

## Erasing Stigma Of Mental Health In Armenia Is Hard Work

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — The people of Armenia, like those of many other traditional cultures, tend to shun discussions about mental health and even if they seek help, consider speaking about it taboo. One group, Mental Health Awareness Initiative (MHAI), is trying to change that mindset.

The non-governmental organization (NGO) MHAI was founded by Gevorg Gharibyan, Artak Begoyan and Ani Asatryan in Yerevan in May 2021, in



Gevorg Gharibyan

the aftermath of the devastating war. “We saw the need,” Gharibyan said in an interview earlier this summer. “The founding members of the organization established a support system to bridge the gap [for mental health access] through the promotion of mental health awareness.”

Mental health disorders know no boundaries and respect no traditions. According to the World Health Organization’s figures from 2019, 1 in every 8 people — or 970 million people around the world — were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders the most common. In 2020, the number of people living with anxiety and depressive disorders rose significantly because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Gharibyan, MHAI is trying to “normalize mental health conditions,” as Armenia has higher incidences than many countries. “The higher estimate of 38 percent of Armenians suffering from mental health issues is 13 percent higher than the World Health Organization’s (WHO) universal estimates, which state that approximately 25 percent of people worldwide have a mental health condition,” he said, according to a study at the Ballard Center of Brigham Young University.

Both in Armenia as well as in the diaspora, Armenians seem hesitant to get help for mental health issues. Gharibyan explained that MHAI is working on efforts to not only help those suffering from mental health issues but also give tools to the  
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## Critically-Ill Artsakh Man Nabbed By Azerbaijani Authorities at Border

### Captive’s Daughter Fears For His Life

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — A daughter of a seriously ill Nagorno-Karabakh resident arrested by Azerbaijani authorities during his aborted evacuation to Armenia demanded his immediate release on Monday, July 31, saying that she fears for his life.

“We have no information about his condition, we don’t know if he is alive or not,” Vera Khachatryan told reporters as she picketed the Yerevan offices of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Vagif Khachatryan, a 68-year-old resident of the Karabakh village of Patara, was in the latest group of patients who were being escorted by the ICRC to Armenian hospitals for treatment on Saturday, July 29. He was detained at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin corridor in what Karabakh’s leadership and the Armenian government condemned as a gross violation of international law.

Azerbaijani authorities said Khachatryan was taken to



Vagif Khachatryan, moments before his arrest

Baku to stand trial on charges of killing and deporting Karabakh’s ethnic Azerbaijani residents in December 1991, at the beginning of the first Armenian-Azerbaijani war. Karabakh officials strongly deny the accusations.

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US diplomat John Allelo (left) inspects an Armenian aid convoy stuck near the Lachin corridor July 28, 2023.

## US Again Urges Reopening Of Lachin Corridor

By Anush Mkrтчian and Tigran Hovsepian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The United States renewed its calls for the immediate lifting of Azerbaijan’s blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) on Friday, July 28, as Armenian trucks carrying food for Karabakh’s residents remained stuck at the entrance to the Lachin corridor for the third consecutive day.

The Armenian government sent the aid convoy on Wednesday in an attempt to alleviate severe food shortages in

Karabakh. Azerbaijan, which tightened the blockade on June 15, condemned the move as a “provocation,” refusing to let 19 trucks loaded with about 400 tons of basic foodstuffs to pass through an Azerbaijani checkpoint.

John Allelo, the acting deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Armenia, joined Yerevan-based foreign diplomats in visiting an adjacent Armenian border  
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## Congressional Caucus On Armenian Issues Calls for Immediate International Action to Prevent Humanitarian Crisis in Artsakh

WASHINGTON — Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues Co-Chairs Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ-06), Gus M. Bilirakis (FL-12), David G. Valadao (CA-21), and Adam B. Schiff (CA-28) released a statement on July 28 calling for immediate actions to be taken by the international community to address the months-long blockade of the Lachin Corridor by the Aliyev regime.

“The people of Artsakh are facing an unfathomable humanitarian crisis at the hands of the Aliyev regime. Because of the Azeri blockade of the Lachin Corridor blockade, food is dwindling, medical supplies are limited, and essentials for daily life are dangerously low,” the lawmakers stated. “The international community has sat on the sidelines for far too long, watching as this crisis has escalated to a critical point where the lives of tens of thousands are currently at risk. Meanwhile, President Aliyev has faced zero consequences for his brutal campaign to force Armenians in Artsakh off their historic lands.”

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### New Communication System Launched for Artsakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — ArtsakhX, a messenger designed specifically for Nagorno-Karabakh to ensure uninterrupted communication in the event of blackouts has been officially launched, the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities announced Tuesday.

ArtsakhX is encrypted with NATO-approved military grade End-to-End AES-GSM-256 algorithm.

The app was developed as part of a memorandum signed between the Government of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) and Zangi.

Zangi CEO Vahram Martirosyan announced ArtsakhX in an [interview](#) earlier in July.

### Students Protest in Front of Red Cross Building

YEREVAN (news.am) — Dozens of students protested in front of the entrance to the Yerevan office of the International Committee of the Red Cross on July 31, demanding a meeting with its head over the arrest by Azerbaijan of a patient transported by ICRC from Karabakh to Yerevan for a surgery.

The students gathered from different Armenian universities chanted “Freedom to Vagif Khachatryan” who was arrested by Azerbaijan’s State Border Service on Saturday and taken to an undisclosed location.

“We demand a meeting with the head of the ICRC, we also demand that a press conference be held in Geneva to inform everyone that a person was kidnapped from their direct control, otherwise it will look like they agree with what happened on Saturday,” said a participant of the protest.

The protesters called on the ICRC employees not to be indifferent, to raise the alarm about everything that happens in Nagorno Karabakh.

### Ambassador Power Raises Concerns about Food Insecurity in Artsakh

YEREVAN — In a tweet on August 1, former US Ambassador and current administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, raised the issue of food insecurity in Artsakh as a result of the blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijani forces.

She wrote, “Food insecurity & shortages of medical supplies in Nagorno-Karabakh are very troubling. The Lachin corridor is critical for getting lifesaving supplies to the people of NK. I join Secretary [of State Antony]’s call for the free transit of commercial & humanitarian supplies through the corridor.”

The day before, Blinken had tweeted, “I spoke to Azerbaijani President Aliyev yesterday to express our deep concern for the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh. The United States urges all sides to continue dialogue to reach a durable peace agreement.”



The flash mob in Stepanakert

## Charity Group Stages Flash Mob in Stepanakert to Attract World Attention

STEPANAKERT (Public Radio of Armenia) — At the initiative of the “Ararich” charity foundation, a group of young people organized a flash mob in Stepanakert’s Revival Square to attract the attention of the outside world.

“There is a humanitarian crisis in Artsakh. The long blockade has paralyzed the entire healthcare system. The rate of early pregnancy loss has increased. Shops and pharmacies are empty. Baby care supplies and food have run out. Agricultural works are carried out under enemy fire, and due to fuel shortage, agricultural products do not reach consumers. Harvesting is carried out partially and in the conditions of periodic violations of the ceasefire. This is not all. The situation is becoming more catastrophic day by day,” said the Facebook page of the “Ararich” charitable foundation.

About 1,710 citizens have been deprived of the opportunity to receive necessary medical treatment due to the suspension of planned surgeries in all medical facilities of Artsakh increasing by about 10 cases in the last 2 days.

As of today, 655 patients have been transferred from Artsakh to Armenia to receive appropriate medical care with the mediation and accompaniment of the International Committee of the Red Cross and another 70 accompanied by Russian peacekeepers to receive appropriate treatment. As a result of additional Azerbaijani obstacles to ICRC activities, movements were suspended for

almost a month in May. After resumption, ICRC activities were again suspended on 15 June and then resumed with some interruptions and additional obstacles.

Around 3,900 people, including 550 children, have been separated from their homes as a result of the blockade, however, some have already returned home with the assistance of the Red Cross and Russian peacekeepers.

No citizen traveled freely along the Stepanakert-Goris highway (Lachin (Qashatagh) corridor), and the cases of two-way movement of people decreased by about 215 times, and only with the support of the Red Cross and RF peacekeepers (instead of 561,050 people in 229 days, 2,614 entry and exit. In the last 2 days, 24 cases of exit and entry of citizens were registered).

Not a single vehicle of Artsakh citizens passed through the blocked road, and the movement of vehicles was almost 72 times less than it should have been without the blockade (instead of 210,680 2,936 vehicles entered and exited in 229 days, and that only by Red Cross and Russian peacekeepers). That means 5 entries and exits of only ICRC vehicles were recorded in the last 2 days.

About 16 times fewer vital goods were imported by the Red Cross and Russian peacekeepers than should have been without the blockade (5.715 tons instead of about 91,600 tons in 229 days, 0 tons in the last 2 days).

During the blockade, Azerbaijan completely or partially interrupted the sole gas supply into Artsakh for a total of 162 days and the electricity supply has been completely disrupted for 200 days. This has led to daily blackouts and additional emergency shutdowns, resulting in many facilities closing or curtailing operations.

Since the blockade, 1,450 businesses (33.9% of the total number) have suspended their activities due to their inability to operate, while 2,827 businesses are operating partially. These partially operational businesses either have an insignificant share of production capacity or are receiving state support.

An estimated 14,600 people (including state-supported temporary work placements and more than 80% of private sector workers) have lost jobs and sources of income as a result of the impact on the economy from the blockade and disruptions of vital infrastructure. Recently, the unemployment rate has been increasing rapidly.

Construction work of 32.6 kilometers of roads, tens of kilometers of water lines, irrigation systems for thousands of hectares of land, 3,717 apartments, and more than 40 social and industrial infrastructures have been stopped.

During the blockade, the economy of the Republic of Artsakh suffered a loss of around \$435 million dollars, leading to the decline of the predicted annual GDP index (903 million dollars) by more than 48 percent.

## Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues Calls for Immediate International Action to Prevent Humanitarian Crisis in Artsakh

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“This is the definition of ethnic cleansing. The international community must utilize all diplomatic tools available to halt the blockade, open this vital lifeline, and prevent a catastrophic humanitarian crisis from unfolding. We call on the Biden Administration to act immediately and help bring this deliberate and calculated crisis to a peaceful end.”

Armenians in the South Caucasus are continuously threatened by the destabilizing, brutal actions of the Aliyev regime. The blockade of the Lachin Corridor for over seven months is risking the lives and livelihoods of over 120,000 people in Artsakh, and the prevention of aid from going through the corridor is bringing

the humanitarian crisis to a head. It is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis caused by Azerbaijan’s deadly 2020 invasion of Artsakh that killed 5,000 and forced more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians to leave their homes. Azeri forces continue to harass, detain, and kill individuals in Armenia and Artsakh, while also falsely declaring Armenian territory as their own.

On July 31 Ambassador Lilit Makunts briefed Pallone on the consequences of the Lachin corridor blockade, which result in a humanitarian catastrophe in Nagorno Karabakh, as well as on the case of Vagif Khachatryan, who was abducted and detained by Azerbaijan on July 29 during his transportation to Armenia for a medical care with the help of ICRC. (See story on this page.)



## ARMENIA

# US Again Urges Reopening of Lachin Corridor

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area to inspect the long line of trucks awaiting permission to proceed to Stepanakert. The diplomats accompanied by Armenia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan also met with Karabakh Armenian refugees.

In a [Twitter](#) post, the US Embassy said Allelo "heard from displaced persons and regional officials about the suffering caused by continued blockage of the Lachin corridor."

"We reiterate [Secretary of State Antony] Blinken's call for an immediate reopening of the corridor to commercial and private traffic," it wrote.

"Unfortunately, there have been no positive developments so far," Kostanyan said, adding that the aid convoy will remain there "as long as it's necessary."

"We will try to ensure the reopening of the Lachin corridor by all political means at our disposal," he told reporters. "The trucks will stay here for now."

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on July 27 that Baku's continued refusal to let the convoy through would testify to its "intention to commit genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh." The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry responded by saying that the Armenian side should agree to an alternative, Azerbaijani-controlled supply route for Karabakh.

Borrell stressed that the proposed route rejected by Karabakh's leadership "should not be seen as an alternative to the reopening of the Lachin corridor."

Meanwhile, Armenia's Vienna-based ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Armen Papikyan, called on the international community to impose sanctions on Baku to ensure its compliance with a UN court's February order to "ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions."

## EU Pressure

Azerbaijan must reopen the Lachin corridor, the European Union said on July 26, expressing serious concern over the worsening humanitarian crisis.

"The European Union is deeply concerned about the serious humanitarian situation affecting the local population in the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast," the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said in a statement. "The movement through the Lachin corridor remains obstructed for more than seven months, despite Orders by the International Court of Justice to reopen it."

"Medical supplies and essential goods are in short supply or have already run out, with dire consequences for the local population. It is incumbent on the Azerbaijani authorities to guarantee safety and freedom of movement along the Lachin corridor imminently and not to allow the crisis to escalate further," added Borrell.

Like the United States and Russia, the EU has repeatedly called for an end to the crippling blockage of Karabakh's only land link with Armenia and the

outside world. Borrell's statement is the most strongly-worded of his appeals made to date.

Azerbaijan rejected the statement on Thursday, saying that it is based on "the Armenian side's false propaganda." "Presenting legitimate actions of Azerbaijan as a closure of the Lachin road is fundamentally wrong," said Aykhan Hajizade, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman.

Hajizade insisted on a different, Azerbaijani-controlled supply route for Karabakh proposed by Baku and rejected by Karabakh's leadership as a cynical ploy designed to facilitate the restoration of Azerbaijani control over the Armenian-populated region.

Borrell stressed in this regard that while the EU "took note" of the Azerbaijani proposal it "should not be seen as an alternative to the reopening of the Lachin corridor."

The EU official made the appeal shortly after the Azerbaijani side refused to allow a convoy of 19 Armenian trucks carrying 360 tons of food aid for Karabakh residents to pass through a checkpoint which it controversially set up in the Lachin corridor in April.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan condemned Baku's refusal to let the aid convoy through. He said Yerevan still hopes it will be allowed to proceed to Stepanakert. The Azerbaijani authorities' failure to do so would lend credence to "concerns about Baku's intention to commit genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh," Pashinyan added during a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

# AMAA's Avedisian School Holds Graduation Ceremony

YEREVAN — "Just as a mother bird soars her nourished, winged chicks, I wish you the same to you. Follow your dream, soar boldly. Don't slack off, don't hesitate, don't be lazy. Study, work, be brave. Love and be loved. Appreciate study, work, wisdom..."

AMAA's Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School Principal Melania Geghamyan's farewell message to the seventh graduation of the School was touching. And in general, the 2022-23 academic year's graduation ceremony, held on June 12, was full of love, exciting moments, special and unique, where representatives of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), philanthropists, leaders of Yerevan universities and schools, par-



Principal Melanya Geghamyan

ents, and former graduates participated as honored guests.

