period of one week. The first application of the resignation was submitted on January 23, 2023," the ombudsperson's office said.

"According to the Constitutional Law on the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, in case of the premature termination of the powers of the Defender due to resignation, the Defender shall publish and present to the National Assembly a summary report on the activities carried out during the period between the submission of the regular annual report and the submission of the resignation."

## Another Armenian Opposition Lawmaker Faces Prosecution

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prosecutors asked the Armenian parliament on Monday, January 23, to allow them to indict another parliamentarian representing the main opposition Hayastan alliance.

In a letter to the National Assembly, Prosecutor-General Anna Vardapetyan claimed that Armen Charchyan, who is also a prominent surgeon, signed in February 2017 a "false" medical conclusion that prevented a criminal suspect's quick release from custody.

The suspect, Artur Sargsyan, drove his car through a police cordon to deliver food to armed members of a radical opposition group that had seized a police base in Yerevan in July 2016. Sargsyan and the gunmen surrendered to security forces after a two-week standoff that left three police officers dead.

Sargsyan was released on bail in March 2017 following a 25-day hunger strike that worsened his health condition. He died at a Yerevan hospital ten days later.

Charchyan was at the time a member of a commission empowered to recommend the release of detainees on health grounds. He testified during a subsequent inquiry that medical records submitted to the commission did not prove that the 49-year-old Sargsyan is suffering from a serious illness necessitating his release from jail. Vardapetyan claimed the opposite in her petition sent to the parliament.

Charchyan refused to comment on the move, saying that he has no "information" about the case. Still, one of his lawyers issued a statement saying that the charges sought by the prosecutors are "illegal."

The chief prosecutor similarly requested permission last week to prosecute Hayastan's parliamentary leader, Seyran Ohanian, on separate criminal charges. Both Ohanian and the opposition bloc headed by former President Robert Kocharyan rejected the charges as politically motivated.



Doctor and opposition deputy Armen Charchyan gestures to supporters after an appeals court's decision to allow his arrest, August 23, 2021



Opposition leader and former Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian speaks to journalists in 2021.

Artsvik Minasyan, another senior Hayastan lawmaker, said the move to indict

Charchyan also constitutes "political persecution." Minasyan claimed that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is thus trying to deflect public attention from his gross national security failings.

"They can bring any slanderous accusation against anyone," he said.

The National Assembly, which is controlled by Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, is expected to discuss lifting its two members' immunity from prosecution on February 7.

Charchyan, who used to run Yerevan's Izmirlian Medical Center, was arrested in June 2021 on other charges he also denies. He was freed six months later after Armenia's Constitutional Court effectively declared his and two other opposition lawmakers' arrest illegal.

## Pashinyan, Klaar Meet in Yerevan to Discuss European Union Mission, Karabakh

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Tuesday, January 24 met with Toivo Klaar, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia. The meeting was also attended by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia, Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin.

The sides discussed the situation in the region, as well as issues related to Armenia-EU cooperation.

The decision on the deployment of the new civilian mission of the European Union on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border was highlighted. The presence of the mission is expected to contribute to stability and security in the region. Reference was also made to the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh caused by the blocking of the Lachin Corridor.

Pashinyan emphasized that as a result of this, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is aggravating day by day, schools and kindergartens are not operating, healthcare institutions suffer a severe shortage of medicine and are facing serious problems. Besides, gas supply to Nagorno Karabakh has been suspended by Azerbaijan, there is also a problem of electricity supply. Emphasizing the targeted response of the international community to the created situation, Nikol Pashinyan emphasized with pleasure the



Toivo Klaar, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, and his delegation met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and members of his cabinet.

fact of the resolutions recently adopted by the European Parliament.

Klaar expressed concern over the blocking of the Lachin Corridor and stressed the need for the uninterrupted operation of the corridor. He noted that the EU is interested in ensuring stability and peace in the region and will continue to contribute to the solu-

tion of this problem.

The parties exchanged thoughts on the deployment process of the new civilian mission of the European Union, as well as on the course of the Armenia-EU joint programs in the direction of the institutional reforms implemented in the Republic of Armenia.



# Karabakh Gas Stations Closed Due to Blockade

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Four days after the latest disruption in supplies of natural gas from Armenia, authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh shut down on Tuesday, January 24, all compressed gas stations selling fuel used by most local cars.

In a statement, the authorities said the small volumes of gas remaining in Karabakh will now be supplied only to hospitals and other critical facilities using it for heating purposes.

Classes in Karabakh’s schools and colleges were suspended on January 19 for the same reason.

“Stepanakert is adapted to gas heaters,” Gayane Arustamyan, a 60-year-old resident of the Karabakh capital, said. “Homes, offices, schools and hospitals all depend on gas, and this [disruption] made people’s lives much harder.”

Azerbaijan halted the flow of gas to Karabakh from a pipeline passing through Azerbaijani-controlled territory at the weekend for the fourth time since Azerbaijani government-backed protesters blocked the Lachin corridor on December 12.

Armenia’s electricity supplies to Karabakh were similarly blocked by Baku on January 10, leading to daily power cuts in the Armenian-populated territory. The energy crisis compounded shortages of food, medicine and other essential items endured by local residents.

The shortages forced the Karabakh government to start rationing late last week some of the basic foodstuffs supplied by it to local shops. Every Karabakh resident received coupons allowing them to buy one liter of sunflower oil and one kilogram of rice, macaroni, buckwheat and sugar a month.

Marta, a Karabakh mother of three, said there is little else she and other locals can now buy without the coupons.

“The kids keep wanting [other items,] but we explain to them that [the end of the blockade] is just a matter of time,” she said.

Baku is facing growing international pressure to lift the blockade. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to “immediately restore commercial traffic on the Lachin corridor” in a phone call on Monday.

Aliyev reportedly rejected the appeal, defending the protesters demanding that the Azerbaijani government be allowed to inspect “illegal” copper mines in Karabakh. He again claimed that they did not

# Parliament Delegation Visits Qatar

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — During a three-day visit to the State of Qatar, President of the Armenian National Assembly Alen Simonyan had a meeting with Hassan bin Abdullah Al-Ghanim, chairman of the Majlis as-Shura (Parliament) on January 24.

The parties stressed the need for implementation of programs in the direction of the development of Armenian-Qatari interstate, in particular, inter-parliamentary cooperation.



Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan with Hassan bin Abdullah Al-Ghanim

the National Assembly, am ready to support the development of mutually beneficial cooperation between Armenia and Qatar for the benefit of our brotherly nations,” he added. Bin Abdullah Al-Ghanim stressed the need to establish peace in the region.

Thoughts were exchanged on economic cooperation. The Arab partner referred to the various wars taking place in the world, noting that wars waged on the basis of religious and racial discrimination and aggression are unacceptable. The parties noted that the parliaments have a lot to do in the fight against them.

Simonyan invited his counterpart to pay an official visit to Armenia.

Simonyan noted that the development of multilateral relations with the Arab world is one of the primary directions of Armenia’s foreign policy.

Referring to the importance of parliamentary diplomacy, the parties attached importance to the role and work of parliamentary friendship groups.

Simonyan presented details of the post-war situation and Azerbaijan’s claims on the territorial integrity of Armenia.

“I am convinced that the Armenia-Qatar cooperation has a great potential for development and expansion, and I, as the chairman of

# At PACE, MP Raises Spotlights Torture of Armenian Servicewomen by Azerbaijani Forces

STRASBOURG (Public Radio of Armenia) — After the recent aggression in September 2022 by Azerbaijan against Armenia, not only Armenian but also the international community was shocked by a horrible video spread in the Azerbaijani media outlets, Armenian MP Arusyak Julhakyants said at the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on January 24.

“Armenian women who fell into the hands of Azerbaijani Armed Forces fell victim to the utmost degrading and inhuman treatment. All of the female captives were stripped down to their breasts and left on the field of combat with their chests stripped naked,” she said.

“In one of the videos a completely nude woman’s body was placed in a trophy-like

manner above the rest of the nearby corpses. Her breasts and genitals were borne naked as a spectacle for the witnesses. The perpetrators left a message “YAŞMA” on her chest, which is a code name for the Azerbaijani specially trained forces, and I will skip all other horrible details,” the lawmaker added.

“The filming and circulating of such operations on media is done for public appraisal and pride. The perpetrators had evidently intended to leave it as a message to the observers, as these videos were seen not only by the Armenian people in general but also by the three children of this female soldier, causing unnecessary suffering and grief to them. And it is worth mentioning that the body of this female serviceperson had not been given to the Armenian side for

a long time,” Julhakyants added.

“The video I am talking about is a concrete evidence of a grave war crime cruelly committed by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces and attributable to Azerbaijan. The



MP Arusyak Julhakyants

severe violence of the perpetrators is beyond imagination. Moreover, these gruesome crimes are followed with actions demonstrating extreme cynicism based on the hatred against ethnic Armenians. This violence is not only gender based but also racial based,” the MP said.

She stressed that the outrage upon the personal dignity, constitutes a war crime under the International Criminal Law and the perpetrators must be punished, as the impunity causes new crimes.

“So it is necessary that the Assembly addresses the issue of sexual violence during armed conflicts,” she said.

# Questions Unanswered After Armenian Soldiers’ Deaths

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The official version of events was also questioned by some civil society members, opposition figures and other critics of Pashinian’s government. They said, in particular, Pashinian drew the conclusion before the completion of a criminal investigation launched by law-enforcement authorities.

“First of all, it is suspicious that only one theory, voiced by the prime minister and the defense minister, is being considered,” said Edgar Khachatryan, a human rights activist monitoring the military. “This leaves me with the impression that the investigation is being directed.”

Elizbaryan said in this regard that the investigators are open to considering other theories if they are backed up by concrete facts.

As of yet, the investigators have not charged or arrested anyone in connection with what was one of the deadliest accidents

ever registered in the ranks of the Armenian army. A spokesman for the Investigative Committee said they questioned about a dozen servicemen.

The army captain blamed for the fire was not among them. He is one of the three survivors seriously injured in the blaze and hospitalized as a result. Hospital officials said that he is still unable to give testimony.

A dozen other, more high-ranking officers were sacked on Thursday. They included Vahram Grigoryan, the commander of the army’s Second Corps stationed in Gegharkunik.

The critics also decried the poor conditions of the dead and injured soldiers’ service. They pointed out that the one-story house where they stayed had no emergency exit and that its windows had railings that made it extremely difficult for the soldiers to jump out of them to escape the fire.





ARMENIA

## INTERNATIONAL

## Khachanov Roots for Karabakh

MELBOURNE, Australia (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Russian-Armenian tennis star Karen Khachanov has explained his decision to write post-match messages in support of Karabakh (Artsakh) on cameras at the Australian Open.

He made it to the Australian Open Quarter Finals on Saturday, January 21 and once again wrote a message on the Channel 9 camera.

“Keep believing all the way until the end! Artsakh Stay Strong,” he wrote.

He said, “I am a citizen of Russia, I represent Russia, but on my father’s and mother’s side I have Armenian blood. I wanted to somehow support and give them faith and strength,” the player said.

## Foreign Minister Meets EP Official

BRUSSELS (Public Radio of Armenia) — Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan had a meeting with Andrey Kovatchev, the European Parliament’s standing rapporteur on Armenia on January 24.

The sides touched upon the situation in Karabakh resulting from Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

## Karabakh President Briefs Paris Mayor on Humanitarian Catastrophe

PARIS (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) President Arayik Harutyunyan had a telephone conversation with Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo on Tuesday, January 24, he revealed.

The two focused on the situation in Karabakh amid Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

“I weighed in on the causes and consequences of the humanitarian catastrophe in detail, and the clear assessments and actions by the international community necessary for overcoming [the situation],” Harutyunyan said. “Anne Hidalgo expressed her solidarity and support to the people of Artsakh, assuring that they will increase their consistent efforts aimed at defusing the situation,” he added.

## Finland Calls for ‘Time-out’ In Heated NATO Talks

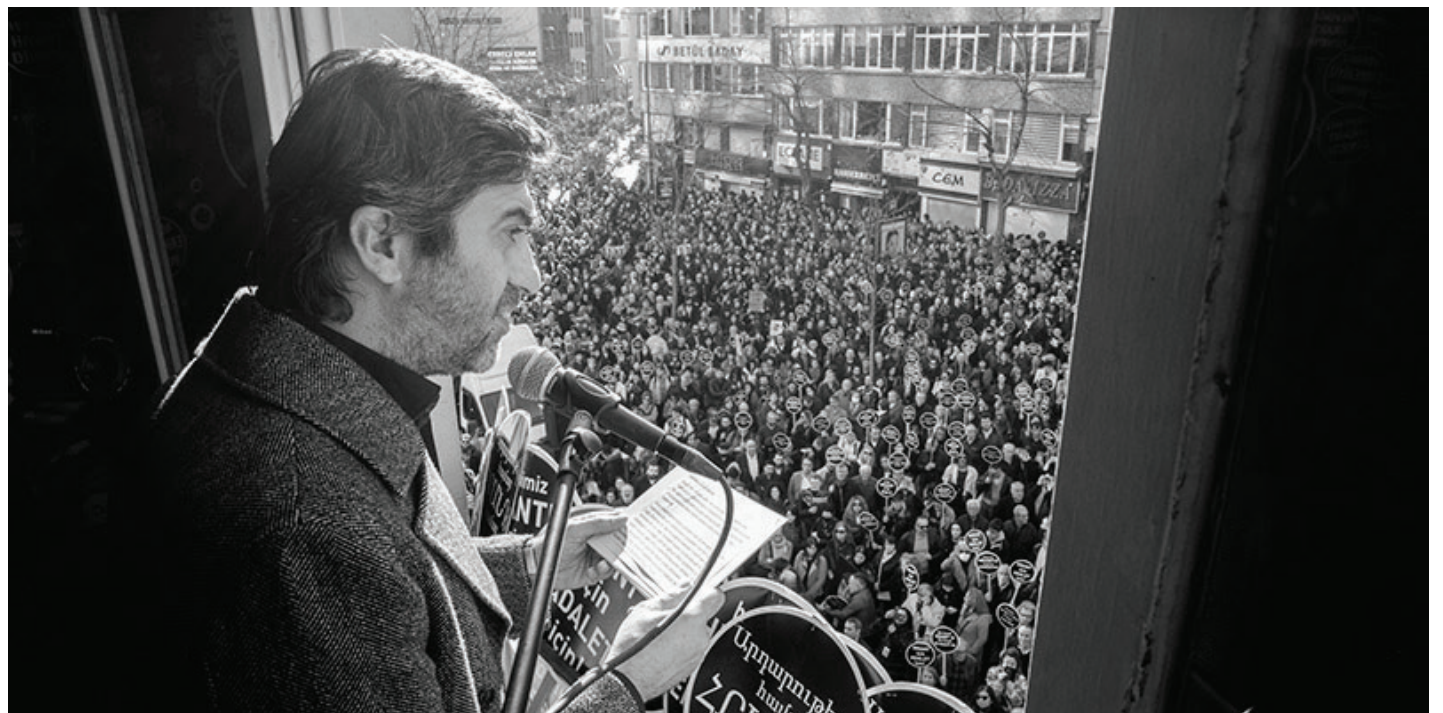
HELSINKI (BBC) — A “time-out” is needed in Finland and Sweden’s talks with Turkey about joining NATO, Helsinki’s Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said on January 24.

A series of protests in Sweden, including the burning of a *Quran*, have angered Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in recent days.

Turkey, a member of NATO, can block applications to join.

Haavisto said that the demonstrations had clearly put “brake on the progress” of the negotiations.

Turkey said the Swedish government’s decision not to prevent Rasmus Paludan, a politician from the Danish far-right Stram Kurs (Hard Line) party, from burning a copy of Islam’s holy book in public was “completely unacceptable.”



Emin Alper (Photo: Kenan Özcan)

## Dink Assassination Anniversary Commemorated in Istanbul

ISTANBUL — On Thursday, January 19, the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink was commemorated in front of the Sebat Building which used to house the office of the Agos newspaper. In addition to the gathering in front of the Sebat Building, thousands of viewers from outside Istanbul were able to participate in the commemoration through the live broadcast in English and Turkish.

The 2022 International Hrant Dink Award laureate Shaharзад Akbar sent a message where she touched upon the unrelenting struggle the women of Afghanistan and Iran face and put up against oppression, injustice and misogyny.

Bircan Yorulmaz of the Friends of Hrant, who was wrongly incarcerated for two years and was released in November greeted all of Dink’s friends who are imprisoned for wanting an equal, free, just, democratic and peaceful world and country. Yorulmaz read the letter sent from the Bakırköy Prison by Çiğdem Mater, imprisoned since April under the Gezi Trials. In her message, Mater said “We are here in the hope of the days when we will be able to face the past and give everyone their due.”

The main speaker was award-winning filmmaker Emin Alper who spoke about what it means to be a minority in Turkey.

Alper stressed that humanity’s struggle under oppressors had to change and that this change was only possible through solidarity.

He said, in part, “If we seek justice, if we want those who killed Hrant to be punished, not only the shooters but also the instigators, not only the instigators but also the provocateurs, the masterminds, those who instill enmity and hatred; if the blood of

government to rewrite this story. Because a person in solidarity is not defenseless. If the woman who is brutally murdered by her husband or lover is not alone, if the Kurdish or Syrian who is lynched, the Armenian who is murdered, the Roma who is subjected to discrimination, the LGBTI individuals whose right to live the life they want as they want it is taken away are not alone, then we are not defenseless. We stand ready



Crowds commemorate the grim anniversary (Photo: Kenan Özcan)

not only Hrant but also that of thousands of innocents who were murdered in this land still trickles among us, we must change this story. We must come together, stand shoulder to shoulder, side by side in solidarity against the violence of the majority and the

to ask for accountability for the violence against one and all of us.”

He added, “The story of humanity has to change, and we will change it. First by standing in solidarity and standing side by side, and then by addressing the majority.”

## Two Killed, Two Hospitalized in Istanbul Armenian Catholic Church Fire



Istanbul Surp Prgich Armenian Catholic Church fire

ISTANBUL (news.am, DailySabah.com) — Two people died and two others were taken to the hospital as a result of a fire that broke out in the lodgings area of the Surp Pırgıç (Prgich) [Holy Savior] Armenian Catholic Church in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, on Monday, January 24, at around 9:45 p.m., according to Turkish NTV.

Firefighters on the scene managed to put out the fire after four hours with difficulty. The rescuers reported two dead. Two others were hospitalized due to smoke inhalation, and four additional people were evacuated.

Beyoğlu District Governor Mustafa Demirelli, who arrived after receiving information about the firefighters’ efforts, shared that fire at Surp Pırgıç Armenian Catholic Church’s lodging broke out for unknown reasons, adding, “Our fire brigade started fire extinguishing efforts quickly. As of now, our firefighters are working on cooling.”

The spiritual leader of the Armenian Catholic Community of Turkey, Archbishop Levon Zekyan, also came to the region where the incident took place. (See mirrorspectator.com for video.)



INTERNATIONAL

# Blinken Tells Aliyev to Unblock Karabakh Road

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agreement that stopped the 2020 war in Karabakh. The agreement placed the Lachin corridor under the control of Russian peacekeepers and committed Baku to ensuring safe passage through it.

The authorities in Stepanakert reported at the weekend that Azerbaijan again blocked a pipeline that supplies natural gas from Armenia to Karabakh.

Armenia's supplies of electricity to Karabakh were similarly blocked by Baku on January 10, leading to daily power cuts in the Armenian-populated territory. The energy crisis compounded shortages of food, medicine and other essential items endured by local residents.

In an interview with BBC published by his office on Monday, the Karabakh premier, Ruben Vardanyan, insisted that despite the severe hardship the Karabakh Armenians remain "very firm in our desire to live in our homeland."

**EU Parliament Also Urges End to Blockade**

The European Parliament on Thursday, January 19, urged Azerbaijan to "immediately reopen" the Lachin corridor, saying the continuing blockade of the sole road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia violates a Russian-brokered ceasefire that stopped the 2020 war.

A resolution adopted by the parliament deplores the "tragic humanitarian consequences of the blockade" which it says were aggravated by "Azerbaijan's disruption of the natural gas supply to Na-

gorno-Karabakh."

The resolution also condemns the "inaction" of Russian peacekeeping forces in Karabakh that are supposed to control the Lachin corridor. It says that "their replacement with [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] OSCE international peacekeepers, under a UN mandate, should be negotiated urgently."

The European Union's legislature added that the EU should do more to "ensure that the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh are no longer held hostage by Baku's activism, Russia's destructive role and the Minsk Group's inactivity."

The EU as well as the United States and Russia have repeatedly called for the reopening of Karabakh's land link with Armenia since it was blocked by Azerbai-

jani government-backed protesters on December 12. Azerbaijan has dismissed such calls, saying that the protesters have the right to demand that Baku be allowed to inspect "illegal" mining in Karabakh.

The 2020 truce accord placed the corridor under the control of Russian peacekeeping forces and committed Azerbaijan to guarantee safe passage through it, a fact emphasized by the European Parliament.

Meanwhile, the Karabakh premier, Ruben Vardanyan, criticized the EU's recent oil and gas deals with Azerbaijan, saying that the 27-nation bloc thus "accepts the authoritarian regime" in Baku. In an interview with the France 24 TV channel cited by his office, Vardanyan said the EU should instead pressure Baku to lift the blockade.

# Istanbul Armenian Patriarch Sahak II Visits Jerusalem

JERUSALEM — Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Sahak II Masalyan, together with priests and pilgrims from Istanbul, are visiting the Holy Land on a special pilgrimage. It is the patriarch's first official visit to Jerusalem since he was elected patriarch.

The members of the patriarchal entourage, Fr. Hovagim Seropian, manager of the Publication Department; Fr. Kasbar Garabedian, pastor of St. Mary Patriarchal Cathedral; Archpriest Fr. Krikor Damadian, Patriarchal Vicar; Fr. Shirvan Murzian, Staff-bearer; Fr. Natan Arabian, Fr. Nerses Ayyazian and Fr. Melkon Pinarcian arrived in Jerusalem. The members of the Armash Choir of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul and many pilgrims from Istanbul, Armenia, USA and elsewhere already arrived in Jerusalem.

Masalyan arrived in Israel on October 17 and was greeted upon his arrival by Very. Rev. Goryun Baghdasarian, Chancellor of

the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. At 1:30 p.m., a large crowd of clergymen, pilgrims and people gathered in front of the Jaffa Gate. Representatives of the sister churches participated in the welcoming ceremony, including a bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church, members of the Coptic Church and the Vicar General of Latin Patriarchate, as well as the Armenian ambassador of Jerusalem and Armenian scouts.

In front of the Jaffa Gate, Archbishop Sevan Gharibian, the Grand Sacristan of the Armenian Patriarchate, welcomed the patriarch. The Brotherhood of St. James, with the performance of the scouts and applause of the pilgrims, accompanied the patriarch in procession from Jaffa Gate to the Armenian Monastery of St. James.

A "hrashapar" service was held in St. James Armenian Cathedral of Jerusalem in honor of the patriarch, who entered the cathedral and offered his first prayer in the

St. James Chapel.

At the end of the ceremony, Gharibian delivered a speech on behalf of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the brotherhood, expressing satisfaction for the fact that the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul came to Jerusalem to encourage

He emphasized that this scene is the glory of the Armenian Church and its people, because the Armenian Church has equal rights in the Holy Jerusalem like other traditional churches. Few people in the world know that there is a special congregation here, each member of which has dedicated



Patriarch Sahak II, fourth from left



Patriarch Sahak II, rear center

# CCAF Co-presidents Received By French President Macron

By Jean Eckian

PARIS — On Monday, January 23, the co-chairs of the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations of France (CCAF), Ara Toranian and Mourad Papazian were received by the President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace.

The representatives of the 500,000 Ar-

menians in France discussed the dramatic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh which has been under blockade by Azerbaijan since December 12 and the threats to the territorial integrity of Armenia. The co-chairs welcomed the attention given to them by Emmanuel Macron and hoped that France will play an increasingly active role in the responsibility of protecting the population of Nagorno-Karabakh.



From left, Ara Toranian, Emmanuel Macron, Mourad Papazian

the congregation of Holy Jerusalem these days.

Patriarch Sahak II delivered his first message at St. James in Jerusalem, declaring that he is happy to be in Jerusalem. He stated that Jerusalem has a special meaning for him, as he lived and served here as a congregation member for three years. He expressed his special thanks to Archbishop Nourhan I Manougian, Patriarch of Armenian Jerusalem, under whose direction the ceremony was held.

his life to the preservation of the old traditional rights of our Church inside the holy places.

After the welcoming ceremony, Sahak II was accompanied to the Patriarchate reception hall, where he was greeted by Manougian. After a short prayer, the two patriarchs received the greetings of the guests, pilgrims and the community of Armenian Jerusalem. As a souvenir of his visit, Masalyan presented a precious glass vase to the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Nagorno-Karabakh Blockade: Can (and Will) Europe Act?

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — In the wake of growing protest actions by human rights groups in several European countries, public awareness of the dimensions and dangers inherent in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has been increasing. Major press organs and prominent thinktanks are expanding discussion of the dramatic humanitarian crisis caused by the continuing blockade of the Lachin corridor. One webinar on January 18 sponsored by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the Green Party, attracted 300 participants. Political forces are responding, albeit slowly and cautiously, with parliamentary resolutions as well as concrete plans for sending representatives to the crisis area.

In Germany, where the political debate remains focused on the war in Ukraine, the government faces massive pressure to expand its military commitments with Leopard tanks. That considered, the office of Chancellor Olaf Scholz replied to human rights advocate Tessa Hofmann's [call for urgent action](#), including an international humanitarian airlift for Artsakh. In a letter on January 20, Scholz's office assured her "that the federal government is following the situation in Armenia very closely and shares your concern about the continuing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the difficult relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan." The German government's position states that both sides should engage "in substantial negotiations for a peaceful and durable settlement of the conflict." In addition, Berlin supports the EU's mediation efforts, undertaken by President of the European Council Charles Michel and Special Emissary for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar, and promotes a complete prisoner exchange and independent investigation of war crimes.

## Words or Actions

Well-meaning and carefully worded, to be sure. If the ball is in the court of the European Union, the question is: What can and will European political bodies do? On January 19, the European Parliament voted up a resolution "on the humanitarian consequences of the blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh." In its list of "whereases," it cites the Lachin corridor roadblock by "self-proclaimed environmentalists from Azerbaijan since 12 December 2022," which has "disrupted access to essential goods and services, including food, fuel and medication, for the 120 000 Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, effectively placing them under a blockade;" the resulting "severe humanitarian crisis, significantly affecting the most vulnerable populations," especially medical patients and separated families; and its further aggravation through "Azerbaijan's disruption of the natural gas supply to Nagorno-Karabakh, which left houses, hospitals and schools without heating."

In its blockade action, "Azerbaijan is breaching its international obligations under the trilateral ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020," to "guarantee the security of persons, vehicles and cargo moving along the corridor in both directions."

Considering the sum of these actions, which "set back the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan and undermine international confidence," the European Parliament (EP) "[d]eplores the tragic humanitarian consequences of the blockade ... [u]rges Azerbaijan to respect and implement" its November 2020 commitment and "immediately reopen the Lachin corridor..." The EP calls furthermore for "a comprehensive peace agreement, which must guarantee the rights and security of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population;" for Azerbaijan "to protect the rights of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and refrain from its inflammatory rhetoric that calls for discrimination against Armenians and urges Armenians to leave Nagorno-Karabakh." Azerbaijan should cease its disruption of "transport, energy and communication connections between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in future." Azerbaijan's "scapegoating of human rights defenders" is condemned, as is "the inaction of Russian 'peacekeepers'." The EP "considers that their replacement with OSCE international peacekeepers, under a UN mandate, should be negotiated urgently." Furthermore, international organizations must have unfettered access to Nagorno-Karabakh to conduct their work.

Concretely, the EP proposes a fact-finding mission, either of the United Nations or Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), "to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground," as well as unconditional resumption of negotiations as defined in the Helsinki Final Act.

The resolution minces no words regarding the role of Russia and the OSCE Minsk Group, urging the EU to intervene, to release Karabakh's population from being "hostage" to "Baku's activism, Russia's destructive role and the Minsk Group's inactivity." The resolution, as is standard procedure, is to be forwarded to all relevant European and member government bodies, as well as the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan. What they do with it, is another issue.

## Protest Encourages Dutch Parliament Resolution Calling on Azerbaijan to Open Lachin Corridor

THE HAGUE — A group of Dutch-Armenians kept a three-day silent watch with posters before the Second Chamber (Parliament) of the Netherlands in The Hague in rotating turns from January 17-19 from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day in close to freezing and windy weather.

The action was organized by the Federation of Armenian Organizations in The Netherlands (FAON). During the watch, some of the MP's joined the activists.

There were two motions by the parties in the Dutch Parliament (Second Chamber) on the Lachin humanitarian crisis: 1. To bring pressure upon Azerbaijan to open the corridor, and 2. To open an airlift to transport humanitarian aid to Artsakh. Almost all speakers emphasized the need for urgent action.

After the argumentations of Minister of Foreign Affairs Wopke Hoekstra, it was decided to take the first motion, i.e. to increase pressure on Azerbaijan, and to put the motion into action together with other European Union member states.

The second motion, on opening of humanitarian airlift, was not sustained. According to the minister, there are legal-technical problems which make the motion impractical at this stage. Besides, it has limited effect, as the real solution is the opening of corridor, for which The Netherlands would do its best.

On January 20, the Dutch Parliament adopted a resolution calling the Dutch government to increase pressure on Azerbaijan to open the Lachin corridor. The motion had been submitted by Don Ceder (Christian Union faction) and co-signed by

Agnes Mulder (Christian Democratic Appeal faction).

The motion states that the blockade of the only access road to Nagorno Karabakh continues and



Armenian protestors with Don Ceder, MP from CU (Christian Union, 3d from left) and Armenian priest Fr. Taron Tadevosyan (4th from the left)

that the humanitarian situation for the population of Nagorno Karabakh is deteriorating as a result thereof, that Azerbaijan has ignored calls to reopen the Lachin Corridor and that Russian peacekeepers do not fulfill the conditions of agreement between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation.

The motion asks the government to investigate, at a European level, how to increase the pressure on Azerbaijan to end the blockade and to involve like-minded EU member states in this process.

## Iranian National Front - Europe Calls on Azerbaijani Authorities to Reopen Lachin Corridor

THE HAGUE — This week the Iranian National Front – Europe, released a statement about the illegal Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin Corridor:

Since December 12, a number of Azerbaijani citizens who identified themselves as "environmental activists" have blocked the Lachin corridor, the only way to connect Artsakh (or Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed region between Azerbaijan and Armenia) with the outside world. The guarantee of free passage of the corridor is entrusted to Russian peacekeeping forces under a document signed on November 9, 2020 by Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, who appear to be unable to distance Azerbaijanis from the passage and free the route – or who, possibly at the behest of their higher authorities, do not desire to do this. The result is that the population of approximately 120,000 of the region, under a self-governing republic, are under siege and it is not possible to provide them with supplies, fuel, and humanitarian assistance. Every day there is worrying news about the status quo in the region, shops empty of goods, closed businesses, separated families, and children deprived of proper care.

The display of Azerbaijan's "environmental protesters" was so absurd that Aliyev was not able to persuade international public opinion, because how can we, in the name of environmental protection, escalate a humanitarian crisis of these dimensions and deprive a mass of people of the right to free movement, medical facilities, fuel supplies, etc.? Blockading a region and closing its connections to the outside world itself is a criminal act, and to do such an inhumane act with claims to protect the environment is not accepted in any civilized society.