Following the Principal's message, a video presentation dedicated to the late and generous benefactor of the School, Edward Avedisian, was shown. It was impossible to watch the video and hear the gentle and kind voice of dear Ed on the screen without being emotional. Everyone's eyes were directed to the philanthropist's widow, Mrs. Pamela Avedisian, who, not breaking the tradition founded by her beloved husband, "continues walking in Edward's footsteps



The graduates of the AMAA's Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School

toward Yerevan, to the Avedisian School." AMAA Representative in Armenia Aren Deyirmenjian's message was meaningful advice to the young graduates on the threshold of a great life.

The graduation's Keynote Speaker was former Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia Arman Tatoyan. His message was a challenge to become a wall of knowledge facing the Motherland.

Valedictorians Nare Bagratunyan, in English, and Maria Petrosyan, in Armenian, delivered words of gratitude.

The highlight of the event was the speech by Pamela Avedisian. Mrs. Pamela or, as the students of Avedisian call her dearly, dear Pam, spoke, told, and said the words of her heart... in Armenian... a bright proof of love and warmth... "Dear graduates, today, one hundred times or more, we wish a good march. We believe that it will be so.

And let the sky above you be cloudless, and the horizons always open and be inviting."

During the Ceremony, the "Paros" Chamber Choir (director: Raffi Mikayelyan) performed the favorite tunes of the late Edward Avedisian, and RA honored artist, conductor Sergey Smbatyan's Orchestra of talented youth, composed of scholarship recipients of "Music For the Future" cultural fund with a few musical selections.

The graduates received diplomas under the flags of Republic of Armenia and Avedisian School followed by much applause. After the "classic" hat-throwing ceremony, Rev. Hovhannes Hovssepian, Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Church of Armenia, offered the Benediction.

This year's Graduation Ceremony went according to all the "rules," but the emotions shown were very different than usual due to the passing of Edward Avedisian.



Pamela Avedisian

Founded in 1918, the Armenian Missionary Association of America serves the spiritual, educational, and social needs of Armenian communities in 24 countries around the world including Armenia and Artsakh. For additional information, visit [www.amaa.org](http://www.amaa.org)



## ARMENIA

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sufferers' loved ones to help them where possible.

Gharibyan said that "every person in their lifetime needs to have the language and tools to help those in need," adding that he and his fellow co-founders "saw a need there."

Gharibyan is a mental health advocate, speaker and researcher. He is a UK-licensed chartered psychologist (CPsychol), an American Psychological Association associate and a British Psychological Society Psychotherapy Section Committee member. A Queen Mary University of London postgraduate trainee in mental health (modern psychological therapies), Gharibyan is a co-founder of the Millennial Psychologist mental health portal that provides mental health support internationally.

Gharibyan, with an advisor to the group, Laura Bilazarian Purutyan, who is based in Massachusetts, spoke about the efforts when he was in town for an event at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR). The program, titled "The Role of Mental Health Awareness in Minority Communities," came as a result of trying to speak about the treatment of mental health among minority groups in Massachusetts and their approaches to the issue.

Purutyan said that for her, the MHAI is a valuable tool because it offers a "rigorous, professional approach and on a human level it is bringing the issues to the surface" in a way that is "culturally sensitive and accurate."

One of the reasons the organizers decided to have the program at NAASR was for a chance to connect with likeminded professional and form possible partnerships, such as, for example with the Alzheimer's Association or the Jean Appollon Expressions, a Haitian-American organization. Facilitating such networking locally was done by the Armenian Heritage Park board member Dr. Armineh Mirzabegian.

Gharibyan said that the next step for his organization is to establish "very healthy partnerships inside and outside Armenia." Among those with which MHAI has already established ties are the British Psychological Society and American Psychological Association.

The group is also establishing a library, partly with the support of the American

Psychological Association.

There are many issues that are affecting the population of Armenia emotionally, Purutyan said. "The issues that cause a struggle in Armenia are distinct" from those in the US, she explained. Between wars and the earthquake, not to mention a tough economic outlet, the population has gone through much.

The main issues that the population in Armenia faces in terms of mental health are



Gevorg Gharibyan in the UK with fellow students at Queen Mary University

depression, anxiety and substance abuse, Gharibyan said.

Purutyan is a Workforce Development and Community Relations Specialist with the McAuliffe Center for Integrated Science Learning at Framingham State University. She is also a board member of Girls Inc. of Worcester, which empowers girls to be strong, smart and bold.

Urging acceptance for everyone is a central tenet for the group. As Gharibyan explained, the NGO will also have "zero tolerance toward discrimination and take a scientific approach to help mental health," he added.

The organization does not want to "reinvent the wheel" when it comes to providing mental health, he said, but to tailor it to Armenia specific cultural sensitivities. To that end, Gharibyan said, the group has launched a social media campaign about the benefits of receiving help for mental health as well as support for caregivers of those with mental health concerns.

Gharibyan said that the organization is actively fundraising to help spread their message and to implement their plans.

His reason is simple, he said: "Only a healthy society can be prosperous. Only if they have the tools and resources they need" can they succeed.

For example, he said, people need to understand that "living with schizophrenia does not make you a monster."

The organization has gotten positive

health as well as neurodivergent conditions such as autism, dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Another topic has been the mental health of gay youth, who often face ostracism in society in Armenia.

Another area being studied and implemented for Armenia is the psychological effect of genocide and generational trauma. Armenians, Gharibyan said, suffer from historically complex trauma passed down to the conscious

feedback, he said. For example, he noted, a young man wrote to the organization that "I was about to commit suicide and I saw your post," and changed his mind. Such reactions, he said, "Melt my heart."

One issue they are trying to tackle is that in Armenia, therapists or other mental health providers are not licensed. In addition, much of the care is provided on an inpatient basis at mental institutions rather than outpatient sessions.

"It is an out-of-date model," he said. Once a sufferer is institutionalized, even temporarily, they can lose touch with their community, who can support them in this difficult time, he explained. At this difficult time, they said, the sufferers should not be "cut off from their community."

Thus, Gharibyan said, they are offering campaigns and programs to "tackle the stigma and debunk myths."

In addition, Gharibyan and Purutyan spoke about the need for finding a new language and framework to discuss mental

and subconscious levels of the current generation.

To start the dialogue initially, MHAI hosted a livestream shortly after the war which registered as having only a dozen or so people watching. However, within a couple of hours, the program had racked up more than 1,000 viewers who could watch anonymously and submit questions without registering for the live viewing. Clearly, he said, there was a need for such programs, but participants still wanted anonymity.

The group has also worked on creating a suicide prevention hotline and is working toward establishing an emotional support number. By September, the phone number (8642) will be in place. The suicide hotline will not be 24/7 at the time being, since it does not have enough staffing.

"It is important to be able to step above my pain is greater than yours and to be able to connect with one another on a human level," he said.

To learn more, visit [mha.am/en](http://mha.am/en).

## Ex-Diplomat, Top Conductor Arrested Over 'Large-Scale Fraud'

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A former diplomat and his son running Armenia's leading classical music orchestra were arrested at the weekend on fraud charges denied by them.

The accusations stem from the privatization in 2012 of a 300-square-meter plot of land in downtown Yerevan by a company allegedly controlled by Armen Smbatyan, a former Armenian ambassador to Israel and Russia, and Sergei Smbatyan, the artistic director and chief conductor of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra.

According to the Office of the Prosecutor-General, the company bought the land for 170 million drams (now equivalent to \$435,000) in return for a pledge to build a cultural center there as well as a new concert hall and central heating system for an adjacent music school. It constructed a 17-story office building instead, causing



Armen Smbatyan (left) and Sergei Smbatyan

the state almost 1 billion drams (\$2.6 million) in "damage," the law-enforcement agency claimed in a statement.

A court in Yerevan promptly agreed to

remand both men in pre-trial custody. Their lawyer, Yervand Varosyan, dismissed the "absurd" charges on Monday, likening them to an "artistic work transcending all

bounds of imagination." Varosyan also argued that the Armenian statute of limitations for the crime allegedly committed by the Smbatyans has expired.

The prosecutors also implicated Hasmik Poghosyan, a fugitive former culture minister, in the alleged fraud. They said that Poghosyan, who served as minister from 2006-2016, gave the green light to the privatization deal despite being aware of the Smbatyans' real intentions.

Poghosyan has been on the run since being charged in late 2020 with abusing his position to privatize a historic Yerevan building in a complex fraud scheme allegedly facilitated by Armen Smbatyan. The latter posted bail and avoided arrest at the time.

A musician by education, the older Smbatyan was the rector of Yerevan's Komitas State Conservatory from 1995-2002. He served as ambassador to Russia in the following years.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Critically-Ill Artsakh Man Nabbed By Azerbaijani Authorities at Border

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The ICRC said on July 30 that its representatives in Baku visited Khachatryan in Azerbaijani custody and enabled him to communicate with his family.

“My father has still not contacted us, that is false information. We have no news except that he is in Baku,” countered Vera Khachatryan, who fled to Armenia during the 2020 war with Azerbaijan.

A spokeswoman for the ICRC office in Stepanakert suggested that the Red Cross statement referred to an “oral message” sent by the Karabakh man to his loved ones. “In this particular case, there was indeed no direct communication, but something was passed on to the family,” said Eteri Musayelian.

Karen Grigoryan, the chief cardiologist at a Stepanakert hospital who treated Vagif Khachatryan, confirmed that the latter suffered from a serious heart disease and needed urgent surgery in Yerevan. “He periodically had blackouts,” Grigoryan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

Khachatryan is the first Karabakh patient arrested by the Azerbaijani authorities during medical evacuations by the ICRC which began after Baku halted last December commercial traffic through the only road connecting Karabakh to Armenia. It is not yet clear whether the Red Cross will resume the evacuations after his arrest.

In response, Armenia has applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regarding the protection of the rights of Khachatryan, the Office of Armenian Representative on International Legal Matters announced.

“An application regarding the protection of the rights of Vagif Khachatryan was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights with the request to apply an interim measure against Azerbaijan. We will inform further about further developments. We will inform further about further developments,” the Office has said.

## Medical Convoys Suspended

As a result of Khachatryan’s illegal and unexpected arrest by Azerbaijani author-

ities, the transfer of critically ill patients from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia has been halted.

Speaking to POLITICO, one of the advisers to Artsakh Premier Gurgun Nersisyan, Artak Beglaryan, confirmed that all medical evacuations have been stopped indefinitely as a result.

The Red Cross did not immediately respond to a query. The Swiss-based aid organization issued a statement on August 1 in which it said it was being prevented from bringing supplies into the region and warned that, without access to food and medicine, “the humanitarian situation will further deteriorate.”

The EU, the U.S., the U.K. and a host of other countries have called on Azerbaijan to reopen the Lachin Corridor to civilian traffic and uphold a ruling from the International Court of Justice that said Baku must “ensure movement” along the highway.

(Reports from Azatutyun, Public Radio of Armenia and Politico.eu were used in compiling this story.)

## Armenia’s Foreign Ministry Issues Statement in Response to Arrest of Artsakh Man at Lachin Crossing

YEREVAN — On Saturday, July 29, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the arrest of a critically-ill Artsakh man at the Lachin crossing, where the Azerbaijani authorities have installed an illegal checkpoint and imposed a similarly illegal and suffocating blockade, a war crime. The man was traveling under the protection of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as he suffers from advanced heart disease.

The MFA issued a statement which appears below in full.

On July 29, 68-year-old Vagif Khachatryan, who, having serious health issues, was being transported from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia for medical treatment, accompanied by the International Committee of Red Cross, was abducted by the representatives of the border guard service of Azerbaijan at the illegal check point installed on the Lachin corridor and taken in an unknown direction without any reliable explanation.

It should be emphasized that the ICRC provides the parties with the lists of patients to be transported in advance and carries out their transportation only after the consent of the parties. The release of the statement full of false narratives and accusations by the Prosecutor General’s Office of Azerbaijan right after the abduction shows that this operation was thoroughly planned in advance. Moreover, the statement contains an open threat to apply the same approach to other residents of Nagorno-Karabakh as well.

This mode of operation by Azerbaijan is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law: the arrest of a person under the protection of international humanitarian law and the ICRC is nothing short of a war crime. It also aimed at completely blocking the ICRC activities in Nagorno-Karabakh, while Azerbaijan continues the blockade of the Lachin corridor and hinders in general the access of other humanitarian organizations to Nagorno-Karabakh.

It is noteworthy that this action of the Azerbaijani authorities is a direct implementation of the statement made by the country’s president on May 28 that “the installation of a checkpoint in the Lachin cor-

ridor would be a lesson for the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, ... they should show up with bent necks,” and the continuous threats, about which the Armenian side has repeatedly signaled to international partners, calling on them to condemn these and other similar statements. This action of Azerbaijan directly demonstrates that the alarms, voiced by Armenia for already a long time, reflect the seriousness and urgency of the existing sinister risks of ethnic cleansing.

Moreover, this pattern of behavior time and again demonstrates the bankruptcy of the arguments of the Azerbaijani side with regard to the Armenian prisoners of war, civilian captives, as well as the servicemen abducted from the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia on May 26, who went through sham trials and are still illegally kept in Baku.

This arbitrariness of Azerbaijan, carried

out in parallel with the complete blockade of the Lachin corridor and refusal to address the issues of rights and security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, is aimed at terrorizing the Nagorno-Karabakh population and in case of absence of international engagement once again casts serious doubt on the possibility of not only ensuring the minimal rights of the Nagorno-Karabakh people, but also on the possibility of realizing the right to life.

We consider the criminal act committed by Azerbaijan today and the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor unacceptable and reprehensible. We expect united and clear-cut steps by the international community, including using existing tools aimed at restoring unimpeded movement through the Lachin corridor, ensuring the activities of international humanitarian organizations in Nagorno-Karabakh as well as humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh.

## Turkish FM Calls Lachin Azerbaijani Territory

ISTANBUL (news.am/Azatutyun) — Turkey is in favor of the early signing of a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, believing that this will ensure stability in the region surrounding them. This was announced by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan after talks in Ankara with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, broadcasted by the TRT channel.

“Turkey supports the initiatives regarding Azerbaijan and Armenia and calls on the international community to also support them, without making any distinction between the parties. The path to stability in the region lies through the signing of a comprehensive peace treaty, and the opening of the Zangezur corridor is of great importance for this,” Fidan said.

He called the [Berdzor] Lachin Corridor the territory of Azerbaijan, noting that Baku has the right to take all the necessary measures they consider necessary to ensure their security and protect sovereign rights.

“The Lachin road is Azerbaijani territory and Azerbaijan can carry out any action

there,” Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan was reported to say after talks with his visiting Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov.

Fidan said that international criticism of the continuing blockage of the only road connecting Karabakh to Armenia is therefore “unfair.”

The United States, the European Union, Russia as well as various international organizations have repeatedly urged Azerbaijan to unblock the vital road. US Secretary of State Antony again did so in a weekend phone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Baku continues to dismiss such appeals.

Fidan also said that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will agree to normalize Turkish-Armenian relations only after Baku negotiates a desired peace deal with Yerevan.