It is even more absurd because, according to international environmental authorities, Azerbaijan itself is one of the most polluted countries in the world due to oil and gas exploration operations and extensive mineral activities. Moreover, no one has yet forgotten the use of phosphorous chemical weapons by the Baku army in the 44-day 2020 war against Artsakh with lasting destructive effects

on the environment and residents of the region. Now Aliyev is trying to blame "Russian peacekeepers," and Russia, of course, is not capable of confronting the Baku regime, which enjoys full Turkish support, because of the conflict in Ukraine. The fact is that behind the war actions and aggressions of the rulers of Baku and Moscow against Artsakh lie an ominous pan-Turkic and Russian plan to force Armenia to open the so-called "Zangezur corridor" through its territory, something about which they themselves now explicitly speak.

Calls by international authorities and leaders of countries, including UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, to open the passage have so far been ignored by Azerbaijan and Russia. It should be noted that when the issue was raised at the UN Security Council last December 20 and the Council was actually close to an agreement and a consensus to send international peacekeepers to Artsakh, Russia proposed unacceptable conditions which led to the collapse of the agreement. These behaviors have led Armenia to think about withdrawing from the Collective Security Treaty Organization which is under Russia's leadership.

It is worthwhile to remember that during the crisis of the blockade of Artsakh, a region with historical ties to and in the geostrategic sphere of Iran, the Islamic Republic has only made ineffective statements about the need to reopen the corridor, while in the event of a continuation of the status quo and Armenia's being forced to make concessions, Iran's strategic interests will also be compromised and the Caucasus region will fall completely out of Iran's sphere of influence.

[The National Front of Iran](#) - Europe condemns the criminal act of the Baku regime and its agents in closing the Lachin corridor and calls on the authorities of Baku to open the vital passageway connecting Artsakh to the outside world. It also calls on the Russian government to fulfill its international obligations, secure the free passage of the region's inhabitants and avoid aiding in the realization of the disastrous pan-Turkic plans.

(Executive Board of the National Front of Iran-Europe, 18 January 2023)



# Community News

## Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology Launches Advance Armenia Campaign with Boston, LA Events

YEREVAN — The Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST), is launching its 2023 global Advance Armenia campaign focused on driving support and engagement for programs to foster and accelerate the advancement of science and technological innovation in Armenia and beyond. The “Advance Armenia” Series will take place in Boston on March 2, and in Los Angeles on May 11. Funds raised will accelerate progress in two key programs of the foundation: the ADVANCE Grants program and Generation AI.

The Advance Armenia Series will be attended by Dr. Noubar Afeyan, founder and CEO, Flagship Pioneering, co-founder and chairman, Moderna. Inc. Also participating will be Dr. Ardem Patapoutian, 2021 Nobel Prize Laureate in Physiology or Medicine, and Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Professor, Scripps Research as the Los Angeles gala keynote speaker.

“We founded the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST) with the belief that Armenia’s prosperity and sustainable future lie in the advancement of science and technology,” said Afeyan. “Since its inception, FAST has taken steps to help transform the education, science, and technology ecosystem in Armenia, including through its ADVANCE STEM grant program, which is actively bringing top-notch STEM expertise to elevate Armenia as a technological and scientific hub.”

The ADVANCE Grants Program connects international scientists with local researchers in Armenia to form research groups and work jointly on globally competitive research projects in computer vision, drug discovery, materials science, and vine bioinformatics. FAST and its partners ensure comprehensive long-term institutional and financial support for local researchers, capacity-building activities, travel costs, laboratory supporting materials, publications, patent-related costs, and other expenses. In 2022, the program was scaled thanks to the generous contributions of the FAST supporters.

Generation AI is a new program launched by FAST in 2022 to create an educational and professional pipeline for AI researchers and innovators in Armenia. The program is designed in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of the Republic of Armenia and will be integrated into the public education system, first as a pilot project and then scaled at the national level. The inaugural Generation AI pilot program, “Generation AI: High School,” commences in September 2023 in 10 schools in Yerevan and other regions of Armenia, with an objective to eventually expand to all high schools. Hundreds of high school students will have opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skills in math, programming, and the foundations of AI.

see FAST, page 11



The Armenian Christmas and water blessing service at St. Vartan Cathedral (PHOTO: Diran Jebejian)

## St. Vartan Cathedral Celebrates Nativity

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

The Armenian Christmas service at New York City’s St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral each January 6 is one of the most spiritually moving and greatly anticipated events in the liturgical calendar. Known as the Theophany (Asdvadzahaydnoutiun), or the Feast of the Birth and Manifestation of Jesus Christ, it celebrates the revelation of God to mankind through the blessed nativity.

The Armenian Church steadfastly remains true to the early traditions of Christianity by also observing the baptism of Jesus Christ on this day, holding a special “Blessing of Water” ceremony following the Divine Liturgy.

For 2023, notably, the Christmas service provided further inspiration to the faithful, with a new Diocesan Primate, the Very Rev. Mesrop Parsamyan, presiding over the ceremony for the first time. It was only last July that a severe automobile accident left him gravely injured. With the care of a highly skilled medical team, Parsamyan has regained his mobility through surgeries and extensive physical rehabilitation.

To help allay the physical demands of the more than two-hour service, however, the Rev. Fr. Davit Karamyan, Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral, acted as celebrant, with Parsamyan delivering the homily and leading the Blessing of Water ceremony.

From the moment the curtain drew back to reveal Parsamyan’s public appearance on the altar after nearly six months, a collective feeling of thankfulness and elation was palpable throughout the sanctuary. As he turned to face the faithful, the congregation responded with a heartfelt round of welcoming applause in a moment of profound emotion. Parsamyan then began his homily with the greeting *Krisdos dzunav yev haydnetsav!* (Christ is born and revealed!), to which the faithful responded with *Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Krisdosi!* (Blessed is the revelation of Christ!).

“Two weeks ago, I could not imagine standing in front of you to deliver this homily, but we are a people who believe in miracles,” he said with gratitude as he alluded to his injuries. “I glorify our Heavenly Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for granting me the blessing of being able to celebrate and pray the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ with you.”

Parsamyan then referenced the story of Christ’s birth as foretold by the prophet Isaiah to illustrate the deeper reality of the relationship we have with God. “The words of the evangelist Matthew assure us that everything that happened more than 2,000 years ago was ordained by God, who chose to enter this world in a manner known only to a few,” he explained. “In that tender scene of the Nativity, where God enters the world as a sweet baby laying in a manger to reveal Himself to mankind, we see that He is truly with His creation.”

The Primate further underscored the fact that the ancient prophecy “God is with us” continues to be fulfilled today in our own time, teaching the importance of forgiveness, mercy, patience, humility, and love, as well as the promise of Salvation through Christ. He reminded the faithful that the extremely difficult situation faced by our brothers and sisters in Armenia and Artsakh requires our prayers, faith and conviction. “We are never helpless, powerless or alone in this world, for God is with us and we are with Him.”

### Godfather of the Cross

As is its tradition, the Armenian Church designates a Godfather of the Cross for the Christmas Water Blessing ceremony. This year the honor was bestowed upon Dr. Lawrence Najarian, a distinguished ophthalmologist and president of the Armenian American Health Professionals Organization (AAHPO), who stood as witness to the ceremonial remembrance of Christ’s baptism. At the beginning of the blessing, Fr. Parsamyan expressed sincere appreciation to Najarian and AAHPO for assisting the Diocese, and guiding the entire Armenian community, throughout the pandemic to ensure the safe participation of the faithful in church services.

see NATIVITY, page 11

## AYF Protest in Washington Calls For Opening Lachin Corridor

By Haykaram Nahapetyan  
Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

WASHINGTON —The Armenian Youth Federation (AYF)’s Washington’s Ani chapter organized a protest in front of the White House on Saturday, January 21. Concerned with the ongoing blockade against Artsakh and the severe humanitarian crisis, the Armenian-American young activists and other participants (including a certain number of non-Armenians) called on President Joseph Biden to “Stop a second Genocide.”

“President Biden, Members of Congress and diplomatic corps, do not allow human rights abusers to use our banks, do not allow oligarchs



and warmongers access to funds, do not allow murderers walk our streets,” exclaimed Matt Girardi, AYF DC Chapter member. Girardi called for sanctions against Azerbaijani officials.

US policymakers were urged to act decisively to open the Berdzor-Lachin corridor that has been blocked, preventing the dispatch of supplies to Artsakh for over one month. The participants noted, “America is at its best when it lives up to its values. And we are better when turning a blind eye to the onset of a humanitarian catastrophe.” The participants chanted, “We are Artsakh strong,” “We are Artsakh” and other slogans. This was the second in the series of protests by the AYF. Earlier, they blocked 34th street preventing traffic in and out of the Embassy of Azerbaijan. On February 2, a protest will take place on Capitol Hill.

The video segment at mirrorspectator.com features episodes of the Saturday protest in front of the White House.







## OBITUARY

# Prof. Roger Smith

## Prominent Genocide Scholar, Chair of Zoryan Institute

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — Prof. Roger W. Smith, Chair of the Academic Board of Zoryan Institute (2004-2022) and longtime Program Director of the Institute's annual Genocide and Human Rights University Program (GHRUP), died at the age of 86 on November 28, 2022.

Throughout his distinguished career, Roger Smith wrote extensively on the nature, language, history, and denial of genocide. He was also involved in the establishment and oversight of the Institute's Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal, which later evolved into the present-day Genocide Studies International (GSI), and served as a longtime founding co-editor.

In his capacity as course director for the Zoryan Institute's GHRUP, Prof. Smith was instrumental in the program's development and long-term success. Prof. Smith's

passion for the program was very evident, and year after year he deservedly earned the respect and affection of many emerging genocide scholars. He often became a mentor and friend to many graduate students and young scholars around the world, including many students from Armenia.

In 2008, Smith was awarded the Movses Khorenatsi Medal in Armenia for "significant contribution to the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide." This is the highest award of the Republic of Armenia, which is awarded to individuals for their outstanding achievements in the fields of culture, art, literature, education, social sciences and sports. Smith was also awarded the Doctor of Letter Degree by Saint Andrews University in 2018 by the International Council on the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem in recognition of his contributions to geno-



cide studies and political theory.

Smith was an outstanding scholar, a pioneer of comparative genocide, and genocide denial studies, and a great friend of the Armenian nation. He served as Professor Emeritus of Government at the College of William and Mary in Virginia and taught courses on political theory. He was a founding member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and served

as the President of the Association from 1997-1999.

In recognition of his lifetime of commitment to comparative genocide studies and genocide denial, and his love and dedication to the Institute's Genocide and Human Rights University Program, which he often referred to as a "utopia", the Zoryan Institute will be offering an annual Roger W. Smith Memorial Prize in his memory. This prize of \$1,000 will be awarded to one deserving graduate of the program who has demonstrated a strong commitment to continuing their studies and work in the field of genocide studies. The recipient will be selected by faculty.

Roger W. Smith is survived by his immediate family: Martha (wife), David (son), Amy (daughter-in-law), and Louisa (daughter).

A memorial service for Roger Smith is expected to be held in Spring 2023. To send condolences to the Smith family, contact the Zoryan Institute's Deputy Executive Director, Megan Reid, for more information at [mreid@zoryaninstitute.org](mailto:mreid@zoryaninstitute.org).

# Haig Didizian

## Descendent of Genocide Survivors, Benefactor of Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin

LONDON — Haig Didizian: a highly respected, visionary figure of the worldwide Armenian community, passed away on January 16, in London, United Kingdom. He was 93.

Didizian was a leading benefactor of the Armenian Church and its great centers in the Middle East, Europe, America, and in our homeland itself — especially at the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin. His generosity always supported a profound moral vision, which sought to shape the Armenian Church not only in our time, but for the generations yet to come.

He and his wife, Elza, left a lasting impression on the Eastern Diocese, inspiring meaningful events at St. Vartan Cathedral, and giving a new birth, and a secure foundation, to St. Nersess Seminary.

Haig's efforts on behalf of Armenia and Artsakh were many and varied. But the creation of the "His Holiness Karekin I Theological Center" was his signature, matchless endeavor. It was born out of the lifelong friendship between Haig and the late Catholicos of All Armenians. Haig supported His Holiness Karekin I with brotherly loyalty in life, and was fiercely determined to preserve and advance the late leader's legacy in the years after his passing.

He represented the Armenian people as godfather of the muron blessing ceremony at Holy Echmiadzin, during the Genocide centennial in 2015.

In a condolence letter to the family, Primate Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) wrote: "Naturally, one could hardly picture Haig without envisioning him surrounded by his family, expressions of pride and mutual love beaming off the faces of Haig and Elza, their children and grandchildren. Haig's passing this week closes a chapter in the history of this distinguished family, in the lives of his many friends and loved ones, and indeed in the story of our community. But we can be consoled in the knowledge that he will now be reunited

with departed loved ones in our Lord Jesus' peaceful and just kingdom."

In addition to his wife Elza, he leaves their children Hagop, Christopher, and Marly.

Haig Hagop Didizian was born in 1930 in Jerusalem into a family that had fled the Armenian Genocide.

As a boy, Haig began his education at Sts. Tarkmanchatz School of Jerusalem until the age of 8 and then went on to St. George's British School in Jerusalem. In 1947 he attended the American University of Beirut because of the unstable political situation in the region. Six months later, his parents, two brothers and three sisters joined him in Beirut. It was a very hard time for the family, having to be uprooted once more and leave everything behind.

In 1952, Haig joined his father in the recycled clothing business, which had been established by his father and great-uncle in 1923. His natural instinct, discipline and hard, meticulous work allowed him to expand the business in the second half of the '60s into military clothing and footwear which were supplied to various governments.

Haig married Elza Azirian in 1964 and they had three children. Due to the civil war in Lebanon, they moved to Switzerland in 1975 and a new head office was established in Greece. In 1976 the family moved to London, England, where they permanently settled.

In the late 1960s, Haig began diversifying into real estate in Lebanon, the United States, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and Australia. In the 1980s, 1990s and beyond, Haig's business continued to grow and further diversified into the manufacturing and distribution of food products. The success that Haig's innate qualities brought about allowed him to give back to the community. He began in the '60s by helping orphans, poor children, and poor families. He remembers donating two dialyses machines to a hospital in Jerusalem. For Haig, giving was more satisfying than receiving.

One of the people he loved, respected, and admired most was His Holiness Karekin I, of blessed memory. Their first encounter was at Haig's summer house in Lebanon in 1965. Haig was only too delighted to accommodate His Holiness' wishes including

his last wish of all, which was to have his works published and for a Theological Center to be built.

To honor the memory of His Holiness Karekin I and to realize his wishes, Haig and Elza commissioned and sponsored a series of multi-volume "Karekin I Studies". Some 17 books covering his life and works have been published, all of which have been distributed to religious educational centers, universities, and libraries worldwide, dignitaries and friends. It is certain whoever reads them, appreciates them and benefits from them. Vehapar was a scholar, philosopher, and a theologian.

As for Karekin I's wish for a theological center, Haig and Elza set out upon their mission and undertook the building of two theological centers aimed at furthering the education of the clergy. The first His Holiness Karekin I Educational Center was built in Echmiadzin and was opened by Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, in September 2015.

The second theological is the St. Nersess Karekin I Theological Center in Armonk, NYk. The St. Hagop Chapel was also built in memory of Haig Didizian's parents.

For many years, Haig helped the Armenian community worldwide by promoting the Armenian Church and the Armenian language and culture so that they remain alive for generations to come. Other projects undertaken by Haig and his family

have included the task of safekeeping St. Gregory Armenian Church in Singapore and the construction of a Scout Association House for young Armenians in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 2013 Haig went on an exploratory visit with other eager Armenians to Armanitola in Dhaka, Bangladesh where the group was able to help save and preserve The Armenian Apostolic Church of Holy Resurrection built in 1781. This was later followed by another exploratory visit, under the auspices and leadership of His Holiness Karekin II, this time to Yangon, Myanmar where the group was able to save the Armenian Apostolic Church of St. John the Baptist, the oldest surviving Church in Yangon built by the Armenian community in 1862.

Furthermore, the couple supported numerous organizations, mostly Armenian, by participating and helping the cause of the Armenian community. They were benefactors in the "Yerevan – My Love" project, a new center opened in 2017, addressing the social, educational, and cultural treatment of children with physical disabilities, refugee and displaced children. In 2020, Haig and Elza Didizian donated to the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin to assist those in need due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The funeral will place on Saturday, January 28, at 11 a.m., at St Yeghiche Armenian Church in London. Burial will be private.

# Rose (Karadizian) Tashian

HUDSON, Mass. — Rose (Karadizian) Tashian of Hudson, formerly of Waltham, died on January 15, 2023. She was the wife of Albert Tashian; mother of Gary Tashian and his wife Lisa of Kissimmee, Fla., Robin Generoso and her husband John of Sudbury, and Mark Tashian and his wife Kelly of Framingham and grandmother of Nicole, Sydney, Andrew, Adam, Kylie and Matthew.

A Celebration of Life Memorial Service was held at the First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Avenue, Belmont, on Friday, January 27.

At the request of the family, cemetery services are private.





COMMUNITY NEWS



# Sponsor A Teacher in Armenia and Six Villages in Artsakh

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2001, THE TCA SPONSOR A TEACHER PROGRAM HAS RAISED \$ 828,060 AND REACHED OUT TO 7,253 TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF IN ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH.

The following is the list of donors in 2022 state by state.

First Name/Last Name	State	US\$	First Name/Last Name	State	US\$
Dr. Sarkis Nazarian	AR	500	Mark & Maral Mamassian	MI	75
Ara & Sona Babayan	CA	100	Susan Kadian Gopigian	MI	1000
Zarouhi Der Mugrdechian	CA	50	Suzanne Hagopian	MI	200
Hagop Azarian	CA	150	Detroit Armenian Womens Club	MI	750
Archie & Silva Andonian	CA	1000	James Derian	MI	150
Peter Raffi Dorian	CA	100	Howard & Catherine Atesian	MI	1000
Dr. Heratch Doumanian	CA	600	Daren Paul Atesian	MI	2500
Vasken Demirjian	CA	200	Dr. & Mrs. Vinod Puri	MI	500
Marie-Louise Yengoyan	CA	100	Mr. & Mrs. Edward Korkoian	MI	200
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Kaspar H. Gazarian	CA	200	Mrs. Emma Sogoyan	MI	200
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Michael Ohanian	FL	2000	Elizabeth Aprahamian	MI	250
Oscar Tatosian Family	IL	500	Mr. & Mrs. Edmond Megerian	MI	50
Karen Demirdjian	IL	400	TCA Detroit Chapter	MI	200
Mariam Tatosian	IL	200	Armine & Thomas Webb	NC	150
Anna Marie Norehad	IL	200	Rose Sielian Theriault	NH	400
Dr. Sam Mikaelian	IL	200	Vahan Sarkisian	NH	100
Vahe Derian	IL	400	Margaret A. Aranosian Gattis	NH	400
Sonya & Ara Hacet	KY	1,000	Takoush & Arshag Tarpinian	NJ	200
Mel & Judy Menasian	MA	150	Alice Emirzayan Costes	NY	250
Silvia A. Migridichian	MA	100	Richard N. Aurslanian	OH	100
Sonia Iskandarian	MA	600	Michael S. & Michelle Norehad	OH	100
Lucille Ajemian	MA	100	Anonymous	OH	7,000
Nancy R. Kolligian	MA	400	Mayis Seapan	PA	200
Zareh Y. Maserejian	MA	100	Daniel D. & Ludmila Sahakian	PA	40
Anahid & Mardiros Aurelian	MA	100	Linda S. Babikian	PA	200
Vahe & Anni Bedian	MA	400	Nerces & Tanya Bardakjian	PA	200
Jean Shapazian	MA	100	Agnes Killabian	RI	100
Margrit Atinizian	MA	1,000	Jacob & Ruth Hapootian	RI	400
Dr. & Mrs. Nishan Goudsouzian	MA	250	Karen & Mihran Aroian	TX	25
Aline & Nicolas Knaian	MA	200	Jack Chelebian	TX	100
Leon Charkoudian	MA	200	Sirop & Maro Bedrosian	TX	500
Hripsime & Harry Parsekian	MA	400	Sarkis A.Satian	VA	600
Carolyn Atinizian	MA	200	Alis Marachelian	VA	500
John Mirak Foundation	MA	1000	Vergine Barsoumian	VA	100
RoxanneEtmekjian	MA	100	Tomas Azarian	VT	100
Dr. Myron Allukian	MA	100	Claire Mangasarian	WI	200
Aram Adourian	MA	400	Arshagouhi Ohanian	WI	50
Dr. & Mrs. Charles and Manoushag Garabedian	MA	700			

# Sera Aintablian Remembered at Hovsepien School

PASADENA, Calif. — Since Friday, January 20 would have marked St. Gregory A. & M. Hovsepien School alumna Sera Aintablian’s 21st birthday, students, faculty, and Sera’s immediate family and friends gathered in the hallway of legacy to remember her bright spirit by dedicating an element on the school’s commemorative periodic table. Aintablian, then a student at the University of California, Los Angeles, died in a horrific [car crash](#) last March.

Fr. Sarkis Petoyan, the parish priest of St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, reminded the school community of Sera’s dedication to her faith. He read and elaborated on the departed scholar’s very own words engraved on her plaque: “Jesus did say that His followers should be the light of this world. Troubles and drawbacks have tested many of our faith; however, I have learned to entrust all my difficulties to God and to believe firmly in His power. He has better in store for

all of us if we continuously follow His word. I’ve learned to live a Godly life, to LOVE everyone. Though I am IN the world, I have decided not to be OF the world.” Fr. Sarkis spoke directly to the middle school students and emphasized the importance of being the light. He reminded them to carry Sera’s spiritual torch.

Shahé Mankerian, the principal of Hovsepien School, reminisced the days when Sera was a student in middle school. He remembered her ever-present smile, even during hardships. He also directed everyone’s attention to the element Strontium (Sr), the actual element dedicated to Sera on the periodic table. “Strontium salts provide the red spark in fireworks,” said the principal. “The symbolism is clear. Sera was the brightest spark in the lives of the people who knew and loved her.”

Jenny Aintablian, Sera’s mother, thanked the school community for supporting her during difficult times and

expressed her gratitude for remembering Sera on her 21st birthday. She also gifted each student a bookmark with Sera’s photos and the quote from the element plaque. Finally, students and faculty celebrated Sera’s fruitful life with a luncheon.

In February, the Aintablian family will bestow two scholarships to two Hovsepien School students who embody similar spiritual, academic, and cultural attributes as Sera. Additionally, in March, students and faculty will plant a pomegranate tree in the school’s garden to immortalize Sera’s legacy at Hovsepien School.

The Hovsepien School administration and Aintablian family would like to thank all those who donated heartfelt contributions to keep Sera’s legacy alive at the Hovsepien School. The school community truly came together to make the luncheon, the plaque, and the pomegranate tree possible.



Jenny Aintablian, mother, standing next to plaque





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Panel Analyzes Global And Media Indifference To Artsakh Blockade

PANEL, from page 1  
of the Applied Policy Research Institute in Yerevan (APRI-Armenia); and Prof. Henry Theriault, a leading genocide scholar, of Worcester State University.

Marc Mamigonian, NAASR's director of academic affairs, and Prof. Christina Maranci, the Mashtots Chair of Armenian Studies at Harvard as well as president of the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS), served as co-moderators of the panel.



## Der Matossian: Academia Needs to be Better Informed

Der Matossian spoke about the academic community's role. Stating that "The silence of the academic community is astonishing," in regard to the current blockade, Der Matossian went on to speak of academia's response to the 2020 war. He, as head of the SAS, had approached the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to make a statement on the war, but they failed to do so. He attributes the silence to the "marginalization of things Armenian in Middle Eastern Studies" due to three main factors: ambivalence, ignorance and Turkish propaganda. He added that even many Middle Eastern scholars are unclear about who the Armenians are and where they live.

In terms of the broader academic world, Der Matossian gave several reasons for why the conflict is being ignored. He mentioned that Artsakh is not geographically close to Europe, and the conflict has become similar to other "non-relevant" conflicts in the East, like the crisis in Yemen. He rattled off other possible reasons, including successful Azerbaijani propaganda, racism against Armenians as being "not white" and therefore of less relevance, the overwhelming focus on the war in Ukraine, Armenia being in "Russia's neighborhood", and finally, the feeling that the West has already "paid their dues" to the Armenians by recognizing the Genocide.

Der Matossian suggested that academics write statements protesting the blockade and get prominent scholars to sign off on them; that they write to human rights groups and urge them to act; that they spread awareness on social media and write to major newspapers, but to not waste time addressing the Armenian community. The academic world needs to be on alert that there is impending genocide in the region. Der Matossian also referenced an academic from Armenia, Suren Manukyan, who stated that "if we raise the Artsakh question to the level of Genocide recognition, we will get results," but pointed out that the recognition issue took decades.

## Phillips: World Should Stop Second Armenian Genocide

Phillips, a noted expert on human rights and international affairs, is a former senior adviser to the US State Department who served during the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations; he has also served as director or leading member of numerous

university-based programs and independent organizations focusing on human rights, conflict resolution, international affairs, foreign policy, and Middle East affairs in particular. He has also been a past executive director of the Elie Wiesel Foundation. In his current role at Columbia, he oversees the "Artsakh Atrocities Project" which includes extensive documentation of war crimes and humanitarian violations perpetrated in Artsakh by the Azeri authorities.

Phillips pulled no punches in describing the situation in Artsakh as the second Armenian Genocide. He stated that "the recent events in Artsakh not only represent clear violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses, but they are furthermore an attempt to purge Artsakh of its Armenian population, and to enslave Armenians in Artsakh to Azerbaijan's agenda and will. And unless the international community responds to that and is clear in drawing a line that highlights the problems and the crisis, the situation will get worse, not improve."

"Second Armenian Genocide" is an appropriate term, he said, because the blockade of the Lachin Corridor "is a clear violation of IHL [International Humanitarian Law]," due to cutting off the goods and services which the people of Artsakh need for daily life, such as food, fuel, and medication.



Phillips further commented on Azerbaijan's buildup of weaponry just before the invasion, stating that "Azerbaijan was essentially armed to the teeth." He noted that Azerbaijan was fully supported by Turkey, with weapons originally supplied by the US and, according to eyewitnesses, Turkish troops that were deployed near the Iranian border. He also opined that Turkey's wish to be a co-chair of the Minsk Group is "totally unreasonable and impossible" because Turkey is "a protagonist in the conflict," also mentioned Turkey's ongoing blockade of Armenia.

In regard to the supposed "environmentalist protestors" who are causing the blockade, Phillips stated, "let me just say clearly and plainly, that this claim is a farce. There is no independent civil society in Azerbaijan. Facial recognition software matched the photos of protestors with members of Azerbaijan's security services." He went on to criticize US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan for calling on Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve their differences bilaterally. Phillips stated that this is not an acceptable suggestion, as "we all know from experience the importance of international mediation and especially, the importance of US engagement."

Phillips then suggested "practical steps" that could be taken to end the crisis. He stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic should have a seat at the table during the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group negotiations. The Biden Administration should rescind its waiver of Section 907, prohibiting military aid to Azerbaijan, until

Azerbaijan lifts its blockade. International monitors should be deployed to Artsakh to witness Azerbaijan's aggression, and their reports should be forwarded to the European Commission, the European Parliament, and policymakers in the US and Canada. Economic and diplomatic sanctions should be imposed on Azerbaijan by the US and "like-minded countries" as long as the current situation persists. US diplomats should return to Stepanakert regardless of Baku's objection. Finally, Phillips opined that the US should deploy forces to Armenia to coordinate humanitarian aid to Artsakh.

To support his proposals, Phillips argued that the US has a national security interest in preventing an all-out war with "serious regional implications" because Nagorno-Karabakh "is one of the most dangerous places in the world today." He argued that Secretary of State Tony Blinken and USAID Administrator Samantha Power are "saying all the right things" but "the Biden Administration will be judged by what it *does*, not what US officials *say*."

He also pointed out that Azerbaijan, as an energy exporter, has cleverly positioned its role as a natural gas supplier, while Turkey has positioned itself as an energy hub, with both countries attempting to use this leverage to profit from playing both sides of the war in Ukraine. "We need to be steely-eyed" said Phillips, in recognizing that Turkey is a co-conspirator with Azerbaijan and that the US government may be saying good things but is not acting effectively.



## Setrakian: A Journalist's Perspective

Setrakian presented herself as a journalist who "happens to be Armenian," and who has covered numerous conflicts in the past. She offered a pragmatic view of how the media works, stating that some conflicts become "celebrity conflicts" while others are ignored, giving the example of the war in Syria gaining and then losing the attention of the masses, while the ongoing war in Yemen has never really gotten much attention.

Attempting to answer the question of "why do some conflicts get more attention than others," she stated that "it's an unfortunate fact of the way the news cycle works." Setrakian stated that, "Ironically, the more an issue is covered, the more people understand and sympathize," and if that happens, "the easier it is for journalists to get that story covered, because there's more interest, and editors assume that there's more interest." While admitting there are numerous other factors that go into what stories get more attention, she stated that "at the end of the day, it's much simpler than everyone thinks" and claimed that "basic media literacy has a very big role to play."

While conceding that the Artsakh issue is emotional and difficult, and that Armenians might be upset with the lack of coverage, Setrakian stated, "I don't actually agree fully with the title of this event; I don't think there has been complete and total in-

difference." She pointed out that there are journalists covering Artsakh, and that one can start by thanking and supporting them. After that, the "formula" is simple, she claimed. Journalists and writers, whether professional or not, should do what they can to either pitch stories to their local papers or simply write "letters to the editor," following the formula of "think rationally, write calmly, and tell your own story." She urged Armenians, as she has done, to be extra careful to cite non-Armenian sources and fact check everything that they write, so as not to be accused of bias. She also noted that "screaming at the internet does not work" and "screaming at editors and newspapers does not work." Instead of "debating bad actors on Twitter," Setrakian said, one is "far better off" asking their local library to organize an exhibit on what's happening in Artsakh.

"You have to understand how to relate to the people you are trying to reach," Setrakian continued. She pointed out that Americans today seem to care a lot about "autocracies beating up democracies next door" and that due to the Ukraine war, "we've taken a position as Americans that that's not OK." Pointing out that the same thing is happening in Artsakh is one way to reach the American public, Setrakian concluded.

In response to Setrakian's comments, Phillips spoke about "branding." He said that he and his organization have been using the phrase "second Armenian Genocide," arguing that it's a "compelling term" and "requires the listener to pay attention." He also stated that while there may be an innate reluctance to criticize US officials, if one doesn't speak up critically, one will tend to be ignored. "The idea that Armenia and Azerbaijan should work out their differences bilaterally; sure that makes sense in a poli-sci course, but in the real world unless the US and the Minsk Group is involved, we aren't going to see any progress. So I wouldn't let stand calls for bilateral discussions. US mediation is critical," he reiterated.



## Theriault: The Paradigm is the Problem

Theriault, who is not only a scholar of genocide but also a philosopher by training, brought a unique perspective to the discussion, centering on how the conflict is viewed by both political actors and the media.

According to him, the framework through which the US State Department has viewed recent cases of genocide, such as in Rwanda, has been a "cycle of violence." This is similar to what many others refer to as both-sides-ism. He argued that the State Department operated under a paradigm that used a narrative where two ethnic groups had "always been at odds," with violence from one group and then counter-violence from the other group continuing across many years. The implicit conclusion of this paradigm was that "everyone is bad, and no one deserves help protecting their lives and

*continued on next page*



COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page  
basic human rights.” In Theriault’s view, this kind of thinking was what allowed the Rwandan Genocide to happen without intervention, even when intervention would have been very easy. It is also what allowed the Bosnian Genocide to continue for many years, he added.