“Iran’s approach to this issue disappoints us and Azerbaijan,” Erdogan said in June this year. “I want us to overcome that problem soon.”

## INTERNATIONAL

## ECHR Gives Azerbaijan Aug. 8 Deadline for Return Of Artsakh Detainee

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has given Azerbaijan by August 8 to provide information about Vagif Khachatryan, the resident of Nagorno-Karabakh who was kidnapped by Azerbaijani border guards while being evacuated by the Red Cross to Armenia for treatment, the Office of the Representative of Armenia for International Legal Matters said in a statement on July 31.

Azerbaijan must provide information on the location and condition of detention of Khachatryan, as well as the latter’s health, any received treatment and possible return.

Earlier Armenia applied to the European Court of Human Rights with a request to indicate provisional measures against Azerbaijan.

## PACE President calls for CoE fact-finding mission to Karabakh

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) The president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Tiny Kox has called for a Council of Europe fact-finding mission with the aim of assessing the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh where Armenians’ lives have been affected by the absence of free and safe access through the Lachin corridor since December 12, 2022.

“I join the call for dialogue voiced by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on 28 July 2023, and urge both Azerbaijan and Armenia, as Council of Europe member States, to finally live up to their mutual commitment, made on their accession in 1991, to de-escalate tension and restore peace between their countries,” Kox said in a statement on July 31.

## ICC Prosecutor Offers Help To Artsakh

BUENOS AIRES (Public Radio of Armenia) — Argentine lawyer, First Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (2003-2012) Luis Moreno Ocampo wrote several tweets this past week announcing his willingness to help Artsakh.

He noted that it is a great honor for him to help the Armenians of Artsakh.

He also intends to publish a report on Ilham Aliyev’s actions against Artsakh within a week at the request of the Artsakh’s President.

In one tweet he wrote, “Is the President of Azerbaijan committing genocide today? He can prevent the genocide in Artsakh and Armenia,” with the hashtags #StopArmenianGenocideInArtsakh #StopArmenianGenocide2023.

On July 29, the President of the Republic of Artsakh, Arayik Harutyunyan, sent a letter to him asking for his expert opinion on whether the deepening blockade of Artsakh corresponds to the crime of genocide.



## INTERNATIONAL

# European Parliament's Call on Turkey to Recognize Armenian Genocide Has Been traditional Position – MEP Nacho Sánchez

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Member of the European Parliament Nacho Sánchez Amor (Spain) has said that there are positive signals for progress in terms of EU-Turkey and Armenia-Turkey relations, but at the same time he has warned that Turkey is an unpredictable country.

Nacho Sánchez Amor, the rapporteur on Turkey in the European Parliament, gave an interview to Brussels correspondent Lilit Gasparyan on the latest report on Turkey, its foreign policy, the probability of Turkey someday recognizing the Armenian Genocide, the Armenia-Turkey normalization process and the possibility of Turkey joining the EU.

**ARMENPRESS: Your latest report on Turkey welcomes the process of normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations. How realistic do you think a settlement is, considering Turkey's endless preconditions? And what effect can this have on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations?**

Nacho Sánchez Amor: Well, I think it depends on the real political will of both parties. I think it's good that at least they started this conversation. It's good that they appointed two interlocutors, but apparently after this good first impression there was a moment of stagnation. I don't know, I'm not aware of some talks that could have happened more discreetly, but I think it's good in the current moment, when apparently Turkey is sending signals of some kind of openness and is trying to mend ties with every neighbor. I think Armenia is very symbiotic of this policy, this really new policy and for that reason, we encourage both parties to continue dealing with the bilateral issues because this is good for both and this is good for the region.

**ARMENPRESS: Like last year, this year as well the report urges Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide, how realistic is this?**

Nacho Sánchez Amor: I think it depends... It depends... There were some approaches in the past and there were some attempts to try to have a common ground. If there is a good bilateral relation, it could be the moment to try to encounter the way in which both parties could reach some kind of agreement on how to tackle the issue. There were, I remember, some ideas about historians or political moves, but it

depends on the mood. If the mood is better, it could be a thing to be put on the agenda, how to tackle the issue, probably not to go fast to an immediate and plain recognition, but at least how to tackle this. Trying to keep the position of both parties. I think it's good. Regarding the Armenian Genocide – this is the traditional position of the European Parliament. We are always trying to send the message and for that reason we use the word again and again, to recognize, because that has been and is a very traditional position.

**ARMENPRESS: Now for many years you have been following Turkey very closely. How do you assess Turkey's role in the South Caucasus, what effect does it have on Azerbaijani President Aliyev?**

Nacho Sánchez Amor: Well, the problem with Turkey, like in other countries is improvising, you can never know what could happen because things change overnight, because the system is so hyper centralized that everything depends on one person and two or three desks in the palace and for that reason you see, as we are seeing complete shifting, complete delving, complete abandoning positions, exploring other ways. And for that reason, you never know what could happen with Turkey. But what I know is, apparently, Turkey is coming back to the old idea of zero problems with neighbors. And this is a good policy. I think we encourage that kind of policies and if you have a problem, you have to deal with the problem with the normal diplomatic means. No putting pressure on the statement. No, of course not using military means, not threatening but talking. This is the way we have been calling Turkey to come back to a more normalized foreign policy. And for that reason, we encourage these policies. Realistic? I'm not sure, but at least the signals we have received lately are good signals.

**ARMENPRESS: After the last elections held in Turkey, many are desperate, many are optimistic. What is your position? Should we expect changes in Turkey's foreign policy or not?**

Nacho Sánchez Amor: Yes, of course. I don't have a particular personal opinion on domestic politics in Turkey. We have to deal with Turkey as it is and with the government that the Turkish people choose.

But even we know that during the elections there were some problems that were clearly detected by the international electoral observation that was done. We have to deal with Turkey as it is and we try to encourage the moves and the drills and the opinions in Turkey, they are more conducive to good relations with their neighbors and with the European Union. This is our stance. I think yes, it's true. Well, they are having local elections and probably this is again a moment of more tensions. But it's true that President Erdogan has five years ahead to try to compose a more consensual policy and foreign policy, and I think this is also related with the economic direct threat of the country, it is in a very difficult situation from the economic point of view, and probably that could help to try to conduct foreign policy which is more friendly, more open and less assertive, and sometimes we use assertive not to use aggressive, but I think it's good that for whatever reasons Turkey have realized that they need to have different ties with the neighbors, and with the blocks and with the European Union, the United States and China and Russia.

**ARMENPRESS: You propose an alternative way of cooperation with Turkey instead of EU membership, what format are we talking about?**

Nacho Sánchez Amor: Well, finally we reached an agreement in the Parliament, not to get rid of the accession process immediately, but to try to maintain the accession process as it is, meaning frozen, and try to really, seriously explore other ways. Because the accession process has not been functional. The conduct of reforms has not protected, unluckily, the profile of a democratic society in Turkey, and this is becoming growingly dysfunctional. The idea is let's explore other ways. There are some approaches to come back or to explore deeply or to review. The whole association agreement. It's good to remind that the current customs union is pending under the umbrella of the old association agreement and we have to deal with the agenda as we can deal with custom unions. We always have been open to that. We have to deal with visa with the conditionalities well known in Europe and not so well known in Turkey. Apparently, we have to deal with migration. We have to deal with economic

cooperation in our area, we have to resume the higher level talks because it's a little bit cynical than theoretically we don't have an element of that. There are a lot of Commissioners and a High Representative, and the Presidential Commission and the Council dealing with, we took his authority, but theoretically we don't have high level talks. There is a lot of things that we can do to mend the agenda, to regain trust. This is the first step to regain trust and try to fix or try to create another framework in the relations with Turkey.

**ARMENPRESS: What is your assessment of Turkey-EU relations from now on?**

Nacho Sánchez Amor: With the EU, it's the same. There are no changes because despite what happened in the world, despite the Green Deal, despite the geopolitical earthquakes, the accession to the European Union is about a very clear process, you have to approach the European Union in every field and one field at the core of the accession process is human rights, democracy, rule of law and from this point of view, there is no minor signal of improvement, not even a minor signal. The gestures of the state, the facts are sending a very confusing message. There are prisoners like Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtas despite the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, the prosecution of HDP as the party. There are journalists in prison. There are clashing with LGBTB movement activists and feminist activists.

And regarding the European Union accession process, these are the things we have to assess and examine. Is not just, say, the good behavior of Turkey in the Greek island, in Cyprus, in the Black Sea, in the Green Deal or in the prisons. That is we welcome any good move in that question, but the official process is completely different and for that reason we were astonished when the [Turkish] president said OK, I let Sweden to enter the coalition, but we have to get something from the EU. These have nothing to do with each other. I criticized openly the NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg. I know for sure that Mr. Stoltenberg has to fix the issue. But the accession process to the European Union is not a bargain piece inside the NATO.

## US, Russia Mum as Turkey Escalates Attacks Against Kurdish Groups in Iraq and Syria

By Amberin Zaman

ISTANBUL (Al-Monitor) — Turkey's military campaign against alleged Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets in Syria and Iraq is continuing full blast with at least four fighters of the US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and four others from the outlawed PKK killed in drone strikes in northeast Syria and Kurdish-administered northern Iraq, Kurdish-led armed groups and Iraqi Kurdish security officials said. The Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration in North and Northeast Syria on July 30, denounced Russia and the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State (IS) in a statement over their silence in the face of the attacks.

The assaults continued throughout the weekend when three civilians were injured as a result of Turkish shelling that targeted a village located south of Tell Tamar in northeast Syria, Kurdish media reported. That attack came after Turkish forces

carried out 40 artillery strikes against the Kurdish majority enclave of Afrin in northern Syria, which was occupied by Turkey in 2018, Kurdish media said. The claims could not be independently verified; however, a low-intensity conflict between the SDF and Turkish-allied groups has been bubbling since Turkey's wresting of Afrin from the Syrian Kurds.

The United States and Russia are guarantors of separate cease-fire agreements struck in the wake of Turkey's 2019 Operation Peace Spring in which it occupied large chunks of SDF-controlled territory and permanently displaced over 200,000 civilians who continue to languish in ramshackle camps. Both wish to pull Turkey to their side as Russia's war on Ukraine rages on. They have, in turn, grown even more hesitant to rebuke Ankara over its aggression toward PKK-linked Kurdish groups, least of all as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to weigh granting final approval to Sweden's

accession to NATO and despite the fact that Washington rejects Turkey's characterization of the SDF as "terrorists."

Salih Muslim, co-chair of the Democratic Unity Party that shares power in the Autonomous Administration, said they had no contact with either Russia or the Syrian regime.

"Their silence is nothing new, and we do not know what is going on behind closed doors," Muslim told Al-Monitor.

Ankara remains oblivious to the critiques.

Though the US Central Command condemned the attack, both the White House and the State Department remained silent. To be sure, Washington's diplomatic engagement with the Autonomous Administration has declined since Russia's occupation of Ukraine in February 2022. Senior Syrian Kurdish officials were told to put off a planned trip to Washington in February even after being issued visas for it, Al-Monitor previously reported.

This was likely to head off potential Turkish fury ahead of a NATO summit that was held earlier this month in Vilnius and where it was hoped Ankara would approve Sweden's formal admittance into the alliance. Instead, Erdogan agreed to tell the Turkish parliament to ratify Swedish membership but then went on to say that parliament was going into summer recess until October. Hence, the issue remains unresolved.

In June, the PKK ended a unilateral truce it had called in the wake of twin earthquakes in February that killed over 50,000 people and devastated large swathes of southern Turkey.

It has since been picking off a steady trickle of Turkish soldiers, mostly in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, Turkey's drones are putting pressure on the PKK as never before. There are no signs that Erdogan is interested in reviving peace talks with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan that were abandoned in 2015.



# Community News

## Zohrab Center's Lily E. Jelalian Summer Internship Program Concludes

NEW YORK — The Zohrab Center's 2023 Lily E. Jelalian summer internship program came to a successful conclusion on Thursday, July 27. Two high school and two college interns assisted with coordinating donations to the library and processing and cataloging Armenian-related books and periodicals in Armenian, English, Turkish, Russian, Spanish, and Italian, as well as organizing the library's space and its holdings to make it more functional. Altogether, over 500 new items were processed and added to the collection, where they are now searchable via the library's online catalog.

Working under the guidance of director, Dr. Jesse S. Arlen, and special projects coordinator and cataloger, Arthur Ipek, each intern also had a special project they pursued, meant to give them an opportunity to foster and develop their own interests in Armenian culture, history, language, and literature.

Armen Karakashian, a mathematics major at Rutgers University, where he is also taking classes in Western Armenian, translated the beginning of a novella by Matteos Mamurean and developed a prototype for an AI-based software to assist in the cataloging of books.

Luiza Ghazaryan, a neuroscience major at New York University (NYU), who is also pursuing minors in creative writing and chemistry, translated Eastern Armenian poetry and short stories to English. Three of her translations were published on the Armenian Poetry Project's website: "My Serene Evenfall" by Vahan Teryan; "Vernal Equinox" by Hovhannes Shiraz; "You Are Everything" by Hovhannes Shiraz.

Tessa Dadourian Weber, a high school student at Poly Prep in Brooklyn, learned the Armenian alphabet and researched the Kütahya/Jerusalem Ottoman Armenian ceramics and pottery tradition, which she plans to apply in her own ceramics practice.

Aren Yegoryan, a high school student at Saint Demetrios Prep in Queens, researched the history of modern Armenian photography.

Over the course of the internship program, the interns also visited and received private tours at the Atamian Hovsepian Art Gallery and Cultural Space and the Morgan Library and Museum, and also met by Zoom with Dean V. Shahinian, who funded the Lily E. Jelalian summer internship program in memory of his aunt.

Each of the interns had an opportunity to reflect on their own experience working at the Zohrab Center.

Armen Karakashian wrote, "I am incredibly grateful for my internship at the Zohrab Center. The internship provided me with the opportunity to continue learning the Armenian

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Co-Chair David Terzibashian with guest

## 15th Annual Armenia Fest 2023 Raises Funds for Humanitarian Aid

ROYAL OAK, Mich. — The 15th Annual Armenia Fest took place on Saturday July 22nd, at the historic Farmers Market in downtown Royal Oak Michigan. Over 2,500 attendees from across Michigan and nearby states were greeted with the sounds of live Armenian folk music performed by the Armenia Fest All Star Band including featured guest star, Michael Kamalian on Clarinet, under the direction of Maestro Vaughn Masropian. The market was filled with colorful vendor booths featuring Armenian pottery, trinkets, baked goods and jewelry. Adding to the festive atmosphere was the aroma of delicious Armenian food. Guests dined on a variety of kebabs, lamajoun (Armenian pizza), Basterma, grape leaves, pastries and breads prepared by local caterers and church organizations.

see FESTIVAL, page 10



Armenian dancers at the event

## Baibourtian Has Joined Buy Armenian Advisory Board

GLENDALE — Buy Armenian announced recently that Ambassador Dr. Armen Baibourtian, who has a combined experience of 33 years in diplomacy, professorship, management, and executive leadership, has agreed to join its newly established Advisory Board. Baibourtian brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the Board to help shape the Buy Armenian's noble mission and successfully carry it out.