Theriault stated that “the reality is quite different” from this paradigm. “Despite some instances” of the victim ethnic group committing human rights violations, in both the Rwandan and Bosnian cases, as well as in the case of Artsakh, there is no question of the actual evidence; the violence is overwhelmingly coming from one side; and the aggressor group had a clear intent to commit genocide, and then did so. According to Theriault, this “cycle of violence” paradigm is the default position of most journalists, “especially [today] in an age of the erosion of investigative journalistic standards.”

Although most who hold a “cycle of violence” position are claiming to be neutral, in fact they are not, Theriault argued. They are presented with evidence that there is one-sided violence, but they misrepresent it, and in doing so, side decisively with the perpetrator, he said. Theriault then cited British journalist and writer Thomas de Waal as a classic example of someone whose allegedly “neutral” position has helped enable Azerbaijan to continue its actions with impunity. These “neutral” voices contribute to preventing the legal and political interventions that could get the perpetrator to stop, Theriault said, stating that “there’s always a point at which a perpetrator will stop what it’s doing if the price is too high,” but that “for Azerbaijan right now, there has been absolutely no international price paid.”

Theriault reminded the audience that Turkish denialists have used the argument of “cycles of violence” for decades to brush aside the 1915 Genocide. He explained that

genocide stigmatizes the victim group just as rape stigmatizes victims; the mentality becomes “this is normal for the Armenians.”

Ultimately, Theriault blamed the lack of awareness on the failure of people to look at the context of the violence. The mass violence that took place in 2020, he said, was just the activation of ideology and attitudes that were in place in both Turkey and Azerbaijan long before 2020. It is necessary, instead of just focusing on recent history, to look at the Artsakh case as part of a “perpetual genocide” framework. Citing the cultural and often physical genocidal process carried out against Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians over many decades, he stated that in cases such as Artsakh, the dynamic is one-sided and long-term. Therefore, looking at the history only from 1988 to now will cause a skewed understanding of the dynamics and become an obstacle to a genuinely human-rights-respecting solution. Instead, the Artsakh case should be looked at as part of a century of genocide starting in 1894 and continuing today.

The reason that this can happen is that Turkey, Theriault pointed out, “has never gone through the rehabilitative process necessary to extirpate the deeply entrenched genocidal attitudes embedded in the educational, political, corporate and military institutions and cultures of its state and civil society, and indeed has exported this ideology to Azerbaijan, who we might say, has become more Catholic than the Pope.”

In response to Theriault’s comments, Setrakian reiterated that interested parties should seek practical possibilities and continue working for a resolution. Phillips emphasized the importance of truth, facts and moral authority.

The Mashtots Chair and SAS were co-sponsors of the program. The program was also supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

St. Vartan Cathedral Celebrates Nativity

NATIVITY, from page 7

St. Vartan Cathedral’s Christmas celebration began on the evening of January 5, with the solemn *Jrakalouys* (“Lamp-lighting”) service followed by scripture readings traditionally celebrated on Christmas Eve. The Divine Liturgy immediately followed, celebrated by the Rev. Arshen Aivazian.

The Christmas Day Divine Liturgy was also made possible with the participation of a half dozen deacons and altar servers, led by Dn. Manuel Rakoubian. Maestro Khoren Mekanejian directed the angelic voices of the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, accompanied by organist Florence Avakian.

A Christmas reception took place in the Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium of the cathedral complex following the service. The online broadcast was directed by Yervant Keshishian, with Chris Zakian providing the narration. Dn. Diran Jebejian photographed the service inside the sanctuary.



Dr. Lawrence Najarian and his family stand with Primate Very Rev. Mesrop Parsamyan (PHOTO: Diran Jebejian)

Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology Launches Advance Armenia Campaign with Boston, LA Events

FAST, from page 7

FAST aims to support Armenia’s transformation into a science-driven innovative country by 2041 through scientific discovery and innovation. The organization’s long-term vision is Armenia’s transformation into a top-10 global innovator nation and top five in data science and artificial

intelligence. FAST has designed and structured numerous programs and initiatives to become independent parts of the STI ecosystem, ensuring their continuing sustainability.

Since 2017 FAST has implemented over 25 programs which impacted more than 9000 beneficiaries.

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# Arts & Culture

## ASA United Launches Student Magazine: *The ASA Compass*

Armenian Student Associations (ASA) United, a coalition of undergraduate Armenian student organizations across North America, has launched its showcase edition of *The ASA Compass*, a magazine which pledges to highlight diasporan Armenian student writing and artwork. The Compass editorial team is completely composed of volunteers, all of whom are either current students or recent graduates.

“It was important for us to see this project through,” said co-Editor-in-Chief Ani Arzoumanian, a recent graduate of Colgate University. “What started as just an idea many years ago has finally come to fruition in such a beautiful way.”

Arzoumanian founded ASA United in July of 2020 with co-Founder Levon Brunson. “ASA United came together by accident, at a time when passionate diasporan Armenian students were uniting to fundraise for Artsakh just before the war started,” Arzoumanian said. “However, it didn’t just end when the war ended. Instead, we decided that connecting and empowering the individual ASA chapters within our organization was worth pursuing during peace, too, so that we could continue our efforts to support the Armenian Cause.”

*The ASA Compass*, Winter 2023 edition, was published online on the ASA United website ([asa-united.com](http://asa-united.com)) on Saturday, January 21. Contributors and their works will additionally be highlighted on *The ASA Compass* Instagram account (@asaunited.compass).

Co-Editor-in-Chief Arpa Boghonian, a recent University of California Davis graduate, explained that the submission guidelines for the magazine were deliberately made open-ended in order to inspire a diverse array of topics and genres. “Despite this effort on our part, the theme of the magazine unintentionally centered around the pain of witnessing the 2020 Artsakh war, through a variety of lenses. Yet, undeterred by the sadness and gravity of this theme, *The Compass* still highlights the resilience of the Armenian people.”

Elen Arustamyan, a freshman at Pepperdine University and a current member of ASA United’s Central Executive Board, joined the editorial team as the multimedia manager. “Part of the success of the magazine is our ability to reach diverse audiences, so managing our presence online and on social media becomes a key part of this campaign,” Arustamyan explained. “It was also important for us to highlight our wonderful contributors individually, which is something we’ll be doing on our social media.”

The *ASA Compass* Winter 2023 editorial staff additionally includes Aram Brunson, Nareg Kuyumjian, Artyom Martirosyan, Elen Nersisyan, Nayiri Sagherian, and Jessica Sargsian.



Manita Vartan and her husband

## Manita Vartan *‘Bulgaria’s Kim Kardashian’ Is How People Refer to Me’*

By Haykaram Nahapetyan  
*Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent*

WASHINGTON — The most beautiful girl of Bulgaria is Armenian, according to a recent contest. Manita Vartan, who triumphed in the Mrs. Bulgaria competition in November 2022, is also anticipated to represent Bulgaria at the Ms. World 2023 pageant later in the year in Dubai. Manita is a fourth-generation Bulgarian-Armenian and a native of the town of Plovdiv. Her last name Vartan is actually Manita’s father’s name; the family name is Khachikian.

Elizabeth, who also received awards at musical events, is Manita’s 6-year-old daughter. When I called Manita, she was driving her car with Elizabeth. She parked the vehicle as we discussed the outstanding success of a mother and daughter who are fourth and fifth generation Bulgarian-Armenians.

“Both of my parents were educators, and I also held teaching jobs in Armenian and Bulgarian schools. These facts made it simpler for me to protect my Armenian heritage. Additionally, keeping our identity was extremely important to everyone in my family,” Manita stated.

One day, Manita learned about the Mrs. Bulgaria 2022 competition and decided to try. “I’ve never attended any beauty competitions, either locally or nationally. I have only ever done a small amount of modeling. And then, surprisingly, I had success on my first attempt,” remarked Manita. Out of 300 participants, the jury first choose 15, then three and then recognized one, the Bulgarian-Armenian representative, as a winner.

She keeps up her modeling career but also started programs in support of Bulgaria’s nursing homes and orphanages. “I also strive to help the gifted kids,” Manita added.

see MANITA, page 14

## Tumanyan.Online Offers Armenian Language Classes To English Speakers

YEREVAN — In 2018, Hayk Hovakimyan founded Tumanyan.Online as a resource for Russian-speaking Armenians to learn their mother tongue. This mission reflected his own experience as an Armenian born in Yerevan but raised in Moscow. Living in the largest Armenian community outside of Armenia, Hovakimyan knew there were many others just like him, working to maintain their mother tongue while using another language in their day-to-day lives.

The Velvet Revolution inspired Hovakimyan and he decided the time was right to move back to Armenia and start his own project, aimed at preserving the Armenian language among diasporans. He began with Russian speakers, recruiting Aida Markosyan, author of the Armenian language textbook *Krunk Hayastani*, to design a unique teaching method that would suit the on-the-go lifestyle of those learning Armenian over the Internet.

Their partnership marked the start of Tumanyan.Online, an interactive online platform for learning Armenian as a foreign language. “Our goal is to provide and encourage successful and technologically new methods of learning the Armenian language, through which the learning process will become easier, and language learning will be accessible to



maximum number of students worldwide,” explained Hovakimyan.

The success of Tumanyan.Online has now led to its expansion, with Armenian language classes being offered to English speakers. To help design the curriculum, Hovakimyan selected Mary Hakobyan, an experienced Armenian language teacher and author of the Eastern Armenian textbook. Hakobyan is a Yerevan native having spent 14 years as an Armenian language teacher for diplomats, ambassadors, and Birthright Armenia volunteers.

Classes for English speakers have already begun, and can be accessed through the [Tumanyan.Online website](https://tumanyan.online/armenian_language) ([https://tumanyan.online/armenian\\_language](https://tumanyan.online/armenian_language)).





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Anoushka

## Star of Egyptian Music And Film

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

CAIRO — My friends, Haig Avakian and Martiros Palaian, hosted me last November in Cairo, allowing me to realize my wish to interview one of the Armenian stars of Egyptian showbusiness. Thanks to their efforts, I met Anoushka, a famous singer, actress and TV presenter in Egypt. Our meeting with this charming, charismatic star took place in the Hilton Hotel of Cairo. I was fascinated by Anoushka's fluent Western Armenian.

Born Vartanoushe Tchaderdjian, she was born in He-liopolis, studied at the Armenian Kaloustian School in Cairo and studied business administration at the American University of Cairo. After graduating, Anoushka worked at the Tarek Nour advertising firm as a singer of jingles. In the late 1980s, she participated in international festivals in Finland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Turkey, France and Latin America. She took third prize with her song *Habbytak* in Turkey and the first prize in 1994, in the Francophonie competitions in France with her own composition, *Ya Habibi (Oh my Love)* in French and *Ya Leyl (Oh Night)* also in French composed by Midhat el Khawla. Anoushka also took part in many national, pan-Arab and international music events. She had the lead role in an operetta entitled "El Ward we Fosoulu" in the Children Day festivities. Anoushka is also a prolific actress. In 1991 the prominent Egyptian film director Salah Abu Seif chose her to participate in his movie "Al-Sayed Kaf." Since then, Anoushka has acted in numerous films and TV serials, as well as in theater and radio.

**Anoushka, how did it happen that after studying business administration you became a famous singer?**

I took my artistic steps in kindergarten. When I was four or five years old, I would stand in front of the mirror, hold the comb as if it were a microphone and sing. My big dream was to be an artist, to sing, act and dance. There was an atmosphere of artistry inside our Armenian community, in Kaloustian National College or in the Armenian clubs, "Ararat" or "Homenetmen." My parents always supported my artistic involvements, especially my father. Mama would always say that her daughter should be the first one in the class, while Papa would say that she should be the second or the third one, but to be in the arts. I wanted to enter a conservatory, but I entered the American University because my father was saying: "It is my duty as a father to take accomplished your studies: you must have your certificate in hand, hang it in the house, but after that you are free to do whatever you want." And it happened that way. As soon as I entered the university, I met someone who was writing TV commercials for the largest advertising company in Egypt. I joined the Tarek Nur advertising agency with the idea that after my classes I could sing from five to six. I sang a number of commercials for six years, my voice was heard on television, but my face was not seen because I was afraid of my father. One day, sitting next to my father, I heard my singing in a TV commercial, and dad said: "Look, this voice sounds like yours!" I said that actually it is me singing. My father, seeing that there was nothing shameful in it, said with a smile: "Hey, Anoushka, you will not do anything wrong!" (*laughs*). And I started to take my steps toward singing.

**And was it okay from the side of the Egyptian show business?**

When I was singing commercials for six years, people in showbusiness would talk about me. At the same time, I started sending my songs to festivals. There was a company that wanted me to sing international songs in Arabic. but I said I would like to sing my own songs. This stubbornness of mine got me to a good place. I said, I don't want money from anyone, I have to work my own. I started to record songs for 19,000 Egyptian pounds, a huge amount in 1988, especially for someone who had barely started working. I was earning already and, on my birthdays, I would always ask for money instead of presents, which I would invest in my songs. Soon I got partners in my work, who were also investing with me. Thus, God helped me. I entered a milieu, knowing very few people, on the other side, the taste for Arab songs and music is very different from our Armenian taste. The only person who was able to help and be a support for me was composer and choirmaster Haig Sarkisian. I was one

of the soloists, the first soprano of his Groong choir. We sang for eight or nine years, we had a concert every year, we traveled here and there, we went to Syria. Our artistic characters were shaped and polished by the Groong choir. My presence in the choir was more professional, and Haig helped me professionally, but up to a certain point. Our qualities were also revealed in the Armenian dance groups. I cannot forget our Zangezur dance group coach Eleonora Grikourova, an Armenian choreographer from USSR.

**I wrote about this amazing lady, originally from Tiflis! Does she speak Armenian?**

Of course, she did. Grikourova helped me a lot to be confident as the first dancer of the group. There is a very thin line between being self-confident and self-righteous. Grikourova taught me to know the difference. When she left Egypt, we started participate in the Sardarapat dance



troupe, where Shakeh Hovagimian continued to "polish" us. In theater director Gerald Papasian's role was memorable. I am glad that artistically I was prepared within our community. Outside of it I was alone: I had to rely on myself. Our field is different, as it is more professional, there are certain limits: I have to swim in a different way if I am in the lake and in another way if I am in the ocean. It is easier for the singer now; the whole world can listen to your new song on the Internet at the same moment. In my time, I had to introduce myself in festivals. I have gone to seven or eight festivals, I had not won many things, mostly fourth or fifth prizes, until the opportunity arose. I went to the Antalya festival in Turkey, where I participated as an Egyptian, not as an Armenian. The name of the festival conductor was Garo Mavian. This also indirectly created some confidence on me. There was another person who supported me — Turkish-Armenian journalist, Anoush. I knew that there was another one, famous musician Onno Tunç (Tunçboyacıyan). Thus, I represented Egypt in Turkey, but I was happy that there were Armenians in the festival. Garo Mavian and I were talking with our eyes, without saying a word. On the last day, when I won the third prize, Mavian came and asked: "Do you speak Armenian?" and I asked: "And do you read Armenian?" These are small things that I will never forget.

**And how did you enter the film industry?**

When I started singing, I also got an offer to act, but always refused, having the idea to be on sure footing in singing first, then switch to acting, radio, stage, films or TV series. The first time I acted was in Adel Sadeq's film, whom I remember with gratitude. In 1994, Salah Abu Seif, one of the big Egyptian film directors gave one of my first breaks in acting. I performed with the great actors Sanaa Gamil and Abdel Monem Madbouly. At that time, Sanaa Gamil would always tell me to be interested in acting. She was not the kind of person who would spoil you. On the last day of the film, Salah Abu Seif himself said on television: "I have a message for Anoushka, there is a little actress in her, so let her grow up, don't keep it inside, don't only sing." After that I was offered by director Ahmad Abdul Hamid a role in a TV series as a woman in a love triangle. This role was the beginning of my actual acting career. I always believe that God will choose for us. In this series Adel Imam, who is considered the Anthony Hopkins of Egypt, noticed me. He called me and said: "Anoushka, I want you to act with me!" After that, I was always offered important and large roles. So, I am happy who I am and where I am now.