Baibourtian has worked twice as deputy foreign minister of Armenia, co-chair of the Security Dialogue with the US, first Armenian chief negotiator with the European Union, first Ambassador of Armenia in India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, senior advisor to the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Yerevan, Co-chair of Armenia's bilateral Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Technological, Cultural, and Educational Cooperation with China and India, and founding Consul General of Armenia in Los Angeles. He became the first in Armenia to hold the prestigious Jean Monnet Chair of European Union Studies when teaching at the Center for European Studies at Yerevan State University. He held the position of Consul General in Los Angeles for the second time having completed his mission in March 2022. He holds the top diplomatic rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

Presently, he serves as professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (since 2014), teaching remotely from Glendale. Simultaneously, Baibourtian is the Chief Administrative Officer in a group of California-based companies in the transportation industry. The firm is one of the largest US Postal Service contractors and in the Energy and Insurance fields.

"We look forward to working with Ambassador Dr. Baibourtian and are excited about other Armenian community leaders to join us on our Advisory Board," said Dr. Nishan Odabashian, the co-founder of Buy Armenian.

The Advisory Board's role is to lend its skills, relevant knowledge, experience, critical thinking and analysis to Buy Armenian to help its business leadership make more informed decisions.



From left, Ambassador Armen Baibourtian, Archbishop Barkev Martirosyan, Very Rev. Fr. Zareh Sarkissian and Alec Baghdasaryan at the Buy Armenian Grand Opening



## OBITUARY

## Mary A. Kilbourne Matossian

### Armenian Studies Pioneer

By Lou Ann Matossian

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. — Historian Mary Allerton Kilbourne Matossian, a pioneer of Armenian, women's and interdisciplinary studies, passed away on her 93rd birthday, on July 9, 2023, in Portola Valley, Calif.

Her groundbreaking 1962 study, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, stood virtually alone for two decades as the main Anglophone source on Soviet social reforms in Armenian life. To this day, her chapters about Armenian women remain the historiographical point of reference for contemporary scholars.

In popular culture, Mary Matossian was known for her 1982 interpretation of the Salem witch trials; her research was reported widely and featured in a New York Times editorial. Using historical climate data, she defended the theory (originally proposed by Linnda Caporael) that ergot-infected rye bread caused symptoms of mold poisoning, which the colonists attributed to witchcraft. The Salem case was included in *Poisons of the Past* (1989), a synthesis of public health and social history that drew international attention.

A native of Los Angeles, Mary was born July 9, 1930, to Norman J. Kilbourne, MD, a Yale honor graduate, and the former Katharine R. Hillix, a YWCA secretary. Named for her Pilgrim ancestor Mary Allerton (1616–1699), the young Mary Kilbourne was deeply influenced by her family's Anglo-American Protestant traditions, which included spiritual conviction, social reform, communion with nature, women's education, and the worldwide missionary movement. Her great-aunt, medical missionary and botanist Fannie Andrews Shepard, MD, served in Aintab, Ottoman Turkey, from 1882 to 1919.

At age 17, Mary received a scholarship to Stanford University, from which she graduated in 1951 magna cum laude and

Phi Beta Kappa. The following year, as a Rotary Fellow, she attended the American University of Beirut (Lebanon), receiving her MA in Near Eastern History, then returned to Stanford, where she completed her PhD in history in 1955.

On July 9, 1954, Mary married Garo S. Matossian (1921–2004), an Armenian physician born in Aintab, whom she had met in Beirut. Garo's parents, Setrak and Eliza (Ayvazian), were both educators, Setrak having taught at the American missionary-led Central Turkey College in Aintab and later at Aleppo College in Syria.

Mary and Garo moved to Boston in the fall of 1956, where Garo received advanced medical training at the Lahey Clinic. While affiliated with the Russian Research Center at Harvard, Mary revised her dissertation on Soviet Armenia for publication. She taught history at the University of Maryland for 31 years.

Mary Matossian was the author of *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Brill, 1962), *Armenian Village Life Before 1914* (with Susie Hoogasian Villa, Wayne State University Press, 1982); *Poisons of the Past: Molds, Epidemics, and History* (Yale University Press, 1989); *Shaping World History: Breakthroughs in Ecology, Technology, Science, and Politics* (M.E. Sharpe, 1997); *Öncesi Ermeni Köy Hayatı* (Turkish edition of *Armenian Village Life Before 1914*, Aras Yayıncılık, 2006), and *Plants, Stars, and the Origins of Religion: With a Decipherment of the Phaistos Disk* (Mill City Press, 2014).

Her articles and essays of note include "Two Marxist Approaches to Nationalism" (1957), "Soviet Diary, October 1957" (1958), "The Armenians" (1967), "Ideologies of Delayed Industrialization: Some Tensions and Ambiguities" (1962), "In the Beginning, God was a Woman" (1973), "Birds, Bees, and Barley: Pagan Origins of Armenian Spring Rituals" (1979), and a reflection on her early work, "The Transfor-



mation of Armenian Society Under Stalin" (1980).

Mary Matossian is survived by her children Lou Ann, Michele, Viken (Mary), and

Mark (Renée) Matossian and nine grandchildren. A requiem service (*hokehankisd*) will be held at St. John Armenian Church, Southfield, Mich., on August 20.

## Loretta A. Gelenian

### Dedicated to Armenian Culture and Letters

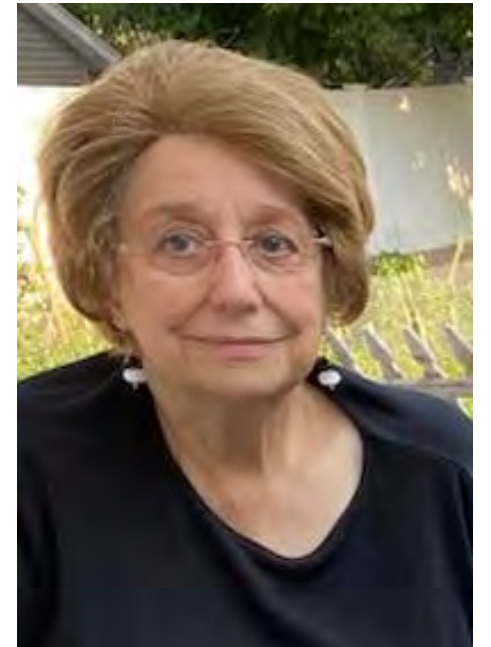
BOSTON — Loretta Anahid Hamasdegh Gelenian passed away on July 28, 2023, at the age of 84.

Loretta, known as Lorig to her family and close friends, was born on January 20, 1939, to Armenian writer and poet Hampartzoum Gelenian (Hamasdegh) and Serpouhi Beghian.

Loretta grew up in West Medford, MA, and attended Medford High School before moving on to study Social Relations at Radcliffe, which was Harvard University's all female college, graduating in 1961. Loretta then attended the Palandjian Jemaran in Beirut, Lebanon, studying Armenian and teaching English. Following this, Loretta went on to complete her master's degree in education at Northeastern University in 1968. Loretta then began an impressive vocational career including being an administrative assistant in Washington DC at the US Department of Agriculture, a service representative at New England Telephone and Telegraph Company, a Job Analyst at John Hancock, and perhaps her most passionate venture, a beloved teacher of American History with the McCarthy School in the Chelmsford public school system for 34 years.

Loretta had a true love of reading and learning and nurtured this love and curiosity by travelling around the world, meeting new people and seeing new places, spreading her kindness and intelligence to all those around her. Some of the many places that she enjoyed visiting were Egypt, Syria, Jerusalem, major cities in Europe, the Soviet Union, as well as Armenia, Hong Kong, and Bangkok. She also loved and had a talent for various arts and crafts and spent many hours working on her beloved doll houses, as well as quilting and creating unique cards for different occasions. Loretta developed an interest in horticulture and formed an active garden club while she was living in Chelmsford.

Loretta also felt it important to be active in the Armenian community. She was one of the founding members of the Armenian Cultural Association. She was also an active member of the Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Soci-



ety in the Boston area. Loretta was on the Executive Board of the Armenian Relief Society (ARS) where she was instrumental in forming the organization's Summer Studies Program for college aged students. Later, she was an executive in the Armenian Renaissance Association. Loretta also believed in being politically active, and was a delegate of the Democratic National Convention, a cause in which she believed strongly.

Loretta was predeceased by her parents Hampartzoum (Hamasdegh) and Serpouhi Gelenian as well as her sister Armine Der Hovanessian. She is survived by her cousins Eleanor Gelenian Hughes, Louise Gelenian Arthur, and Judy Gelenian Zarifian and their extended families. She is also survived by Velda Jerrehian Moog and family, Nini Petrucione and family, niece Mara Der Hovanessian and many friends.

A funeral service will be held at St. Stephen's Armenian Church in Watertown on Saturday, August 5, at 12:30 p.m. Visitation hours will be at the Church from 11:30 am-12:30 pm, and the funeral service will begin at 12:30 pm. A memorial meal will immediately follow the Church services downstairs in the Church Hall.

Cemetery services will be private.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Zohrab Center's Lily E. Jelalian Summer Internship Program Concludes

INTERNS, from page 7

language in new and challenging ways, such as interpreting Armenian texts for cataloguing purposes and being introduced to the Eastern Armenian dialect. In addition to cataloguing books, I also practiced translating chapters from the novella Ամիս մը ծովուն վրայ by Մատթեոս Մամուրեան [A Month on the Sea by Matteos Mamurian] and programmed a prototype AI-based software to assist in the cataloguing of books. I was also exposed to many Armenians throughout the cathedral and the center who speak the language fluently, which greatly assisted in my own learning of the language."

Luiza Ghazaryan noted, "Interning at the Zohrab Information Center gave me the opportunity to be closer to the treasures of Armenian literature, history, and art. During my time as an intern, my mentors and peers inspired me to explore the beauty of my roots, strengthen my skills in Creative Writing, and publish translations of Armenian poems in *The Armenian Poetry Project*. I spent most of my time cataloguing the donated books and in this very captivating process, I encountered new writing styles and forms of art, and learned more about talented Armenians."

Tessa Dadourian Weber added, "During my time spent at the Zohrab Center this summer, I completed various projects and tasks. One reason I became interested in working and researching at the center was to expand my knowledge on Armenian pottery. Next year I plan to engage in an

independent study at my school on Armenian pottery. Having the opportunity and access to the Zohrab Center has allowed me to gain a basis of understanding on how these vessels were created and the history behind them. I plan to take what I have learned to my study where I aim to use the same techniques as used in the Ottoman Armenian tradition from Kütahya and Jerusalem. In addition to my research, I spent time at the center helping organize the periodicals, some dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. Sorting through different series of periodicals, for example *Hoosharar*, broadened my prior knowledge on different subjects, for instance the history of AGBU. Lastly, I spent time studying the Armenian alphabet so I would have the ability to read titles of books and periodicals located in the center."

Aren Yegoryan wrote, "During my time at the Zohrab Center, I assisted in processing, cataloging, and organizing Armenian books. It was a pleasant experience to participate in as a summer job. It provided a sense of responsibility and gave me my first work experience, which I'm sure will help me with my future endeavors. Being exposed to many different books, people, and information, the environment was great to work in, and I'd certainly do it again."

The Zohrab Center's 2023 Lily E. Jelalian summer internship program lasted for six weeks, from June 19 to July 27, with the interns coming to work in person at the Center three days per week.



From left, Aren Yegoryan, Armen Karakashian, Arthur Ipek, Dr. Jesse Arlen, Luiza Ghazaryan, Tessa Weber

Tekeyan Cultural Association

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenia Fest 2023 Raises Funds for Humanitarian Aid



The crowd at the festival

FESTIVAL, from page 7

One of the highlights of the Fest was the presentation of Armenian folk dancing by the local Hamazkayin Arax Dance Troupe under the skilled direction of Nayiri Karapetian, assisted by Dickran Callan. The troupe consisting of 94 dancers of various ages in dazzling ethnic costumes brought the crowd to their feet with amazing preci-

sion performances.

Another highlight is the annual Choereg (Armenian Bread) competition where local clergy judge entries to determine the best Choereg! This year's winner was the St. Sarkis Womens Guild with a close second won by a member of the Fundukian family! A fun-filled night for all.

This annual admission free Festival is



2023 Armenia Fest Committee, from left, Vaughn Masropian, Noreen Masropian, David Terzibashian, Pam Coultis, Madeline Thomasian, Ed Bedikian, Angela Hagopian Snow, Elise Papazian, Hagop Alexanian, Ray Boujoulian (fest members not in photo are Ken Khezarjian & Corinne Khederian)

open to the general public under the patronage of the Knights of Vartan, Detroit Nareg Savarshan Lodge. The credit for the success of this much-anticipated annual Festival goes to the generous sponsors, donors, and advertisers. This year's sponsors included the Mardigian Family Foundation, Hagopian Family of Companies, Robert Ajemian Foundation, Simon Javizian, Armenian Community Center, Crispelli's Bakery and Pizzeria, Herman Hintirian Family, Matthew Bedikian, Highland House Restaurant, Shakeh Basmjain and Family and Helen Parnagian Corrigan.

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GENATS! MAY YOU DELIGHT IN OUR WINES



The Armenia Fest Committee comprised Choereg Competition, from left, L-R Deacon Rubik Mailian, Deacon Garo Balian, Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Rev. Fr. Hrnt Kevorkian

es local American-Armenian activists who help to organize throughout the year, events and programs like Armenia Fest celebrating and perpetuating the rich Armenian cultural and heritage. Each year proceeds from the festival are donated by the Committee to humanitarian Armenian causes. This year's proceeds are being earmarked to specifically help the Armenian population affected by the inhumane blockade being imposed by Azerbaijan. The Armenians of Artsakh are fighting each day for their freedom and self-determination in their ancestral homeland.

Armenia Fest is proud to be recognized as one of the largest ethnic festivals in Oakland County.



## COMMUNITY NEWS



THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR**  
**SPECTATOR**

*Reflecting ~ Connecting ~ Inspiring*

**MEDIA COVERAGE OF ARMENIA AND  
KARABAKH TODAY** Journalists' Panel and Q&A

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2023**

**7:00 – 8:30 PM** (Free and open to the public)

With the participation of:  
**David Ignatius**  
*(Washington Post)*  
**Ken Dilanian**  
*(NBC News)*  
**Eric Hacopian**  
*(CivilNet)*



Joyce Cummings Center, Room 270

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**90TH ANNIVERSARY GALA**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2023**

Boston Burlington Marriott, Burlington, MA



**KEYNOTE  
SPEAKER**

**Robert  
Avetisyan**

*Representative of the  
Nagorno Karabakh  
Republic in the US*



**EMCEE**

**Sona  
Movsesian**

*Author, podcast co-host  
and personal assistant to  
Conan O'Brien*

**MUSICAL PERFORMANCE**



*a cappella trio*



From left Teni Apelian, Anais Tekerian, Yeraz Markarian

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# Arts & Culture

## Juan De Lara Named Director of Armenian Institute of London

LONDON — The Armenian Institute recently announced the appointment of Dr. Juan de Lara as its new director. De Lara is an archaeologist, art historian and digital engineer with more than 20 years of experience leading businesses and charities. He also holds the position of Associate Researcher at the University of Oxford - Khalili Research Centre for the Art and Material Culture of the Middle East and is also a Trustee of Global Learning London. Previously, he served as the Director of the Bagri Foundation (2021–2023), where he spearheaded the organization's endeavors to foster and celebrate the arts and culture of Asia.