**What about your theatrical activities?**

I have always played leading roles in the theater, both for children and adults, also on the radio. I would like also to have the opportunity to perform in Armenia, not just to

sing or dance. That should be chosen carefully: children can make mistakes, but being an adult is different, you have no right to make any mistake in your career.

**I was impressed to watch you perform modern dance on YouTube with the first dancers of Cairo Opera theater.**

When I dance, I always want to dance with someone who I can learn from, with someone stronger than me, who is a choreographer himself. I was very happy to dance with Walid Awni. I wasn't really trained as a dancer, but I had a good posture shaped by Grikourova or Sardarapat, so I could dance with someone strong. Performing with the first dancers of Cairo Opera was a risk, but it was a calculated risk and I was happy. The stronger the person I have in front of me, the better.

**Anoushka, do you know where your grandparents were from?**

My maternal grandmother was from Smyrna, now Izmir. When my uncle Eduard traveled to Izmir, he said he visited their house, where there was a pool with fish inside. My paternal grandmother was from Constantinople, now Istanbul. That's all I know. My grandmother migrated to Cairo, while her sister repatriated to Soviet Armenia. I wish I had an interest in my ancestors when they were alive, to compose my family tree. My mother's cousin Garbis died in Armenia, while his brother Vagharsh moved to Montreal. Now while watching the photos of my grandmother or my mother, I ask myself: who were they? There is a letter from my grandmother that she received from her sister in Armenia, which I found in her papers after her death. These

little things are very precious to me; I want to put them in a frame.

**How many times have you been to Armenia?**

Now, twice. But when I was 14-15 years old, we went to Armenia. It was very long trip: first we traveled to Kyiv, to Moscow, then to Yerevan. I visited Echmiadzin, Sardarapat, but most of my time I spent with Armenia's State Dance Ensemble. I would go to the rehearsals; the adults were dancing, and I was watching them from backstage, trying to learn from them. Eleonora Grikourova would say: "Let's take Anoushka to the State Dance Ensemble," and my father would say: "My daughter should not go far away from my nose!"

Three years ago, in August 2019, I went to the All-Armenian Games in Yerevan. While returning I was crying, I didn't want to go back. I was divided inside. We went to Tsaghkadzor, we took the cable car, there was a friend with me who was afraid. But my feeling was very sweet: below there were a forest, trees, mountains, above there was God — if I raised my hand, I could touch him! I am sitting on a chair, it is free space from all my sides, I had a feeling that I am so happy! I thanked God with the idea that I always wanted to have this milieu and now I am in it, being aware of both its nice and difficult points. When I returned, the Ministry of Culture of Egypt informed me that in October I should participate in the days of Egyptian culture in Armenia as singer. I would have wanted to reach out and invite Armenian singers to my event, but I just did not know how to reach them, and I did not know who was supposed to do the advertisement as well. No one informed them that there is a singer of Armenian origin in the Egyptian delegation. I only had the opportunity to meet composer Robert Amirkhanian in the village where he lives. In Yerevan, I sang Arabic songs and also three Armenian songs. But if there is an occasion to visit Armenia again, this time my preparation would be different. I love many Armenian songs. I would like to sing with Armenian singers, to perform *Surb Surb* (Sanctus) and *Ter Voghormya* (Lord Have Mercy) with a big orchestra!

**Let's hope it will come true. Anoushka, one of your films is called "All Girls Love Chocolate." Do you love it too?**

Yes, very much.

**Here is some Armenian "Grand Candy" chocolate for you!**

Oh, I am on a diet, but despite that, you can be sure that this evening this box will be empty! (*laughs*). I am very happy. When you come again, bring my favorite cherry and walnut jam. After my return from Armenia, along with a *khachkar* I bought in Tsaghkadzor, there were also four cans of jams in my suitcase (*laughs*).



# Vote for Saint Sarkis Armenian Church as 2022 ‘American Building of the Year’



CARROLLTON, Tex. — The new Armenian Church of Saint Sarkis in Carrollton, which celebrated its first Sunday service on Genocide Remembrance Day in 2022, was honored as the ‘US Building of the Week’ by the editors of the web platform World-Architects on April 25, 2022.

World-Architects has now invited the public to select the ‘American Building of the Year’ by popular vote from the forty buildings selected as ‘US Building of the Week’ in 2022.

The Saint Sarkis church is modeled on the ancient church of Saint Hripsime completed in AD 618 near Echmiadzin. The cornerstone of the Saint Sarkis Church was laid in 2018, exactly 1,400 years later, a testament to the endurance of the Armenian people in the face of genocide, dispossession and exile. The facade of the Saint Sarkis church is a memorial to the victims of the 1915 Armenian Genocide in the form of an Armenian cross composed of 1.5 million unique ornaments, each serving as a memorial to one of the 1.5 million Armenians martyred for their traditions and beliefs.

If Saint Sarkis is selected as the 2022 Building of the Year, the publicity will be used to place stories in American media that call attention to the resumption of the program of religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, expulsion and cultural genocide underway in Artsakh today.

Visit <https://www.american-architects.com/en/building-of-the-year> to vote for the Saint Sarkis Armenian Church as the 2022 Building of the Year. Voting ends January 29th.

# Bulgaria’s Kim Kardashian’ Is How People Refer to Me’

MANITA, from page 12

## Meeting Kim is My Greatest Dream

People in Bulgaria frequently refer to her as “Bulgaria’s Kim Kardashian” when they learn that she is Armenian and also because of some physical resemblance between the American top model and social media figure Kim Kardashian and Bulgaria’s top model Manita Vartan. “Meeting Kim is my greatest dream. She is my inspiration,” declared Manita.

Manita’s husband is a businessman originally from Yerevan and she intends to travel to Armenia in the near future. The couple’s daughter, Elizabeth, took first place in an international musical contest in Naples last October. She also won about 20 different musical and foreign language competitions in Bulgaria, including one on January 18 of this year coming at the top of the International Festival City of Talents.

“We recently enjoyed tremendous popularity in Armenia. I’m delighted that the Armenian media reached out to me and welcomed me. I was born in Bulgaria, but my heart is Armenian. I want to document how my great-grandparent endured the Genocide and deportations in a book,”



Manita stated.

(An interview with Manita Vartan and her photographs and other videos are shown in the bilingual video that goes with this article at [mirrorspectator.com](http://mirrorspectator.com). The video includes musical performance by Elizabeth.)



The Vartan family

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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Dear subscribers, it has come to our attention that for the past year, and specifically the past month, the delivery of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* has been erratic.

Please note that our paper goes to our printer at the same time every week and is mailed out the same time every week. Nothing has changed.

The delivery problems all lie with the postal service, which is understaffed, and though we have contacted them repeatedly, we have not been able to resolve the problem.

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ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Falafel (Photo courtesy Kamal Al Faqih)

## Chef Kamal AlFaqih’s Lebanese Classic

In 1986, Chef Kamal AlFaqih made his debut as the owner and head chef of Med Catering, Inc., the first exclusively Mediterranean catering company in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Born in the United States, AlFaqih grew up watching his mother and aunts prepare traditional regional dishes, providing him a natural authenticity and palate for Lebanese and Mediterranean cuisine. He has catered events at the Smithsonian Museums, the White House, and numerous private homes, hosting such notables as Queen Noor of Jordan and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. He led cooking demonstrations at the Middle East Institute and Georgetown University and continues to present in Southern California and on YouTube.



hef Kamal AlFaqih (Photo courtesy Kamal Al Faqih)

Chef Kamal is one of 39 Arab Americans featured in the PBS series, “Arab American Stories.” His cookbook, *Classic Lebanese Cuisine: 170 Fresh and Healthy Mediterranean Favorites* (2009), combines tradition with innovation.

### Falafel

- 1 cup dry garbanzo beans (soak overnight)
- 1/2 teaspoon and 1/4 teaspoon baking soda, divided
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped garlic
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped yellow onion
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped green onion
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped flat-leaf parsley; use green leafy parts and tender stems
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped cilantro; use green leafy parts and tender stems
- 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/16 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3/4 teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons raw sesame seeds (for topping)
- 2 cups canola oil (for frying)

### To soak the beans for the falafel:

Soak the beans in 4 cups water (so they are submerged) with 1/2 teaspoon baking soda overnight at room temperature, uncovered. (Note: The baking soda will soften the beans.)

### To prepare the falafel (the following day):

Drain the beans. Place them on a kitchen towel and dry them well. Pat the vegetables dry to remove excess water (too much moisture in the mixture makes it difficult for the patties to hold together).

Place the beans in a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Add the garlic, both types of onion, the parsley, and the cilantro. (Kamal uses a 12-cup food processor; smaller ones may require processing one half at a time.) Pulse several times until the beans are coarsely chopped. Scrape down the sides, then slowly pulse and process until the beans are finely chopped (not pureed) and the mixture begins to hold together. (Test a small amount by squeezing it in the palm of your hand.) Transfer the mixture to a bowl. Add the salt, spices, flour, and 1/4 teaspoon baking soda, and mix well.

Measuring the falafel mixture into 2-tablespoon portions, place each portion in your palm and press it into a 2-inch round dome-shaped patty (like a crab cake) using your other palm (or use a falafel mold; see below). Place the patty on a plastic-lined baking sheet, dome-side up. Repeat with the remaining portions. Sprinkle a few raw sesame seeds on top of each and gently press them into the patties with your finger. (Do not use toasted sesame seeds; they will not stick.)

### To fry falafel:

Heat the oil to 375°F in a small saucepan over medium-high heat (the oil should be about 1 inch deep). Use a candy/fry thermometer to measure the temperature of the oil for accuracy. Fry 5 patties at a time. Once they are golden brown, remove them with a slotted spoon to a paper towel-lined plate. Fry the remaining falafel. Ensure the temperature of the oil remains at 375°F so the patties fry evenly.

Serve with warm pita bread, tahini sauce, and pickled turnips on the side.

### Falafel molds:

Handheld molds can be found in specialty markets or online. They consist of two pieces: a small circular mold attached to a spring-loaded handle, and a flat paddle. Hold the lever down on the handle as you fill the mold with the falafel mixture. Pack it down into the mold using the paddle as you press the mixture into a dome-shaped patty. Gently release the lever and transfer the patty to a plastic-lined tray. If you plan on making falafel often, it is worth purchasing one of these. The final number of patties may vary based on the size of the mold you use. Try to find one that is about 2 inches in diameter.

For more recipes, go to: <https://app.ckbk.com/authors/kamal-al-faqih>

In 1986, Chef Kamal AlFaqih made his debut as the owner and head chef of Med Catering, Inc., the first exclusively Mediterranean catering company in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. For more Arab American stories and recipes with Chef Kamal, see this video featuring him making Lebanese kibbi with his beloved mother: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Slxr7czVHMI>

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  - <https://www.mamaslebanesekitchen.com/dips/lebanese-garlic-dip/>
- For instructional videos, go to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/@ChefKamal1>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUeLe5uMZ6E>
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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Author Aslibekyan Wants to Get to the Heart of the Matter

THEATER, from page 1

2006, and completed her graduate *aspirantura* work in 2018. She has worked as a television reporter and commentator on Armenian stations and has been a cultural correspondent for the newspaper *Azg* for the last 5-6 years. In a wide-ranging discussion she revealed her views on art and Armenian intellectual and creative life.

## Mercedes

“Mercedes and Zaruhi” was performed as a monologue in New York by actress Nora Armani, but Aslibekyan originally wrote it in the form of a short story based on true life episodes. She said that she heard the story of the heroine Mercedes from her husband’s mother, who heard it in turn from friends who had repatriated to Soviet Armenia. Aslibekyan said that she combined the stories of various Turkish-Armenian families to create a collective character typical for this period of time. She wrote the story with the shorter name “Mercedes” in 2012 and it was printed in the *Nartsis* monthly that year. It inspired great enthusiasm, Aslibekyan said, and she realized that the protagonists were suitable for drama, so she quickly turned it into a play in about five days, presenting the completed drama to several directors. Hakob Ghazanchyan, who in 2014 was both head of the Adolescent Spectator [Patani Handisates] Theater and chairman of Armenia’s Union of Theater Workers, telephoned to say that he saw the story of his grandparents in her play and wanted to direct it.

It was staged at the Adolescent Spectator Theater in the framework of events commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Ghazanchyan invited Armani from New York since she could speak both in Western and Eastern Armenian, which were used in the play. Armani performed several times and then left, with a young actress continuing in the role. The play was also invited to be performed at Cairo’s Experimental Theater Festival, and then for several days for the local Armenian community.

Later, Aslibekyan turned this version of the play, with multiple characters, into a monodrama and offered to place it at Armani’s disposal. The latter was invited to the United Solo Festival in New York, which is the world’s largest solo festival, and performed the new version of the play, which she translated into English, on November 6, 2022 in Aslibekyan’s presence.

Aslibekyan observed that the theme of repatriation to Soviet Armenia was not represented in Armenian dramaturgy and in general had been idealized, especially through propaganda in the Soviet period. Armenians returned believing that rivers flowed full of honey and milk in the homeland but immediately collided with a completely different reality, she said. “We are afraid to talk about this, but this is our history and we should not fear to confront history, because it is only by facing mistakes that they can be corrected,” Aslibekyan exclaimed. On the other hand, she said that when a historical topic turns into a theme for art, theater, film or literature, it becomes more popularized and those topics have their reverberations among the public, and she hoped that “Mercedes” had its distinct place in this process.

Aslibekyan’s story follows the trajectory of a century, beginning with the events of the genocide and ending in 1991 as Armenia becomes independent. She declared, “When I was writing it, Armenia was again in a troubled state. It was prior to the [“velvet”] revolution. The protests and feelings of injustice had reached their zenith... When my heroine says in 1991, before closing her eyes at the end of her life, ‘I hope that my children will live in a safe Armenia,’ I as a writer put it as questionable – will it be like

that, though hoping greatly that it would indeed be like that.”

Later, however, she concluded, “It became clear that difficulties still awaited Armenia, still a harsh reality, and that safety? I don’t know when it is written in our nation’s fate that it will be safe and peaceful. I hope, we all hope, every generation dedicating its life to this country hopes that their children will have a happier life than at least they did, as [the writer Hovhannes] Toumanyan used to say.”

Aslibekyan’s first two books, both collections of short stories, were published through Levon Ananyan, then president of the Writers Union of Armenia. The first one, which he edited, appeared in 2009 and was called *Bari galusd, im hekiyat* [Welcome, My Fairy Tale]. It included one play along with the stories. The second, *Moyraneri notatrits* [From the Diary of the Moiras], appeared in 2014, edited by Davit Muratyan, and included the story “Mercedes.”

Aslibekyan said, “I sometimes jokingly say that of all my creations, this [story] was the one born under the luckiest star, being the most read and bringing me the greatest recognition. It has been commented on numerous times. It was translated into various languages, the story version into Greek, Russian, Polish and German in various anthologies and journals of various countries. When I created the solo play, in 2017, it was entered into the Yerevan Festival of Books, and was one of the winners in the drama category.”

The play was printed in the biannual Chekhov International Theater Festival of Moscow’s young playwrights anthology of former USSR countries, which led to an invitation to participate in Minsk (Belarusia) at the youth theater forum. There a professor at Warsaw University, Dr. Andreij Moskwin, was intrigued with “Mercedes,” and said, according to Aslibekyan, that the secret of its success was that it takes up a national theme but is written in a very contemporary manner which speaks to the world. Moskwin proposed translating the play into Polish, and publishing an anthology of Armenian writers with Aslibekyan’s help.