Prior to this role, he held the position of Cultural Manager at Asia House (2018–2021) and has been an advisor for The Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition "Epic Iran" (2020) and consultant for the world-leading cultural consultancy firm Barker Langham (2019–2023).



Dr. Juan de Lara

De Lara's academic background includes extensive research in the archaeol-

ogy of the ancient and late antique Mediterranean, the Near East, and the Caucasus. His work focuses on understanding cross-cultural networks that existed between societies throughout this time. Currently, his research delves into the interactions between ancient Urartu and the Aegean during the first millennium BCE.

De Lara said: "I am honored to be entrusted with the opportunity to serve not only the Armenian community but also the global stage in advancing and celebrating the culture and heritage of the Armenian people. This endeavor promises to be an extraordinary chapter in the annals of our institute's history. I look forward to fostering meaningful collaborations with each of you, as we embark on a shared mission promoting cultural awareness while remaining attuned to the ever-evolving social needs of our time. As we continue to build upon the legacy of this esteemed center together, let us ensure that it resounds deeply within the hearts of generations to come."

Tatiana der Avedissian, chair of the Board of Trustees, said: "We are thrilled to have Juan join our team. Juan not only possesses extensive knowledge of Armenian culture and history, but also brings a wealth of experience in developing exemplary programs and growth for the organizations he has been part of. We look forward to this new chapter at the Armenian Institute under his expert leadership and we can't wait for you all to meet him."

see APPOINTMENT, page ?



From left, Jeremy Dalmas, Gohar Khachatryan and Nyree Abrahamian

## Podcast Brings Storytelling To Armenian Experience

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BOSTON — Armenian history, unfortunately, is filled with much turmoil. The current news out of Artsakh is the latest episode in Armenian history where a devastating

defeat must be endured.

A new podcast, "The Country of Dust," is taking the hard news and presenting it in a narrative format.

Nyree Abrahamian, the co-host and producer of "Dust," in an interview last week from Yerevan said, "The idea came about right in the aftermath of the Artsakh war. Among friends we were talking about different things we could do, what we felt needed to be out in the world."

She and the fellow producers, Jeremy Dalmas, Gabrielle Kaprielian and Gohar Khachatryan, all met through Birthright Armenia. All, except for Khachatryan, were diasporan volunteers in Armenia; Khachatryan was a longtime staffer at Birthright's Armenia offices.

"We were having a conversation and Gabrielle came up with the idea of starting a podcast to share some of the stories coming out of the war and post-war period," Abrahamian said.

"We all felt this need for a certain type and quality of stories to be out there. Especially during the war and the direct aftermath there were news stories that covered basic facts, like which lands were given up and how many losses. But when I would speak to my friends in the diaspora who were really concerned about what was going on here. They wanted to know what people's lives were like. Human stories," Abrahamian said.

She added. "If I am trying to quickly describe it to someone, I say you know 'This American Life.' We are 'This Armenian Life.' It's the same style. Within the Armenian world we don't know of another podcast doing this kind of thing and that's a lot of the reaction we are getting," she said.

"We've got a lot of people reaching out through social media. It's been overwhelmingly positive," Abrahamian said. "The type of podcasts we are producing is narrative storytelling. Many podcasts are two people speaking, recording that conversation and putting it out here. What we're doing is very different. It's a story, it's a narrative, there is a host carrying that thread. There is music that Jeremy composes. So it's a series of audio documentaries."

see PODCAST, page 20

## Davit Galstyan

*Noted Soloist Wants to Put Choreography School on The Map*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN — The Yerevan State Choreographic College of Dance is one of my favorite places in our city; the office of its director exudes high art and taste. Since the end of last year, one of our best dancers, Davit Galstyan, has been working in that cozy room. Still young, at 38, and full of charm, Davit follows the footsteps of our outstanding ballet artists, Vilen Galstyan and Nadezhda Davtyan, both of whom have passed away. He studied at the Yerevan Choreographic College and the Royal Ballet School in London, from which he graduated with a gold medal, being recognized as one of the best students of the school for three years. In 2004–2022 he was the soloist of the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse (France). He performed leading roles in a number of classical and new classical ballets, participated in several gala-concerts, festivals and tours of European ballet stars in many countries: also danced in performances of the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater.



**Davit, you have been in charge of your alma mater dance college for more than half a year. What changes have you managed to make?**

Most importantly, two new one-act ballets were staged: the third act of "Raymonda" from the classic repertoire and my own staging "Back to the Roots" with music by Knudage Riesager. We had three performances on the college stage, the tickets were almost completely sold: the public demanded from us to repeat the performances, but we did not do it so as not to overburden the schoolchildren. This year we celebrated Aram Khachatryan's 120th anniversary, with the partnership of the Spenidiyan Opera and Ballet Theater and Khachatryan's house-museum, which provided us with unique film footage with Khachatryan's participation. It was a very good evening, the sections of classical and folk dance were presented from the

*continued on next page*



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Noted Soloist Galstyan Wants to Put Choreography School on the Map

from previous page

performances of Vilen Galstyan, Norayr Mehrabyan and Vanush Khanamiryan from Khachatryan's works. Also, with the cooperation of the Zark Foundation, we celebrated the 120th anniversaries of our ballet dancers Azat Gharibyan and Tereza Grigoryan in Yerevan and Gyumri. My wish is that our college should be maximally active in community events and regions. On April 29, we also participated in the International Dance Day concert on the stage of the Opera and Ballet Theater. I attach great importance to our children being able to dance on the big stage, since it motivates them and awakens other feelings in them. There are many projects, but it all depends on funding.

This year, the modern department of the college also had its first alumni. With great pleasure, I watched the graduation performances: Ara Asaturian's "The Prophecy" and Rima Pipoyan's "Dido and Aeneas." They were truly original performances that can easily enter the repertoire of any theater.

Yes, our graduates made a great impression, they are a ready-made dance troupe. I am very sorry that in our country we still do not have a modern dance repertoire, a suitable theater for contemporary dancers. Unfortunately, this resource of talented young people has no place to fully manifest itself. It would be wonderful if one day we had a college-affiliated youth group, both modern and classical, that would serve as a trampoline to the big stage.

Let's hope that it will happen. Entering the college, certain technical changes are also noticeable.

We now have a specialized, new stage floor of a very good quality: dancing on the old one was risky for injuries. We also had newly designed scenes, a back curtain, we bought new tutus for the girls, and new outfits for the boys. But there is a lot of work to be done, especially in terms of building infrastructure.

**And now what does the college need the most?**

Recruiting male dancers. In the last 30 years, Armenia has been a country that "supplied" boys to international ballet. We know how many talented young people from this college went to work in different countries (one of them was me). Before we finished, 15-16 countries invited us to continue our studies for free. But in the last five years we also have the problem that existed in Europe some 30 years ago. That's why we have to do everything to restore the public's interest in ballet. There is no such problem in the folk-dance section, the same in the modern section, but there are no boys there. Now there is an agreement with the principals of the schools that starting from September, like in the old Soviet times, we will go to the schools and choose suitable candidates for the ballet from among the boys. We must achieve the fact that the repu-

tation of our college in the country will rise so much that many people will try to bring their sons here. The conditions are already good, we provide free food. The Ministry of Education and Culture also supports us in deferring boys from military service.

**Don't you intend to attract students from abroad as well?**

So far, we have a girl from Japan. She worked so well that I could not leave her out of our program and included her in our last two productions. Next year we will have two more students from Japan.

I think our college can become the best ballet school in the region.

It is a goal that we must achieve. First of all, it would be desirable for our teachers to be trained. Then, it will be necessary to involve the

certificate for the management of artisanal and secondary professional educational institution. Marine Hakobyan, director of the National Training Foundation, helped me a lot, so I was able to pass the exams and get the management certificate. I must say that my most recent performance, Nijinsky's famous "The Afternoon of a Faun," which took place in Toulouse, was emotionally very difficult. Imagine, I was sitting backstage before the performance, and twenty years passed before my eyes, after which I had to concentrate and go on stage to present my last performance to the audience. Anyway, that page was closed.

**And you turned a new page by acting as a ballet master this year. Do you think you will continue to direct?**



young people of the opera theater who are at the end of their career (which we are already doing, our ballet soloists Sevak Avetisyan and Karen Martirosyan are teaching at the college). I don't want to organize master classes for a short time: such work should be systematic, two or three times a year, with a certain plan. Only in this way will we be able to raise the qualification of our specialists. Why not, from time to time we can also organize master classes; this year Arsen Mehrabyan from Stockholm taught for a week, those short-term classes are also important, but they are not a solution to the problem. If we want to leave a legacy of good specialists after us, it should be with state support, organized, and I can bring the best specialists to be most useful.

**Davit, you finished your career as a dancer. Wasn't it a bit early? You are still in great shape.**

In terms of age, maybe it was early. But, to be honest, I was on stage for 20 years and I had had enough. I had fulfilled all my dreams, goals and desires. There was also a big factor: my father was ill, so I left everything and came back to be by his side. At the same time, it was impossible to remain without work. Learning that the position of the director of the college was vacant, I studied for three months and received a

To be honest, I did not have the ambition to stage, but I did it out of necessity and the enthusiasm of my students, and it seems to have worked. All three performances received very good responses. I think I will continue and I have decided to stay in the classic and new classic genre. Although I am not bad at modern ballet, I have worked with choreography giants, like Kilian, Forsyth, Neumeier, Duato, etc., but since our employer is the Opera and Ballet Theater, and we are the provider of their ballet group, it is very important that I perform classical ballet productions.

**We can say you have reached a very good milestone in your career. And in personal life?**

It is in progress!

The prominent Danish dancer and ballet master August Bournonville said: "I chose the most glorious of all professions." Do you agree with the sentiment?

I absolutely agree with him. I also chose the most glorious profession. I have never regretted that I took that path. Growing up in a ballet family, I have always loved dance. Today, I convey the same with great love to the talented students of our college. I am also very happy with this new status of mine, as I said, there is a lot to do. The responsibility is huge, but I am ready to do my best!

## 2023-24 UCLA Promise Armenian Institute Grant and Fellowship Recipients

LOS ANGELES — The UCLA Promise Armenian Institute announced in July the following individuals selected for research support during 2023-2024. PAI grants and fellowships are designed to support research across all academic fields, with an emphasis on or connection to Armenia or Armenians.

### PAI Postdoctoral Fellowships

**Anoush Tamar Suni** (Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 2019) "Underground Traces: Violence, Ruins, and the Politics of History in Anatolia"

Under the mentorship of Dr. Salih Can Açıksöz, associate professor in the UCLA Department of Anthropology, Dr. Suni will focus on expanding her dissertation—which traces the afterlives of the architectural heritage of the now-absent Armenian community that has persisted on the landscape of southeastern Turkey alongside more recent ruins—into a book manuscript to submit to an academic press.

**Arman Shokhikyan** (Ph.D., University of Nottingham, 2023)

"Charisma and Authority in the Armenian Christianity: A Decolonizing Engagement with the Vardapet Order"

Under the mentorship of Dr. Peter Cowe, the UCLA Nareketsi Endowed Professor of Armenian Studies, Dr. Shokhikyan will examine the historical relationship between the Armenian Apostolic Church's vardapet position and the Russian Orthodox Church's bishop, proposing that the fading of the Armenian charismatic leadership is linked to the Russian Orthodox Church's colonial influence. A decolonizing approach will offer new insights into the vardapet's charismatic leadership, gender representation, and ritual context drawn from unstudied archival, literary, and artistic sources.

### PAI Armenian Genocide Research Program Postdoctoral Fellowship

**Sedat Ulugana** (Ph.D., EHESS-Paris, 2019) "Transformation of the perpetrator into a victim: shifting relations between Kurds and Armenians from the genocide of 1915 to the Ararat revolt"

Under the mentorship of Dr. Taner Akcam, director of the UCLA PAI Armenian Genocide Research Program, Dr. Ulugana will examine the shifting nature of the Kurdish-Armenian political movements and alliances towards the formation of the modern Turkish state, revealing how the transformation from an imperial political setting to a modern national state impacted the state-society relations, as some Kurdish communities that were implicated in the Armenian Genocide became victims of state violence themselves.

### UCLA PAI Dissertation Year Fellowships

**Erdem İter** (UCLA Department of History) "Ottoman State-Building: An Analysis of the Anatolian General Inspectorate (1895-1899)"

Under the mentorship of Dr. James Galvin, professor in the UCLA Department of History, Erdem İter will complete his dissertation which examines the history of the Anatolian General Inspectorate, Anadolu Umûm Müfettişliği (1895-1899). Sultan Abdulhamid II established the inspectorate to solve the growing "Armenian Question," which was seen as an existential threat to the empire during the late nineteenth century.

**Daniel Ohanian**, (UCLA Department of History) "Church of Armenia, Church of Rome: Faith, Print, and Power in Ottoman-Armenian History, 1688-1717" (*partial fellowship*)

Under the mentorship of Dr. Sebouh David Aslanian, the UCLA Richard Hovannisian Endowed Professor of Modern Armenian History, Daniel Ohanian will complete his dissertation, which examines a period of turmoil among the Armenian communities of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. Around 1700, these communities reacted to increased Roman-Catholic missionary work in their midst by either (1) doubling down on their adherence to the traditional Armenian Apostolic Church or (2) converting to Catholicism and creating new, Armenian-Catholic institutions.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian



## Broma Bakery's Rhubarb Almond Honey Cake

"This pairing, ruby red stalks of rhubarb with wildflower honey and almond flour, is a total winner. It's my favorite type of dessert to make: one that's simple and made in one bowl, but that looks rustically beautiful and tempting you to devour it. Rhubarb is one of my favorite things to bake with. The color makes you instantly happy. The versatility makes it so each dish is unique and special. And the flavor lends itself to a variety of pairings. One thing that makes this cake such a knock-out is the use of Bob's Red Mill almond flour. It changes the texture just slightly from a 100% all-purpose flour cake, giving the cake added moisture. I also love the size of the almond flour bags that Bob's has. I find that I go through almond flour so quickly, so the larger bags are ideal for me," says Sarah Fennel. She is the successful blogger, photographer, writer, and baker at Broma Bakery. She also works in marketing, and has held a variety of positions in the food industry in Boston, New York, and Ann Arbor. She has amassed more than 600,000 followers on her Broma Bakery Instagram account. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan.



Broma Bakery's Sarah Fennel

This honey almond rhubarb cake is tender, moist and the perfect quick cake to whip together for any party or celebration.

### INGREDIENTS:

For the rhubarb:

- 7 stalks rhubarb (on the thinner side)
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons orange zest
- 2 tablespoons fresh squeezed orange juice

For the cake:

- 3/4 cup vegetable oil
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons light brown sugar
- 3/4 cup wildflower honey
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh squeezed orange juice
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 2 teaspoons almond extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 1/4 cups Bob's Red Mill all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup Bob's Red Mill almond flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

### PREPARATION:

On a large sheet pan, toss rhubarb to coat in sugar, orange zest, and orange juice. Let sit while you make your cake.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a 9 x 13 baking pan with parchment paper and set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together vegetable oil, eggs, both sugars, honey, orange juice, orange zest, almond extract, and vanilla extract. Fold in all-purpose flour, almond flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt, stirring until just combined.

Cut rhubarb stalks to size so they fit the entire length of the 9 x 13 baking pan. Cut the remaining/leftover stalk pieces into 1/2 inch pieces. Fold pieces into cake batter.

Spoon cake batter into prepared pan. Top with the longer rhubarb stalks.

Bake cake for 30-35 minutes, or until just golden brown. Allow to cool completely before serving.

This post is sponsored by Bob's Red Mill. Thank you for continuing to support the brands who help make Broma possible.

For this recipe, see: <https://bromabakery.com/rhubarb-almond-honey-cake/>

For Broma's Complete Recipe Index, go to: <https://bromabakery.com/recipe-index/>

For Sweet Tooth, The Baking Series, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2ga3vH2yDs>

For Strawberry Rhubarb Bakewell Tart & a weekend in Detroit, see <https://bromabakery.com/strawberry-rhubarb-bakewell-tart-a-weekend-in-detroit-with-tillamook-kroger/>

Check Broma Bakery regularly for numerous recipes (mostly desserts) and beautiful food photos. Shop for everything from cookbooks to your favorite home decor items - you'll also find a curated section of Broma favorite lifestyle items from around the web at: <https://bromabakery.com/shop-home/>

Watch as Sarah Fennel from Broma Bakery helps you step up your cookie decorating skills. She chats about all things baking and recipe development, with a few of your favorite cookies. Watch on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@bromabakery>

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## Juan De Lara Appointed Director of Armenian Institute of London

APPOINTMENT, from page 12

If you would like to contact the Director, please write to [juan@armenianinstitute.org.uk](mailto:juan@armenianinstitute.org.uk).

### About the Armenian Institute and Library

The Armenian Institute creates a space to meet and discuss, be entertained by world-class artists, listen to authors, academics, journalists speak about their lat-

est work. It initiates and organizes and is stimulated and inspired by masterclasses, interactive workshops, films, exhibitions and performances. Its language classes in Eastern and Western variants of Armenian draw an average of 55 students annually and it also produces important publications such as the children's book, *Who Are the Armenians?* and most recently, the re-publication of Leon Surmelian's *I Ask You, Ladies and Gentlemen*. It publishes a magazine, *Zanazan* and run a series of podcasts, *Zanazan Sounds*.

The Institute Library includes over 8,000 volumes and collections of serials on Armenia, the diaspora and neighboring peoples and countries. The core of the library is the collections of Charles Dowsett, the first Professor of Armenian Studies at Oxford, the historian Christopher J. Walker,

the chronicler of British Armenians Joan George, the author and translator Mischa Kudian and the personal papers of David Miller, the first British resident ambassador in Armenia.

The magnificent Dowsett Collection, comprising 4,000 books, contains scholarly and rare publications in Armenian, Georgian, Ottoman Turkish and most European languages.

The magnificent Dowsett Collection, comprising 4,000 books, contains scholarly and rare publications in Armenian, Georgian, Ottoman Turkish and most European languages.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Books

## *The Fear and Longing of Small Nations*

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

TO FREE US FROM THE EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS, TO GIVE US BACK TO OURSELVES—THERE LIES THE GREAT, SINGULAR POWER OF SELF-RESPECT.

—JOAN DIDION

Long one of the most thought-provoking Armenian-American intellectuals, going back to her days as a punk lyricist and her 20-something memoir *Princess Freak*, Nancy Agabian continues to influence the culture. Her latest work, *The Fear of Large and Small Nations*, doubles as both a multi-genre novel and a feminist primer on building self-worth and emerging from abuse to boldly take control of one's life.

This isn't always easy for Armenian women who must not only shoulder often unreasonable expectations to somehow be perfect mothers and wives, but also fight patriarchy and contend with the weight of recent history. Genocide, war, sovietization — the list seems endless at times. Here, Agabian also writes from the distinct standpoint of a diasporan. This universalizes her project. While the diasporan's search and longing for roots is a commonplace of sociology, Agabian pulls back the wallpaper on Armenian society to show that they too fear and long for things that they sometimes can and sometimes cannot perceive.

*The Fear of Large and Small Nations* tells the story of Na, an Armenian-American woman in her late 30s who embarks on the trip of a lifetime to teach English at a well-known university in Armenia. Na has some deep-seated reasons for wanting to fly almost 6,000 miles to this small, landlocked country in the Caucasus, seemingly always at odds with its neighbors or with itself. The daughter of two Armenian Genocide survivors, Na is not only trying to learn more about her heritage. Rather, she is also trying to fill a void that she cannot quite identify. Still single and nearing the end of child-bearing age, Na knows that culturally and otherwise she finds America somehow wanting. This comes through in wry one-liners and observations that Na makes throughout the book, particularly as she is packing in New York City for the journey in September 2006, which includes a veiled criticism of capitalist production and the idea that industrial R & D can make us happy: "I cannot take any fluids or gel-like substances in my carry-on luggage. This new measure must be making the product development people at Dr. Scholl's miserable. Their state-of-the-art gel shoe inserts are now forbidden... Other items on the list also seem questionable: liquid mascara, for one. I highly doubt that other's enough room in such a tiny bottle for a harmful amount of explosive material."

Na does not speak Armenian fluently and does not really feel wholly Armenian either. Inside a deli on her first night in Yerevan, she has a first telling interaction with the Armenian language and culture: "Na was relieved to remember the word for bread, and the word for butter too (...) but she didn't know how to make a sentence (...) The translation of the Armenian in the imperative mood was, 'Give me the bread,' which sounded rude. Saying 'I want the bread' sounded primitive. Finally, she pointed to a loaf behind the clerk's head and said 'Hahts?' very softly, her voice like that of a young woman. The clerk stared at Na, a fully grown woman. Na was so embarrassed by her inability to speak Armenian that she lowered her eyes and wordlessly slipped out the open door."

Once in Armenia, Na soon falls in love with a much younger man named Seyran and her world turns upside down. Expectations are dashed and stereotypes overturned in a series of events that test the mettle of the protagonist, whose kindness and almost self-effacing

behavior turns against her. Seyran is a prototypical player: straight when it suits him, bisexual when he wants to intrigue, and gay when he feels the need to seduce men. On more than one occasion, when discussing a friend for example, Seyran purposely muddles the topic of their sexuality. One night in Seyran takes Na to his friend Krisdapor's violin concert: "Seyran whispered gleefully in Na's ear 'He's bisexual.' Na was struck with insecurity. She assumed that in a highly homophobic place, "bisexual" really meant "gay" as a way for some men to protect themselves. Separated from a support network, she defaulted to old stereotypes that bisexuality was a lie or a pit stop on the way to being gay (...) It wasn't hard to feel sorry for herself. *I am so lonely that I am seeking the attention of a twenty-one-year-old sexually ambiguous kid.* She teared up a bit."

Seyran is also brilliant and rather handsome, hence Na's desire to please at all costs: Na also wants to ingratiate herself with Seyran's parents, especially given the fact that Armenia remains a conservative society, even twenty years after the fall of the Soviet Union. It soon becomes clear that aside from the age difference at hand, Seyran's parents also don't know if they are coming or going when it comes to interpreting their own son's behavior. At first the reader thinks that Seyran is simply strange, but as the story goes on and Na offers to move back to America and marry him, we realize that he is in a fact a selfish, cold-hearted narcissist. In the supposed sanctity of their Astoria, Queens house, Seyran sets about defiling her psychologically and physically. After one particularly humiliating incident, Na is slow to react because of complex issues having to do with lack of self-worth. As the narrator explains in a meta-writing entry: "*In Astoria, I was in denial about the familial pattern of our relationship. I knew there were similarities, but I couldn't believe my family was sick like Seyran. I know—if I had seen him as sick, then why did I stay with him? Rather than admit the hurt from my upbringing and identify bad behavior from the past, my sense of shame allowed his worse behavior in the present. And my guilt gave me a misplaced sense of purpose. I knew Seyran was missing his family. In another convoluted, twisted plot, I rationalized that love for his family was the source of disrespect toward me.*"

The great stylistic originality in *Fear and Longing* lies in Agabian's use of three styles or literary devices: novelistic prose, blog entries and "meta-writing" where Agabian beguilingly comments on the events that happened to Na. All three devices work well, but the blog entries can disorient the reader at first, until he gets used to parsing from one style to another. An example of one of NA's blogposts when she and Seyran practice for his U.S. citizenship exam:

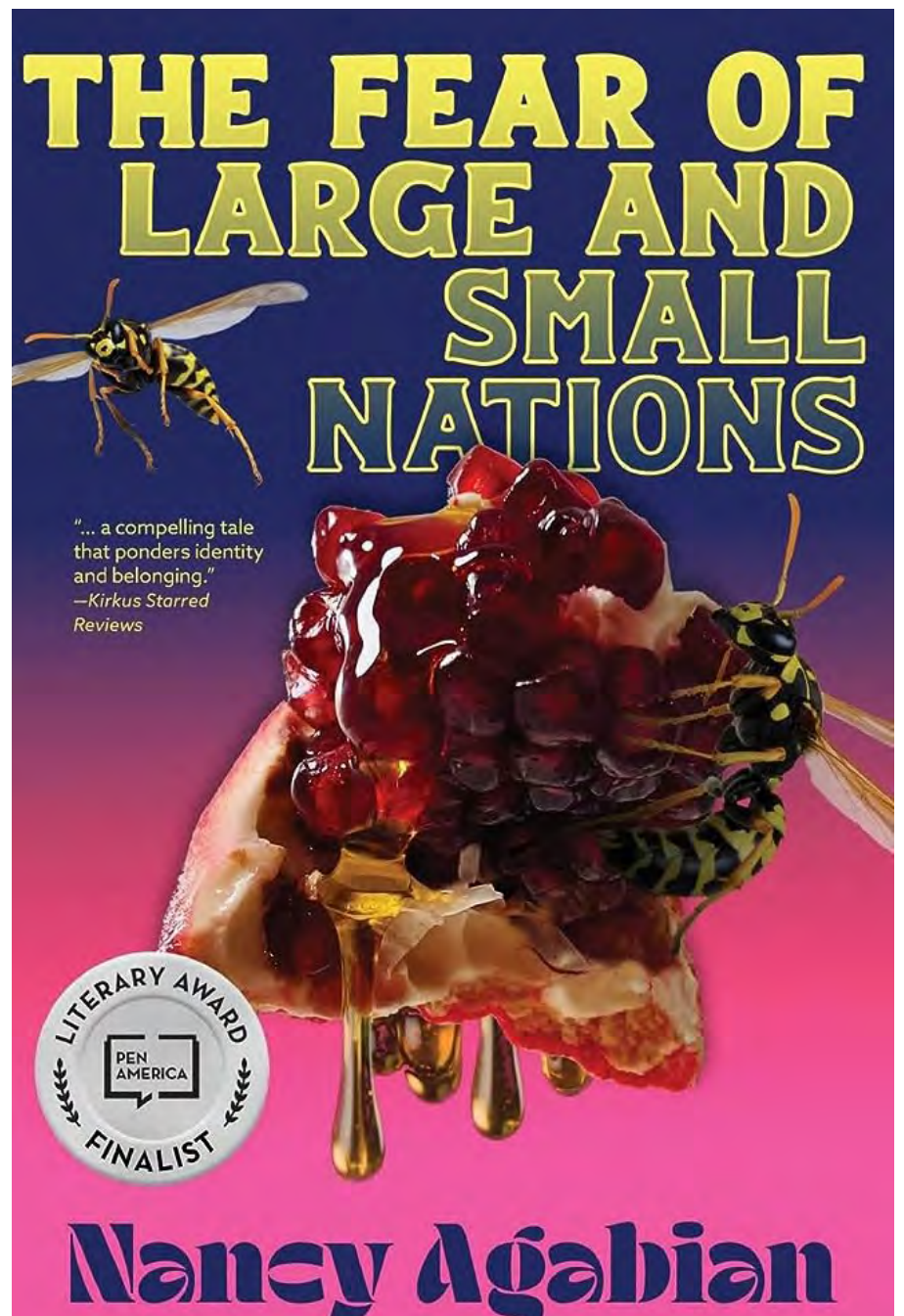
Interviewer: What side of the bed does Natalee sleep on?

Seyran: the left side.

I: What kind of face cream does she use?

Seyran: "She brought a big bottle of moisturizer from America. I think it is called Keri."

Seyran's abusive behavior, though apparent from the outset, worsens when they arrive in America. And why wouldn't it? He has finally gotten what he always wanted — American citizenship. Now he must somehow disentangle himself from Na in order to be able to do exactly as he pleases in life. With whomever he pleases. Infidelities follow the psychological and physical abuse. It takes Na a while to regain her bearings. Like most victims of abuse, the harm done to her is so far removed from her previous experience that Na at first withdraws into a shell of denial and rationalization. But her inner fortitude slowly builds until she finally explodes one day as he attacks her physically. As Na explains near the end of the novel: "I should have recognized that I was being abused — emotionally, physically and emotionally — even if the web of identities Seyran inhabited were hard to pull apart. An Armenian-American woman entering Armenia may still have privilege as an American, but she loses her status as a human being. The global system of sexism gave powers to Seyran that he freely took advantage of. He broke boundaries and I let him, writ-



ing him off as a harmless kid. On the internet he found porn that dehumanized girls and he read a guidebook to take advantage of women... The more he took from me, the more he was empowered since there was nothing to check him: my shame and silence protected him."

In spite of Na's slow path to lucidness, the reader is sometimes at a loss regarding the amount of condescension and two-timing that Seyran heaps on her before she finally reacts. At the heart of Na's self-abnegation lies a terrible longing, a desire to please — to feel loved, no matter the cost. The rest of this mostly affecting memoir describes Na's escape from the cycle of abuse and her rise to fully reclaiming her power. The author's assertion that this is indeed possible sends a message that readers — and not just young women — will appreciate.

*The Fear of Large and Small Nations* was a PEN America Literary Award finalist.