## Family and Career

Aslibekyan was one of four children and she was the only one who entered a creative field. Her parents’ families were doctors and teachers who had some artistic or creative interests. Her father’s family originally came from Artsakh. A *melik* (princely) family, they moved to Tavush Province in Eastern Armenia and were well known *kemancha* players. The parents of her maternal grandparents were from Western Armenia, with her maternal grandfather’s family from a village in the Moush area and that of her grandmother from Alashkert. Her grandfather’s grandfather was a priest in Sourp Garabed Monastery of Moush and the family was called Der Garabedian until in the Soviet period.

“I belong to that group of writers who were born with that talent,” Aslibekyan related. “I was five years old when I said my first rhymed words, while playing.” From five years old she had a fiery desire to write and would cry, asking to be sent to school, although she had to wait till turning six because of the customs there.

A book of Hovhannes Tumanyan’s quatrains and ballads, beautifully illustrated, became her window to the limitless universe of literature. She said, “My school years were unsatiated reading.” Initially she wrote poetry. As a seven-year old, during the first Artsakh war, inspired by the atmosphere of patriotic songs and news of victory, she wrote patriotic poems which won her attention.

She loved art too, and her parents sent her

to the Henrik Igityan National Center for Aesthetics, where she painted for 10 years alongside her regular schoolwork. At music schools, she learned to play the flute, and at the Symphonic Estrada they performed songs she composed. She said, “I had the difficult choice during my last years of school of choosing which branch of the arts to follow. I could have gone on to the conservatory’s composition division or the Artistic Academy’s art division, but speech – the word, triumphed, and I entered the Theatrical Institute [Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema]’s Dramaturgical Division....The theater, literature, pedagogy, and later scholarship, became the four paths of my life.”

Her discovery of Shakespeare was a literary earthquake, and after discovering Chekhov and later Pirandello, Aslibekyan said she fell in love with theater.

She ruminated, “I understand now that I am a painter to the degree that it was necessary to be a good writer. In other words, sensitivity to color, taste, composition, etc., these all were formed in me through painting. I see the world as very colorful. ... Music deeply helped me because literature itself is the sister of music. Just as there is melody in song, there is melody and rhythm in stories and plays, and they are composed in the same fashion.”

Her husband is a musician and she continues to be involved with music through her children, she said, while maybe when her children are older she will return to painting.

## Style

She went on to graduate studies (*aspirantura*) and wrote her dissertation on the production of William Saroyan’s dramatic works and Armenian theatre. She said she has adopted Saroyan’s literary approach, declaring: “If I speak about any school, I will say that I am a follower of the creed of Saroyan’s literature, because Saroyan, speaking of people in the most difficult situations of life, never creates in the reader a feeling of the lack of hope. In such circumstances, he shows the beauty of life, the beauty of people’s souls, and the beauty of

human relations, which is higher than everything else. In reading Saroyan, you think you are living, together with Saroyan, the lives of his protagonists. You are feeling their tears and their pain, but you come out better, loving life more, with a soul filled with great gratitude and love towards God, life and nature.”

However, she said that in each of her five published books, her style is different. The first volume has impressionistic small works, symbols and the self-awareness of the young writer standing before the world but looking inwards towards her internal world, finding her place while understanding herself. “The second collection, which comes five years after the first, is an Anush Aslibekyan of a totally different style – unrecognizably different. Here, the writer stands more mature, more open before the world. Now having achieved a certain degree of wisdom, looking towards the world, has a point of view analyzing the world. The length of the stories also increase,” she said.

The stories of this volume are written in a more realistic style and are all based on true life figures, including some historical figures such as Dr. Vahan Artsruni, who was a cofounder of the Yerevan State Medical University, and others who are ordinary Yerevan natives. She said that she heard very interesting stories about people in various Yerevan neighborhoods and kept them in her “mind’s drawers.” However, “one day, they suddenly rebelled and wanted to come out of those drawers, so in a short period of time, with great inspiration, I wrote this book,” she explained.

Her third volume, *Trichk kaghaki vrayov* [Flight Over the City] (2018), is a collection of plays, so it represents primarily a change in genre. It includes the play of the same name which was her first work in the field of drama. Prior to that, she said, she only wrote reviews and was a theorist of theater, as well as of course a prose writer, but she was convinced to write it by actress and director Narine Grigoryan. Grigoryan wanted her to try to transfer her prose style

*continued on next page*





ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page

to drama. “Flight Over the City” was performed in around 20 international festivals and nearly always returned with grand prizes, Aslibekyan related. “At a certain point, it became a calling card for Armenian theater,” she said.

Of course the volume also contains “Mercedes” and a third play, “Mi Irir Remi” [Don’t Be Silent, Remi].

Aslibekyan also has published a novel, *Profesore* [The Professor] in 2019, and, in 2022, together with Valeri Gasparian, a short guide, *Stsenaradramaturgiakan arvest: grakan varpetutyun: Metodakan ughetsoyts* [The Art of Script Dramaturgy: Literary Mastery: Methodological Guide].

Literary Schools in Armenia

Aslibekyan has strong views on the role of art and various literary tendencies or groups in Armenia. She said, “Sometimes those literary groups basically are the result of Western artificially introduced currents, whether forced or through various grants, and it seems that those writers in all ways have the intention to move away from the national, from our national values and history. When you look at these tendencies, you see that this literature is a literature of despair, which does not give any trace of light. In the end, together with their heroes, people lose the desire to live. I don’t accept this in literature.”

Instead, she related, “I believe literature must sustain people, because even without this, our life is full of many difficulties. In Armenia in recent years, sadly, life is full of war, and our youth experienced a very difficult time. I have also noticed as a lecturer that every consecutive year, when you enter the classroom, you see sadder eyes. ... the serenity in our children’s eyes further disappears. In the most recent years it is the saddest reality, when the boys standing before you were participants in the 44-day war. They witnessed loss, blood and pain. I as a teacher understand that in addition to giving knowledge, we must also, as lecturers, today work with redoubled effort in the university. We have another goal too, to return these people to life, to make these people forget the horrors of war, to make them believe that they are to live, they are necessary, that life continues and they must live the full value of the life which has fallen to their lot. In other words, in a certain sense, it is therapeutic – the lecturer will have a role treating the soul.”

In this vein, she said, “The goal of art, in my opinion, is to convey hope to people. It is possible through art to speak on everything, on the most serious realities, but the writer must give to his readers, and artists in all other spheres to their audience or viewers, that hope, that strength, those wings which are the pledge of being mankind.”

She also believes that Armenian writers, and writers in general, must connect national themes with universal sorrows, as she did with “Mercedes.” She said, “Often in Armenia, as perhaps everywhere, people think that in order to be integrated it is necessary to be a citizen of the world, speak in the world’s language and speak on global themes. We forget our national roots and history, and what we have to say. We often in dramaturgy choose heroes with foreign names and foreign environments, not understanding that if we are going to appear on the map of the world, it must be with our national themes and identity, presenting our history.”

Role of the State

Most theaters in Armenia today belong to the state. Aslibekyan said, “There are only a few independent theaters because no law about independent art exists in Armenia. In other words, the sphere of independent art has not been systematized, neither through law nor through equal opportunities. That is the reason why it remains under state

patronage. This is good on the one hand because in a country like Armenia which is economically insecure, the patronage of arts is important as it gives a certain stability. On the other hand, it would have been very correct and important to have established legislative points about independent art which would have assured equal rights for state employees and those involved with independent art.”

Aslibekyan said she never noticed any ideological obstacles imposed by the Armenian state. In fact, she argued for a more active role for the state in art. She said, “Sometimes we even think that the sphere is so overlooked that perhaps it would have been worth in a certain sense working out state ideological directions since our country sadly after the latest developments does not have the right today to make mistakes. After such horrors, the politics of our theatrical repertoire must be very well thought out and our literature. What I am saying is not about censorship, or ideological forcing, which could kill everything. This is the enemy of art, but certain ideological guidance or prompting is necessary by the state, especially for state theaters and organizations under state patronage.”

This would pertain to theatrical repertoires. She said, “We cannot just produce by accident because the time has passed when we can produce any sort of vaudeville or happy standup, laugh, and then go home. Such questions have emerged before the nation that we can only by thinking and analyzing solve them in public, and art must aid in this. The artistic directors of theaters today do not have the right to solely provide entertainment. They must be creative hearths where a person entering must leave thinking.”

At the same time she pointed to the German playwright Berthold Brecht, who said in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that theater must be a place of intellectual discomfort, as well as to the views of French playwright Jean Giraudoux in the same period, in support of her position that theatre and art must always keep the authorities sensible, and not just the populace. She said, “by nature, artists are always anti-authority. They must be pro-state, especially today, but not close to power...The artist must awaken both the authorities and the unthinking public, and make them stand as if before a tribunal, giving them questions and calling them to think and to be responsible.”

Furthermore, she said that art must always be for the sake of art, declaring, “When you create, you don’t think that you are creating this work for a specific purpose, or writing this work for this specific group, or in order to say this specific thing. No, never...I don’t think purposes must be placed for art. Goals must be set for people dealing with cultural politics, but creators must remain free, without constriction or censorship.”

Velvet Revolution

“In the days prior to the revolution,” Aslibekyan recalled, “there was mass excitement because social injustice, deceit and corruption had no bounds...It seemed as if the revolution had come to solve all those issues.”

What was the result? According to her, “None of the promises of the program points turned into reality. It seems that it became the continuation of the mistakes permitted in the 30-year independence period.” In the field of the arts and academia, she said, “We do not value our creative and intellectual force. We have abased our scholars, teachers and lecturers, paying them kopecks and not giving them the possibility to do what they are able to do.”

Attitudes and moods in Armenia today are extremely dual, she said, with people who are still believers in the revolution and others whose eyes have been opened. Meanwhile, she said, “The artist, the intellectual

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

**JANUARY 28 — Armenian Genocide Remembrance interviews.** High school students throughout the greater Boston area will conduct interviews to collect oral histories concerning the Armenian Genocide and the way in which history is passed on from generation to generation. Anyone with a connection to this important history is welcome to join us to be interviewed. Organized by Jenny Staysniak, a history teacher at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School and a member of the Teacher Advisory Board for Facing History and Ourselves. Interviews to take place 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont. With questions, write to [jennifer\\_staysniak@lsrhs.net](mailto:jennifer_staysniak@lsrhs.net).

**FEBRUARY 6 — St. James Men’s Club Dinner Meeting, Father-Son Night.** Monday, featuring a live presentation from Boston Iaido Dojo, established in 2003. Iaido, the way of the sword, is the art of drawing and using the traditional Japanese sword. Iaido is the second oldest martial art from Japan. Get ready for an exciting night. 6:15 p.m. Social, 7 p.m. Losh Kebab and Kheyra dinner. Dinner \$20.00. 465 Mt. Auburn Street Watertown. For more information look at St. James web site .New members welcome.

**FEBRUARY 8 — Celebrating Contributions: Leadership Sharing Experiences, Wednesday at 5 p.m., virtually.** Highlighting Storica Wines: Wines from Armenia paired with signature dishes from anoush’ella. Zack Armen, co-founder/president, Storica Wines: Wines from Armenia and Nina Festekjian, restaurateur, chef-owner, anoush’ella, InChu, Hum’oveh, Nu Burger & Kutzu. Host: Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV5. To register and for details, email [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**FEBRUARY 10 — Feast of St. Vartan Cultural Program of Music & Poetry under the patronage of H.E. the Most Reverend Mikael Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the USA and Canada, with keynote speaker Aram Arkun, Executive Director Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada, Managing Editor Armenian Mirror-Spectator, Friday, 7:30 p.m. at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan & Margrit Atinjian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont MA. Reception follows, open to the public.**

**FEBRUARY 18 – Sts. Vartanantz Poon Paregentan (“Great Carnival”) Dinner-Dance.** A terrific family evening of great food, music and dancing. Featuring the fabulous Ani Ensemble – Joe Kouyoumjian, Oud; Dave Anisbigian, guitar and vocals; Art Chingris, Dumbeg; and Ara Jeknavorian, clarinet. Also featuring the latest dance tunes from Armenia and America Pop music. 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. 5:30 p.m. Adults: \$30. Students: \$15. Children under 6: free. Paid reservation must be made by February 14 either on the church website, [www.stsvartanantz.com](http://www.stsvartanantz.com) or by contacting Corie Horan, [coriehoran@gmail.com](mailto:coriehoran@gmail.com).

**FEBRUARY 25 — The 128th Anniversary of the Lowell Aharonian Gomideh of the ARF.** The Armenian Church at High Pointe, 1280 Boston Rd, Haverhill. Dinner-program. Narrated slide presentation by Joe Dagdigian: “Unseen Armenia: A brief glimpse of People, Places, and Projects.” Keynote Speaker: Reverend Father Vart Gyozyan - “Current Life and Conditions in Armenia.” Donation: Adults- \$35 and Students: \$20. Reservations Required. For Tickets: Call or email Armen at [978-265-9479](tel:978-265-9479), [armenjeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:armenjeknavorian@gmail.com) or Ara [617-803-2612](tel:617-803-2612), [ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com). Tables of 8 to 10 may be reserved in advance.

**APRIL 16 — Annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture, Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston.** Sunday beginning at 7:30 a.m. Supported by the Park’s Charles and Doreen Bilezikian Endowed Fund. Rain date: April 23. For details, email [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

NEW JERSEY

**MAY 13 — Save the Date! The Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group will mark its 25th anniversary with a gala. Details to follow.**

remains alone in his personal responsibility, not being supported from anywhere, not being guided from anywhere, but alone before his professional responsibility and his conscience and his moral responsibility.”

Even more negatively, she said, “I have the impression that these new authorities desire to destroy everything and create the new, but anything that is completely refused and destroyed cannot productively build the new. We can create the new [based] on the best of the past.” She contrasted European organic development of education and culture, based on experience and precedents to the current Armenian government acting to

destroy the old before the new has been developed. In the Armenian educational system, “the result is that chaos commences,” she concluded.

She also noted that the government is closing theaters and combining institutions of higher education without giving any thought-out reasoning to explain why. She said that this is a destructive approach, exclaiming, “Each time when there are alarmed declarations, imagine the psychological state of the people who work in these spheres...it creates anxiety in them and yet after this these people must still work in academic or creative activity.”





## COMMENTARY

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
UNITED STATES

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## EDITORIAL

## From Blame Game to Army Reform



By Edmond Y.  
Azadian

Armenia can hardly handle one calamity at a time but a rapid succession of disastrous occurrences is shaking the country to its core.

The closure of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan with its ensuing humanitarian consequences had left the Armenian nation reeling from Yerevan to the remote corners of the diaspora. We were in a national dialogue to find out a solution to the blockade

and help the 120,000 Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (Art-sakh) to survive. Before even solving that crisis, Armenia was hit by another catastrophe: the fire that broke out on January 19 in the army engineer sniper company of the military unit in Azat village in the province of Gegharkunik.

Details have been coming out on a daily and even hourly basis, along with the blame game as to who was the responsible party.

Fifteen soldiers died and three others hospitalized. It is believed that a total of 21 soldiers were stationed there and three escaped to safety. Therefore, there are live witnesses to give testimony to help with the investigation.

Rather than coming together and grieving the losses, the majority of the people in Armenia are in a rush to judgement; unfortunately, the calamity has become only an excuse for many people to air their views along the lines of their biases.

For the opposition, this seems to be a golden opportunity to lay the blame on the doorstep of the ruling party and ask for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Defense Minister Suren Papikyan, as if that would solve any problem, while the enemy is on the borders and encroaching on Armenia's sovereign territory day by day, with complete disregard for criticism and a call for restraint from many international capitals.

"Speculations are futile and irrelevant," said Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan. "Regarding the resignation of Defense Minister Suren Papikyan. ... The minister of defense cannot have anything to do with all this because in terms of his functions, he has completely done his job."

So far, the commander of the Second Army stationed in Gegharkunik, Vahram Grigoryan, and a dozen army brass have already been sacked.