Purchase *The Fear of Large and Small Nations*: [www.bookshop.org/p/books/the-fear-of-large-and-small-nations-nancy-agabian/19813717](http://www.bookshop.org/p/books/the-fear-of-large-and-small-nations-nancy-agabian/19813717)

Learn More about Nancy Agabian: [www.nancyagabian.com](http://www.nancyagabian.com)

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### CALIFORNIA

**OCTOBER 14** — The Orange County Trex Fraternity presents Kef Time So-Cal at Bagramian Hall Mezza 900 W. Lincoln Avenue, Montebello. Featuring Hagopian Kef Time Legacy Band. Saturday, 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. **ORDER TICKETS ONLINE:** orange-county-trex-fraternity.ticketleap.com Adults \$85. Students, College Age & Younger \$65. Table Sponsor \$800. For More Information Contact: Ralph Dergazarian 714.681.3013 • Brian Melkesian 626.827.8434 Chuck Simonian 559.799.3949 • Ari Gulugian 949.701.8006

### MASSACHUSETTS

**AUGUST 6** — Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church will hold its annual picnic, featuring music by Jason Naroian Ensemble. Sunday, 12 noon to 5 p.m. Admission \$1. Shish kebob, losh kabob, chicken kabob, khyema, rice pilaf, salad, pastries, beverages. 50/50 raffle. Children's activities. Please bring your own lawn chair but no alcohol. In the event of rain, picnic will be held in the Kazanjian Memorial Ballroom. Church is located at 180 Old Westford Road, Chelmsford. www.stsvartanantz.com.

**AUGUST 13** — Sunday, 7:30pm, UNDER THE AUGUST MOON. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston, Featuring Black Sea Salsa Ensemble. Meet & Greet. Walk the Labyrinth. Refreshments. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

**AUGUST 16** — Wednesday, 4pm, TEA & TRANQUILITY. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston, Meet & Greet. Walk the Labyrinth. Marvel at Abstract Sculpture. Write a Wish on a Ribbon for The Wishing Tree. Refreshments. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

**AUGUST 27** — Armenian Church at Hye Pointe Picnic, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill, 12 noon to 5 p.m. Live music with the fabulous Jason Naroian Ensemble. Menu includes Lamb Shish, Losh & Chicken Kebab, Khyema, Vegetarian Plate Available. Beverages including Cash Bar. Cash Raffles. Air Conditioned Hall. Bring your lawn chairs for sitting outside. Tours of the new church will be given. For more info please visit www.hypointearmenianchurch.org or call (978) 3729227. Take Rte. 495 N to exit 106, bear right at the end of the ramp and follow the signs.

**SEPTEMBER 9** — Saturday, at 11am, LET'S MEET AT THE PARK! FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN BOSTON & BEYOND. Meet & Greet. Eat & Enjoy. Welcome at 11am. Walk the Labyrinth. Write a Wish on a ribbon for The Wishing Tree. To receive the e-invite, please email first and last name of the

student(s), college each attending, year graduating and email to hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org. We will ask they invite their roommate(s) to join us, too.

**SEPTEMBER 29** — Save the date! City of Smile-USA will host "A Tribute to Coco Chanel Who Loved Pearls." Friday, 11.30 a.m., Oakley Country Club, Watertown. Pearl jewelry raffle fundraiser and shopping the world's largest collection of pearl jewelry designs at incredible direct-from-producer savings. City of Smile-USA is dedicated to treating the children of Armenia who have cancer.

**OCTOBER 14** — The Armenian Friends of America, Inc., presents Hye Kef 5, a five-hour dance featuring Harry Bedrossian, John Berberian, Leon Janikian, Bob Raphaelian and Jason Naroian. Saturday, 6.30 p.m. to midnight, The Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. AFA rooms available at Double Tree by Hildong, Andover. Ask for AFA room rates. Ticket prices \$50 for the dance and mezza platters. Coffee and dessert to follow. Cash bar. Tables of 8, \$385. Advance tickets only. No tickets will be sold at the door. Ticket sales final. Online at armenianfriendsofamerica.org or call Lu Sirmaian 978-314-1956 or Mary Ann Janjigian 603-770-3375. Proceeds to benefit The Armenian Churches of Merrimack Valley.

**OCTOBER 27-28** — Mark your calendars. Celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Mirror-Spectator with two spectacular events. First, a panel discussion on Friday, October 27, with renowned journalists including David Ignatius from the Washington Post, Ken Dilanian from NBC News, and Eric Hacopian from CivilNet, at Tufts University. Second, a spectacular gala benefit on Saturday, October 28. The gala, at the Burlington Marriott, will be MC-ed by the irrepressible Sona Movsesian, who calls herself the Worst Assistant in the World, in her capacity as assistant to the one and only Conan O'Brien, and feature as keynote Speaker Artsakh's Representative to the US Robert Avetisyan.

### NEW YORK

**NOVEMBER 4** — SAVE THE DATE! 12 Vocations: The Ongoing Promise of St. Nersess Seminary. Help us celebrate the vocations of the next 12 priests and lay ministers who studied at St. Nersess and St. Vladimir's Seminaries. Details, invitations, and booklet donations can be found on www.stnerssess.edu.

Send Calendar Items to the Mirror-Spectator: To send calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator, email alin@mirrorspectator.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the "calendar" section under the heading "More." You can also mail them to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication. There is no fee for calendar entries.

## Exhibit Featuring Saroyan Artworks Opens at Armenian Museum Following Donation from Joan Agajanian Quinn

By Elias Trout

**WATERTOWN** — Following the donation of Ruben Amirian's "Homage to Mesrop Mashtots," a 14-foot composite work celebrating the Armenian alphabet, art collector and Museum Trustee Joan Agajanian Quinn has gifted two watercolors by literary genius William Saroyan and two drawings from his son Aram Saroyan to the Armenian Museum of America. All five works are now on display in the new exhibit "My Name Is Saroyan," inspired by Armenian literary culture both past and present.

"After the success of our 2022 exhibition 'On the Edge: Los Angeles Art 1970s-1990s from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection' at the Armenian Museum, the Quinn family is happy to broaden the Museum's collection of contemporary artists with these donations," explains Quinn. "We continue to be impressed with the way the Museum displays Armenian art which spans the time frame from ancient to modern times. The contemporary exhibits on the third floor have been professionally and artistically compared to the top museums in the country."

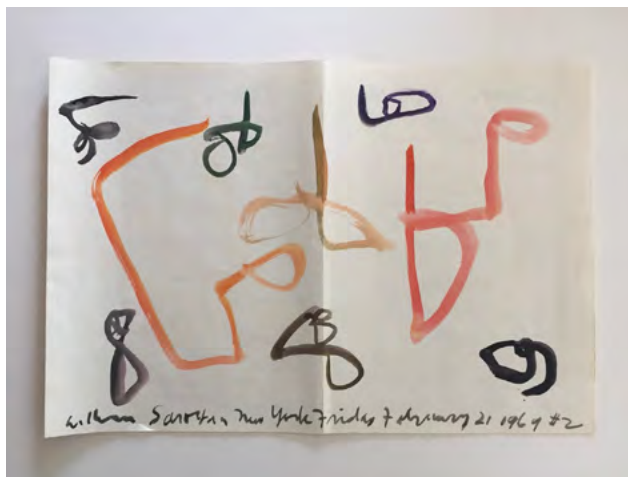
Quinn is the co-host of "Beverly Hills View" and has been the producer and host of the "Joan Quinn Profiles" for more than 35 years. The Los Angeles native was West Coast editor of Andy Warhol's *Interview*, society editor of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* and the founding West Coast Editor of *Condé Nast Traveler*.

The Quinns have loaned art to museums all over the world, including the Louvre, MoMA, LACMA, Museum of Arts and Design, Bakersfield Museum of Art, Fresno Art Museum, Hammer Museum, and the Huntington Art Museum. Part of the extensive Quinn family collection was loaned to the Armenian Museum for the exhibits "On the Edge" and "Discovering Takouhi: Portraits of Joan Agajanian Quinn," which showcases contemporary Armenian artists.

"There's a long tradition of contemporary exhibitions here at the Armenian Museum and the last few shows have taken things to new heights," says Executive Director Jason Sohigian. "'On the Edge' was very well received, and we opened a new exhibition, 'Ara Oshagan: Disrupted, Borders,' that fits perfectly with our permanent collection, from manuscripts to diaspora and cultural identity, and even Artsakh with the installation of the 'Shushi Portraits' series. On top of this, the new exhibition of four Saroyan works adds more excitement to the Adele and Haig Der Manuelian Galleries."

One of the most prominent American-Armenian literary figures of the 20th

century, William Saroyan also wrote music and painted throughout his life. Visual works from his later years, like the water-



This watercolor by William Saroyan was donated to the Armenian Museum of America by Joan Agajanian Quinn; it was drawn on the back of a menu from "The Ararat" restaurant in New York City on February 21, 1969.

colors currently on display in "My Name Is Saroyan," have been compared to the Abstract Expressionism made famous through figures like Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb. The Pulitzer Prize winning author has artworks in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Birmingham Museum of Art, and the Weisman Art Museum of Minneapolis, among others.

Earlier this month, the Armenian Mu-

seum's Sound Archive released a rare and previously unknown recording of William Saroyan singing at the home of the writer Hamasdegh in 1939. The seven-minute recording, digitized and restored from a lacquer disc, is available on the museum's website under "Virtual Resources."

Succinct and provocative, Aram Saroyan's brand of minimalism is reflected in a range of media, including his two Uchida marker drawings displayed in "My Name Is Saroyan." The son of William Saroyan, Aram is an artist, poet, novelist, memoirist, and playwright, having made his debut with six poems and a book review in the 1964 issue of *Poetry*. He became famous for his one-word or "minimal" poems, a form he developed in the 1960s that is often linked to Concrete poetry. Saroyan's honors include the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. He resides in Los Angeles.

Ruben Amirian's "Homage to Mesrop Mashtots," currently exhibited alongside William and Aram Saroyan at the Armenian Museum, contains 38 canvases representing the letters of the Armenian alphabet. Each canvas is 12 by 16 inches. Assembled altogether, the series extends to an impressive 14 feet wide by four feet high.

The Armenian Museum of America's galleries are open Thursday through Sunday from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., and it is located at 65 Main St.



## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

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# Iran Policy in the Context of Armenia – Azerbaijan Peace Negotiations

By **Benyamin Poghosyan**

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

As Armenia and Azerbaijan come closer to signing an agreement by the end of 2023, and competition grows between Russia and the West to lead the process and take the prize of the main pacifier, other regional actors take steps to clarify their positions. In this context, Iran stands out as one of the primary buffers against the growing role of the West in the South Caucasus.

Being engaged with the US in continuing negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear deal in full or at least partly, Iran is simultaneously concerned by the US efforts to reduce Russian influence in the South Caucasus. This is not because Iran loves or trusts Russia but because Iran understands the dangers of being encircled by the US, including from the north. Moreover, for Iran, US influence does not mean US military bases or US direct investments.

Tehran understands the current trends of global geopolitics too well to not have a clear vision of what influence means in the 21st century. A country does not need boots on the grounds or direct investments to exert influence. This can also be done through a network of alliances and partners, and since the end of the Second World War, this is what Americans are best at. Thus, from Iran's perspective, the increase of Israeli presence, or the growth of Turkish influence, at the end of the day, brings the same result: more US in the region.

In this context, Iran cannot ignore the Armenia – Azerbaijan peace negotiations, especially given the growing US involvement. The US was also among the key players in the negotiation process before the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war through its position as the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair country. Nevertheless, at that period, Russia was playing a leading role in the negotiation process as another co-chair. However, the war in Ukraine de facto killed the OSCE Minsk Group. As Russia has shifted its resources to Ukraine and its confrontation with the collective West, the US has significantly increased its involvement in the negotiation process in an individual capacity. Americans organized two days-long summits of foreign ministers in Washington, pushing forward the work on a peace treaty. The US cooperates closely with the EU, and these two parallel Washington/Brussels negotiation tracks embody the West's growing influence.

Meanwhile, Turkey is sending clear signals that immediately after the Armenia – Azerbaijan peace deal, it is ready to fully normalize relations with Armenia, including opening the land border and establishing diplomatic relations. One does not have to be a distinguished expert in international relations to understand that these steps will significantly impact the balance of power in the region, making Turkey and Azerbaijan's positions much stronger. At the same time, from the Iranian perspective, at the strategic level, Turkish influence equals the US influence. No public or private brawls between US and Turkish officials on issues such as Sweden's NATO membership can change the Iranian calculus.

Meanwhile, the South Caucasus is not the primary arena for Iranian vital national interests and cannot compete with the Middle East to attract Iranian resources. As Iran's economy faces multiple challenges, Tehran cannot reduce its involvement in

Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon to expand its presence in the South Caucasus. Moreover, Iran cannot afford a direct clash with Turkey in the region. Thus, given limited resources and geopolitical constraints, Tehran's primary tools in the region are sending messages to Russia and, to a lesser extent, to Armenia about its concerns, hoping that Kremlin will take them into account. In this context, the paper published by Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on international affairs, is of utmost importance, as it delivered the main strategic messages of Iran's views on the ongoing geopolitical struggle in the South Caucasus.

Velayati clearly stated that the intention behind the idea to establish links that connect Nakhchivan to the Republic of Azerbaijan is to divide Armenia into two parts, disconnect Iran and Armenia, limit Iran's connection to the outside world, and disrupt Iran's free connection with North Caucasus, Russia, and the European continent. Then Velayati argued that the establishment of a link between Turkey and Chinese Xinjiang, more than signifying the formation of an imaginary world named pan-Turkism, would lead to the creation of a strip that would surround Iran from the North and Russia from the south and spread NATO's influence in the region, simultaneously creating significant problems for China. The goal of this strategic assessment is clear – to warn Russia that if Kremlin continues to decrease its involvement in the region, it will have long-term, very negative implications for Iran, Russia, and China. Meanwhile, it gives us a better understanding of Iranian thinking: Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing have coinciding interests in the region and should jointly counter the US.

Iranian officials delivered the same message to the Armenian minister of foreign affairs during his July 24 visit to Tehran. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi reiterated Iran's position that the countries in the region should settle regional problems and that any foreign intervention will only complicate issues. Raisi explicitly emphasized that Armenia - Azerbaijan negotiations must be carried out based on the two nations' interests and without political conspiracies involving the US and Israel.

The primary audience of these messages is Russia, as Iran understands very well that the Armenian government will not abandon the Washington track, especially as high-level Armenian officials clearly state that they welcome the growing role of the US in the region. Interestingly, Russia, in recent weeks, has significantly increased its involvement in Armenia – Azerbaijan negotiations. The Kremlin organized a meeting between Armenia and Azerbaijan foreign ministers in Moscow on July 25. It aims to bring Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev to Moscow to sign a peace agreement, thus fomenting its role as the leading player in the region.

Assessing how much these recent Russian activities were influenced by constant Iranian messages is challenging. However, from the Iranian perspective, the signature of the Armenia – Azerbaijan peace agreement in Moscow is a better option than the ceremony held in Brussels, Vienna, Geneva, or Washington.