Many government figures, starting with the eloquent Andranik Kocharyan, president of the Defense Commission of the parliament, have hit the screens, trying to diffuse the situation and rebut the opposition's accusations.

The debate and the controversy have driven the parties further from each other rather than bring them together around a national tragedy.

The loss of 15 soldiers this time around has caused a deeper trauma than the loss of 200 Armenia sustained during the flareup of September 13-14, 2022, because the latter occurred during the defense of the homeland against the Azerbaijani army. Besides, for the first time in recent memory, they fought back well, causing 700-800 enemy casualties which sent a message to the Baku leaders that they must pay a stiff price for such adventures.

Military historian Arzrun Hovhannisyan states that the military unit stationed in Azat had played a valiant role in the September conflict. That statement further supports speculations that this particular group could have remained a prime target for Azerbaijani revenge.

One of the opposition leaders, Yerevan State University lecturer and founder of the 5165 Movement Menuah Soghomonian, firmly places the blame on the prime minister, citing

Article 155 of the constitution: "We believe that de-facto Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Defense Minister Suren Papikyan are to blame for this tragedy."

Pashinyan himself has jumped into the foray to do some fence mending and during a speech in Aragatsotn Province, he said, "Some repercussions of the events show that we need to go deeper and understand the problems in their depth, in addition to the superficial problems. ... These problems often arise from the lack of willpower to break out of the habit of 'patching' the problems."

This debate boils down to the fundamental question of army reform. The first question that arises is why this unit was accommodated in such primitive quarters, with rudimentary means of heating. After so much bragging about army reforms, this situation flies in the face of the statements of the current authorities, who in this dire condition are conducting a witch-hunt. It was just announced that former defense minister and current member of parliament Seyran Ohanyan and another deputy, Armen Charchyan, are to be tried for illegal accumulation of property and other charges.

The opposition is not playing a constructive role and the government stoops to its level to conduct a farcical street fight



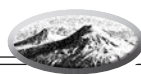
rather than run a country facing incredibly difficult choices. Although the 2020 war waged by Azerbaijan set back many reforms, there had been time for those reforms before. For almost five years, Pashinyan's administration has been blaming the misrule of the "former" regime but not done anything differently.

Even if the army reforms begin today, there are internal and external problems to solve first. Azerbaijan, for one, has warned that it will hamper any effort by Armenia to enhance its armed forces. Russia is refusing to deliver the armaments for which Armenia has already paid and Moscow has many devious ways of undermining army reforms in Armenia now that Yerevan has been looking to the international markets to replenish its military hardware. The deal with India offered good news but drone purchases from Iran may prove to be toxic politically, touching a raw nerve with the US and Israel. In short, Armenia is caught between a rock and a hard place. The West will not sell or supply any armaments as long as Armenia remains a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) but the CSTO refuses to help its member even in the face of attacks.

In the best-case scenario, if armaments were supplied, Armenia would have to develop its own military doctrine. Russian arms and military formations proved to be ineffective during the 2020 war and Armenia does not need to apologize to any party in enhancing its army according to its needs.

Let these deaths not be in vain. The fire that took the lives of 15 Armenian soldiers can serve as a useful if painful lesson to begin reforms in the army and bring it to the level of the country's needs.





## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Azeris Shoot Themselves in the Foot By Blocking the Lachin Corridor

One hundred and twenty thousand Armenians in Artsakh are trying to survive in sub-zero temperatures without heat, food and medicines due to the blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijani eco-terrorists who are masquerading as environmentalists. However, Azerbaijan is not going to get away with its grave human rights violations without paying a steep price.

Azerbaijan has become the laughing stock of the world. Just about every government, except for Erdogan's dictatorship, has condemned the inhuman blockade of Artsakh.

International organizations, such as the United Nations Security Council, European Parliament, Council of Europe, European Union, and European Court of Human Rights have criticized the government of Azerbaijan for blockading the population of the Republic of Artsakh.

Thousands of newspapers and television stations around the world have harshly attacked Azerbaijan.

Many politicians, prominent individuals and parliaments have urged Azerbaijan to immediately unblock the Lachin Corridor.

Thus, the billions of dollars Azerbaijan has paid in bribes to officials in Europe and around the world to gain positive PR have been wasted.

After countless violations of international law, everyone has become aware of the dictatorial regime of Azerbaijan.

From now on, no country will urge Armenia to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan given its genocidal actions. Besides the outright murder of a people, the UN also defines genocide as: "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

Both sides of any conflict must be desirous of seeking peace. When Azerbaijan is hell-bent on destroying Artsakh and Armenia, how can anyone expect a peaceful co-habitation with such a murderous neighbor?

Pres. Aliyev has undermined his own claim that Artsakh Armenians can live happily under Azeri rule, just like all other citizens of Azerbaijan. Since the Azeris themselves are deprived of their basic rights, how would Artsakh Armenians enjoy any rights? It is inconceivable for Artsakh Armenians to live in Azerbaijan, a government that is starving its 'future' citizens.

Pres. Aliyev does not hide his mischievous intent. He regularly makes Armenophobic statements, claiming that in addition to Artsakh, the entire Republic of Armenia was historic Azerbaijan. Of course, this is a ridiculous statement. Whereas Armenia has existed for thousands of years, Azerbaijan is barely over one hundred years old.

The fake Azeri environmentalists have never protested the severe air pollu-

tion in their own country. They also ignored the Azeri military's use of internationally-banned white phosphorus during the 2020 War which destroyed forests, humans and other creatures in Artsakh.

Many of the so-called Azeri protesters who have blocked the Lachin Corridor are members of the Azeri military. No Azeri is allowed to enter the occupied territories of Artsakh without the permission of Azerbaijan's government. Particularly ridiculous is the female Azeri protester who was wearing a mink coat and acting as if she was an environmentalist!

Meanwhile, the government of Azerbaijan kept denying that Azeris were blocking the Lachin Corridor by showing videos of a handful of International Red Cross cars and Russian Peacekeepers' trucks crossing the Corridor. The small amount of supplies they are allowed to bring to Artsakh is a tiny percentage of the 400 tons of supplies previously delivered daily to Artsakh from Armenia.

Artsakh's inexperienced leaders made inexcusable mistakes which undermined their own interests. The Artsakh government unwisely decided to shut down their mines in response to Azeri demands to inspect them. Thus, the Artsakh government was deprived of the large amount of tax revenues it received from these mines and left hundreds of Artsakh miners unemployed and without income. Furthermore, instead of telling Azerbaijan that the Artsakh mines are none of its business, the Artsakh government announced that it would allow international inspectors to come and inspect the mines.

The other mistake made by a high-ranking Artsakh official was his announcement that Armenian bandits were making money by using side roads that bypassed the Lachin Corridor to smuggle people and supplies in and out of Artsakh. This inappropriate announcement was immediately publicized by the Azeri media which published a map of the alternate route to reach Artsakh, threatening to bomb that route and telling the world that there is no blockade of Artsakh.

Besides Azerbaijan, Russia is to be blamed for the blockade of the Lachin Corridor as it is its responsibility to keep the Corridor open, according to the agreement signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia at the end of the 2020 War. The Russian Peacekeepers should not have allowed the Azeri mob to reach the Corridor, let alone block it. Furthermore, 120,000 Artsakh Armenians, instead of slowly starving to death, should have forcefully removed the Azeri mob and opened the Corridor.

The Armenian government has its own share of responsibility for the blockade. By telling Artsakh's leaders to deal directly with Azerbaijan to solve their dispute, Armenia's leaders have washed their hands from Artsakh, leaving Artsakh to face alone the powerful Azeri enemy, even though Armenia had repeatedly declared that it is the guarantor of Artsakh's security.

Finally, the Diaspora Armenian communities, instead of holding peaceful protests, should surround Azerbaijan's Consulates and Embassies around the world, not allowing Azeris to go in or out of these buildings, the way they have blocked access to the Lachin Corridor.

# Armenia and The Turbulent World: What To Do Next?

By Suren Sargsyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

At the end of 2022, I published an article in the *Armenian Mirror Spectator* ("Where Does the Ship 'Armenia' Float?") in which I tried to summarize the challenges that are facing the Armenian people and will continue to be relevant in 2023 as well, without suggesting any solution. The purpose of the article was to prepare a basis for discussions and to try to find answers to the questions that were put forward. A lot of readers who really understood this goal wrote to me, offering discussions, and presenting thoughts and ideas about the challenges that arose. I received dozens of letters and comments on various platforms from our concerned compatriots. There were also thoughtless people who did not understand the essence of the problem or tried to distract the Armenian public from these important ideas. In many cases, of course, they were not Armenians, but representatives of other states, who presented themselves as Armenians in social networks. Anyway, we are moving forward with our challenges and problems.

The current world order has cracked, but has not yet collapsed. The new world order is in its embryonic stage, but

it has not yet been born. In other words, the world order has de facto changed, but de jure the order established as a result of the Second World War and the collapse of the USSR still exists to some extent. Such pillars of international law as the UN Charter, the International Court of Justice, the Helsinki Final Act and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) began to emerge from international politics, rather than being its foundations. As a result of these transformations, international global institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization have found themselves in crisis. Structures such as the OSCE, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and dozens of formal and informal alliances appear as if in a stupor. The current world order has turned into a world disorder. The reason for all this is the de facto formed multipolar world, which has already led to the actual distribution of global "capital."

The actions of global players in Ukraine, and before that in Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere, essentially imply a third world war, but this is a new kind of world war typical of the modern world, with its newest manifestations, such as proxy and hybrid wars, economic sanctions, cyber, technological and economic wars. As a result of the actions of the global superpowers, the superpowers and regional superpowers such as Turkey, India, and Pakistan also become active. The international community (which has traditionally been understood as the Western community or the advanced world) wants Europe's problems to be the world's problems, but the world's problems not to be its problems. A good example is the blockade in Artsakh. It is no different from Hitler's blockade of Leningrad during World War II. However, it is not an issue of interest to the international community. In this regard, the question arises: what to do with such realities?

My opinion is that in these difficult conditions, Armenia has two things to do. To develop proactive diplomacy to try to prevent the coming war and to develop its army in case of the failure of this diplomacy, which is quite likely.

Today, Armenia is obliged to align its interests with all the main players, mobilize all Armenian and diasporan potential and work on these priorities on a daily basis. First of all, it is necessary to work with Russia, Iran and the USA. The reality is that the commencement of the so-called "Century of Peace" in Armenia is a non-perspective policy. Turkey and Azerbaijan refuse to live in peace with Armenia until they get what they want in full. The Armenian authorities do not realize this and misjudge the situation. Today, Russia is the only state that has a military presence in Armenia and Artsakh. Iran is the only state whose interests contradict the implementation of the Turkish plan, that is, depriving Armenia of Syunik or opening the corridor.

The US is the state through which and with the influence of its Armenian community it is possible to gain influence over Azerbaijan and exert pressure on it. At the same time, Armenia should work with the US in the fight against terrorism, because during the last war, Azerbaijan and Turkey brought terrorists to fight against Armenians. Most probably they are still in the region for future considerations. At the same time, Armenia is the only democratic state in the region, compared to its neighbors (along with Georgia), and this is also important for Washington from the point of view of preserving democracy. In other words, there is a lot to be done and the cooperation with these powers is extremely important. As already said, Armenia has two things to do today: acquire weapons, strengthen the army and make tenfold diplomatic efforts for the sake of saving Armenia and Artsakh.

The peace agenda was unrealistic from the beginning and it makes no sense to hope for it, especially when you are dealing with genocidal Turkey and Azerbaijan.

(Suren Sargsyan is an expert on US foreign policy, researcher and author. He is a graduate of Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Sargsyan is a founder of the Armenian Center for American Studies, a research center based in Yerevan.)



COMMENTARY



Tekeyan Cultural Association Launches  
**ARTSAKH CRISIS  
AID CAMPAIGN**

The Armenians of Artsakh have been suffering direly due to the Azerbaijani blockade since December 12 despite international condemnation and sympathy.



How Much  
Longer Must  
the People  
of Artsakh  
Suffer?

The people of Artsakh have appealed for aid but diasporan Armenians hesitate, not knowing what can be done.

Due to the blockade, sending supplies is physically impossible, but there still is a way to help. The Tekeyan Cultural Association of USA and Canada has reached an agreement with the Artsakh government to send money directly into the bank accounts of large families with many children whose fathers were killed during the 2020 Artsakh war. With our help these families can purchase much needed life-sustaining supplies.

TCA has already sent an initial \$10,000. All money raised will be immediately transferred, with TCA paying all administrative fees.

**LIVES, AND THE VERY FUTURE OF  
ARTSAKH AND ARMENIA ARE AT STAKE.**  
**The Time to Act is NOW!**

Please donate as much as you can by making your donation online by clicking **HERE** or mail checks made out to the Tekeyan Cultural Association, memo: Artsakh Aid, to Tekeyan Cultural Association, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, or in Canada, 825 Manoogian, St.-Laurent QC, H4L 1Z5.

For more information, see <https://mirrorspectator.com/2023/01/05/tekeyan-cultural-association-launches-artsakh-crisis-aid-campaign/> or email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).

Applications for Zarmanazan 2023  
Registration Is Now Open

The Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is happy to announce that Zarmanazan, the Western Armenian language immersion programme, will take place in person from 11 July to 6 August 2023, in the French Alps, in Haute Savoie, France. Zarmanazan is a place where children, teenagers, young adults, teachers, and facilitators from the Diaspora are joined by the common willingness to learn and explore the Western Armenian language to its fullest.

Zarmanazan is composed of three distinct but interconnected parts: A program for 10 to 17 year old children and teenagers; a program for 18 to 24 year old young adults and a university certificate program for teachers of Western Armenian.

Children, teenagers and young adults participate in various immersive activities adapted by age groups. Multi-age activities are strongly encouraged as well. These include visual arts and audio-visual workshops, crafts, music, theatre and movement, creative writing, literary readings, outdoor games,

and nature-based explorations. All activities are created and led by a talented and qualified team of facilitators. The young adult workshops involve expressive elements, therefore require an intermediate comfort level in Armenian.

The number of spaces is limited. The deadline is February 14. Applications need to be submitted promptly via [www.zarmanazan.com](http://www.zarmanazan.com)

The certified intensive program for Diaspora-based Western Armenian educators, in collaboration with the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) in Paris, runs part of its programming during the Zarmanazan summer session. This includes theoretical instruction as well as a guided practicum. The number of participants is limited to 15. Information regarding the full course is forthcoming.

For further information visit: <https://gulbenkian.pt/armenian-communities/> subscribe to the newsletter .


TCA Continues Artsakh Crisis Aid Campaign

AID, from page 1

TCA will send another \$10,000 by the end of next week as the first fruit of its fundraising campaign.

The time to act is now. The lives of the 120,000 Armenians of Artsakh are at stake. Moreover, if Armenian Artsakh is depopulated through coordinated Azerbaijani actions, the future of the Republic of Armenia itself will be in grave danger. Azerbaijan's leaders already have occupied small bits of Armenia's territory and even periodically lay claims to the Armenian capital of Yerevan as Azerbaijani.

There is a grave and urgent responsibility weighing upon all Armenians of the world. We each have the ability to concretely ameliorate people's lives. Join the TCA effort and either send your checks made out to the Tekeyan Cultural Association, memo: Artsakh Aid, and mail them to Tekeyan Cultural Association, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472 and in Canada, 825 Manoogian, St.-Laurent QC, H4L 1Z5; or make your donations online at <https://givebutter.com/YCrT8P>. For more information, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).

**Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church**

Under the Patronage of His Excellency the Most Reverend

**Mikael Mouradian**

Bishop Of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg  
In the USA and Canada

**Cordially Invites You To**


**FEAST OF SAINT VARTAN**

**A Rich Cultural Program of Music & Poetry**

**Keynote Speaker**

**Mr. Aram Arkun**

Managing Editor of the Armenian Mirror-Spectator  
And Executive Director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association



Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2023, at 7:30 pm

Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan & Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont, MA  
A Reception Will Follow the Program, Open to the Public