(Benyamin Poghosyan is chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan, and Senior Research Fellow at the Applied Policy Research Institute (APRI) of Armenia.)

## Armenian-Americans Must Build a Christian Coalition

By **Aro Hovsepyan**

As an Armenian-American, I can take much pride in our community's achievements: We have built vibrant communities with wonderful churches, schools and cultural centers that successfully pass on our values and identity to younger generations.

In our efforts to preserve our particularism, we might have nevertheless missed out on the PR and political opportunities offered by our broader Christian faith and identity. We all know that our nation was history's first to accept Christ and Christianity. Yet how many of our non-Armenian Christian neighbors, priests and pastors are aware of this spiritual milestone?

Cultivated non-Armenians are often aware of the Armenian Genocide. But

how many know that this genocide was the culmination of centuries of Islamic persecution and oppression? In fact, I am certain that hundreds of millions of Christians would share our pain and pride if they learned about the trials and triumphs of their Armenian brethren.

Diaspora Armenians and particularly Armenian-Americans need to build more bridges to other Christian communities. We especially need to engage with religious leaders able and willing to influence policymakers so that they actively safeguard the lives and rights of persecuted Christians in the Caucasus region.

On May 8, a fascinating article appeared in the Armenian daily *Aravot*. Its author, the Berlin-based political analyst Alexander Stepanyan, urges Armenians

and Armenian-Americans to approach Evangelical Christian leaders in America and convince them to leverage their relationships and influence in Israel to deter the Jewish state from giving Ilham Aliyev a blank check to attack Armenia with the weapons it supplies to Azerbaijan.

The logic of this approach is that if Armenian community leaders raised awareness of Armenian Christian suffering by, for example, publicizing in pro-Israel Christian publications photographs of churches and khachkars Israeli weapons destroyed, American Christian leaders could be moved to pressure Israel to curb weapon sales to Azerbaijan.

Mr. Stepanyan mentions that Israeli governments rely more and more on the votes see COALITION, page 18



## COMMENTARY

## OPEN LETTER TO CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER JUSTIN TRUDEAU FROM DR. ARSHAVIR GUNDJIAN

(Dr. Arshavir Gundjian sent the following letter to Canadian Premier Justin Trudeau on July 25 asking for his support for the besieged Armenians of Artsakh.)

Dear Prime Minister,

I am taking the initiative to write this open letter to you with a sense of dire urgency, as a proud citizen of this God-blessed country of Canada, who is also proud of his Armenian descendancy.

The urgency I refer to is a result of a humanitarian crisis which unfortunately is at par with some of the other current humanitarian crises such as the one affecting the Ukraine. However, whereas the latter has fortunately the full attention and help of much of the civilized world focused on it, the gravity of this other crime against humanity unfortunately appears to mostly miss the attention of the international community.

Indeed, at this very moment, a blockaded entire population of 120,000 Armenians, including the very young, adult, elderly, healthy as well as seriously ill, men and women living on their ancestral lands of Nagorno Karabagh, are held at the border line of starvation by a vengeful Azerbaijani government and its despotic leader Ilham Aliyev, merely in order to achieve the latter's political objectives.

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, unfortunately the daily heart-wrenching news of this sadistic slow genocidal act, a blatant crime against humanity, do not permeate sufficiently through the reports of other daily multiple international tragedies.

Knowing that you personally and our government are aware to a good extent, about this human tragedy taking place in the South Caucasus, and echoing surely the feelings of Canadian Armenians in general, I actually do like to express to start with, our appreciation for the decision announced recently by the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, to name two Canadian representatives to the European Union civilian monitoring mission in Armenia, concerning this crisis.

However, in view of the persistent continuing sad news of growing literal desperation, due to the actual death of children, and of the seriously ill lying helplessly deprived of medical supplies in their deathbeds, we receive from the region, I am writing this letter to you dear Mr. Trudeau, expressly to stress the magnitude of the crisis and the need for immediate intervention to stop this insensitive criminal madness.

Canada's impeccable track record as a leader in the promotion of peace and justice in the world, justifies that you take the initiative through the appropriate processes offered by the UN or otherwise, to lead an international immediate intervention, specifically to force the swift opening of the currently blocked Lachin corridor of relief between the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh, in order to allow the immediate passage of humanitarian help, such as food and

vital medical supplies, as well as the transportation of the critically ill.

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, this is an urgent call for you to please help stop this genocidal monstrous crime being perpetrated at this very moment against peaceful Armenians in their multi millennial homeland of Nagorno Karabagh.

This call echoes the voice of Armenians from across the world, from the green lands of Nagorno Karabagh, inseparable part of multimillennial Armenia, from the flanks of historic mount Ararat, from the altar of the first Christian church in the world of Holy Echmiadzin, and especially from the proud Armenian citizens across Canada.

Respectfully yours,

Dr. Arshavir Gundjian C. M.  
McGill University retired Professor  
Canadian Armenian community leader  
12450 Albert Prevost Ave.  
Montreal, QC., H4K 2A7

cc: Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly

Honorable Ambassador of Armenia in Canada  
Anahit Haroutyunian

## Armenian-Americans Must Build a Christian Coalition

COALITION, from page 17

and support of Evangelical Christians to influence American foreign policy. This reliance provides a golden opportunity for the Armenian-American community to appeal to the solidarity of an influential demographic group whose Christian faith is as steadfast as ours.

I believe it is crucial for our awareness-raising efforts to be positive and constructive. Our outreach must appeal to sentiments of care and compassion for persecuted Christians. We must make it clear to our Evangelical Christian allies that Mr. Netanyahu's support for the dictator and former KGB agent Aliyev is an affront to our shared Judeo-Christian values.

We need to communicate empathy for the existential threat that a nuclear Iran poses to the Jewish state, while pointing out that in the long-term, a strong and secure Christian and democratic Armenia is valuable not just to America, but also to Israel.

By no means should we succumb to the temptation of defaming Israel or echoing antisemitic tropes. Azerbaijan's PR industry already does its best to portray Armenia as an antisemitic nation. It would be silly and unethical if our appeals to Christian solidarity were tainted by bigotry.

How should Armenian-Americans act concretely?

1) Our community leaders and political activists should coordinate with representatives of the Armenian Evangelical Christian community all outreach and PR efforts.

2) Armenian-American intellectuals and religious leaders should publish open letters urging Evangelical Christian leaders who actively support Israel like, for example, Pastor John Hagee to use his friendships and influence in Israel to intercede on behalf of Armenian Christians.

3) To make sure that these open letters are not ignored, we should make sure that all pro-Israel pastors and churches in America affiliated to CUFI (Christians United for Israel) hear and learn about Christian pain and suffering at the hands of Azerbaijan.

4) Our appeals need to be attuned to the sensibilities and values of each recipient. Evangelical Christian leaders should be urged to use their power and influence for the good of oppressed Armenians, whose gratitude and security will certainly bless Evangelical Christianity, America and Israel. Outreach to Evangelical pastors should also mention the heavenly rewards for shielding persecuted Christians. When approaching the most diehard Zionist Christians, we should highlight the fact that if American Christians and Israel do not protect the world's most ancient Christian nation, they could experience God's wrath at Armageddon.

If Armenian-Americans work together to actively approach and build new bridges to our non-Armenian Christian brothers and sisters, something wonderful could happen: Instead of Armenian-Americans being a community of just 1 or so million members, our worries and concerns could be understood and shared by over 60 million Evangelical Christians.

Since the friendship and support of Evangelical Christians is crucial for Israel, our activism could finally make Armenian interests and concerns relevant for Israeli policymakers. And once this occurs, Aliyev and Azerbaijan will no longer have automatic access to the weapons needed to wantonly threaten and attack Armenia. Especially, as a political analyst recently explained in a publication popular among rightist Zionists, because the alliance between Israel and dictator Aliyev does not serve long-term Jewish interests.

## UK Government: Daesh Committed Genocide Against The Yazidis

By Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab

On August 1, 2023, the United Kingdom Government formally recognized the Daesh atrocities against the Yazidis as genocide. The announcement comes nine years after the atrocities and follows a determination of the atrocities as genocide by a German court. Making the announcement, the Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, said that "The Yazidi population suffered immensely at the hands of Daesh nine years ago and the repercussions are still felt to this day. Justice and accountability are key for those whose lives have been devastated. Today we have made the historic acknowledgement that acts of genocide were committed against the Yazidi people. This determination only strengthens our commitment to ensuring that they receive the compensation owed to them and are able to access meaningful justice. The U.K. will continue to play a leading role in eradicating Daesh, including through rebuilding communities affected by its terrorism and leading global efforts against its poisonous propaganda."

On August 3, 2014, Daesh, a non-state actor with unprecedented support from foreign fighters, attacked Sinjar and unleashed prohibited acts against the Yazidis, an ethno-religious minority group in Iraq. Daesh fighters killed hundreds if not thousands of people. As part of the same campaign, Daesh fighters abducted boys to turn them into child soldiers and women and girls for sex slavery. More than 2,700 women and children are still missing and their fate is unknown. The atrocities have been recognized as meeting the legal definition of genocide by the governments of the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands, several parliaments, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and bodies of the United Nations.

Making the announcement, the U.K. Government credited the recognition to the judgment of the German Federal Court of Justice earlier this year, which found a former Daesh fighter guilty of acts of genocide and crimes against humanity committed in Iraq. Indeed, it is the U.K.'s position that determinations of genocide should be made by competent courts, rather than by governments or non-judicial bodies. However, the announcement does not comment on why the U.K. Government has not recognized the determinations of the genocide by other competent German courts and first after the determination by the German Federal Court of Justice. Indeed, as of August 2023, three German courts have made such determinations of the atrocities as genocide.

Despite the delay, the announcement is significant as it recognizes the nature of the pain and suffering inflicted upon this community. Murad Ismael, President and co-founder of Sinjar Academy and co-founder and former Executive Director of Yazda, welcomed the determination stating that "As Yazidis commemorate the Yazidi genocide and as the plight of Yazidis continues, the U.K. recognition comes at an important time. We hope it will generate momentum on the international level to re-engage on Yazidi issues. We appreciate the tireless work of Yazidi friends in the United Kingdom who ensured this genocide will not be overlooked and forgotten, including Lord Alton of Liverpool, Brendan O'Hara MP, Baroness Kennedy KC, the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Yazidis, Coalition for Genocide Response,

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## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate's 98-Year Lease Details Revealed

As the publisher of a newspaper, I frequently receive what is supposed to be factual “news,” but, after doing some checking, I find out that most of what I was told is baseless rumor.

A good example of gossip mongering happened last week when Israeli travel blogger and journalist Alexander Lapshin arrived in Los Angeles. His visit generated rumors and hateful words by some Armenians.

For those who are not familiar with Lapshin, he visited Armenia on several occasions and went to Artsakh in 2011 and 2012. Azerbaijan blacklisted him, considering his visit to Artsakh illegal. President Aliyev then asked Belarus in 2016 to arrest and extradite Lapshin to Azerbaijan. After being held in a Belarus jail for two months, Lapshin was sent to Baku on Feb. 7, 2017, on the personal airplane of President Aliyev, where he was put through a sham trial and sentenced to three years in jail. On September 11, 2017, Lapshin was attacked in his prison cell by four masked Azeri agents who broke his jaw, ribs and arm, partially paralyzing him. He spent three days in the intensive care unit of a Baku hospital, after which President Aliyev issued him a pardon and expelled him to Israel, where he spent another two weeks in a hospital. Azeri officials falsely claimed that Lapshin had tried to commit suicide which he strongly denied. Several independent medical examiners confirmed that there was an attempt on Lapshin's life in Baku.

Ever since his release from jail, Lapshin has toured dozens of countries exposing Azerbaijan's dictatorial regime and its human rights violations against its own citizens and Armenians in Artsakh.

Contrary to the unfounded rumor that he is an Israeli agent, Lapshin has had a major conflict with the Israeli authorities who repeatedly warned him that if he knows what's good for him and his family, he should stop criticizing Azerbaijan. Israeli officials described Azerbaijan as ‘an ally of Israel’ and told him that his actions were contrary to Israel's interests. Lapshin was given the same negative message when he met with American Jewish organizations. Israel also warned Lapshin that his Moldovan wife would not be granted Israeli citizenship unless he stops vilifying Azerbaijan.

Lapshin is currently on a tour of Canada, the United States and Mexico

where he is meeting with human rights organizations and elected officials to expose Azerbaijan's brutal violations and defend the interests of Artsakh Armenians.

My source for this information is neither Lapshin nor his critics. There are two official documents — the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Committee — which independently verified the information submitted by both Lapshin and Azerbaijan's government.

Lapshin filed a complaint against Azerbaijan to the European Court of Human Rights in 2018. The Court, in a 32-page decision in 2021, found credible that Azerbaijan had attempted to murder him and ordered Azerbaijan to pay Lapshin 30,000 euros in compensation, which Azerbaijan has refused to do.

In 2022, the UN Human Rights Committee, in a 10-page report, recognized that Belarus violated several articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by arresting and extraditing Lapshin to Azerbaijan, thus putting his life at risk.

Here are some interesting facts from the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on the case of Lapshin vs. Azerbaijan.

The Government of Azerbaijan falsely told the European Court that Lapshin had written two letters from his Baku hospital allegedly thanking President Aliyev for pardoning him and stating that the prison guards saved his life. Lapshin denied that he wrote these letters. The European Court concluded that Azerbaijan's allegation is “particularly hard to believe in view of the difficulties which the applicant [Lapshin] had with his writing arm.” Yet there are some Armenians who rather believe Azerbaijan's lies and forged letters than the European Court's ruling that there was no reason to doubt Lapshin's word. The Court also found Lapshin's assertion ‘plausible’ that there was an attempt to murder him in his Baku prison cell.

The Azeri Judge Latif Huseynov, who was a member of the seven judges assigned to the Lapshin vs. Azerbaijan case, refused to participate. He was replaced by another Azeri Judge, Ceyhun Qaracayev, who voted with the rest of the judges unanimously “in favor of a finding of a violation of Article 2,” which is the ‘Right to Life’ of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In conclusion, those who accuse Lapshin of being a spy without any evidence are alienating a supportive non-Armenian who has risked his life to defend the rights of Artsakh Armenians. This is contrary to the constant Armenian complaint that no one in the world cares about Armenia's and Artsakh's destitute situation.

# The True Meaning of Ataturk's Legacy

By Stephan Pechdimaldji

Later this year, Turkey will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its republic, founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, one of the most revered figures in modern Turkish history. While there will be much praise and accolades paid to Ataturk as a leader who led Turkey to independence after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and paved the way for democracy, for Armenian American families like mine, it is a stark reminder of how Ataturk continued the genocidal actions of the Young Turks, who were responsible for the 1915 Armenian genocide.

For years, Armenian Americans have fought for recognition of the genocide, when more than 1.5 million Armenians were systematically exterminated by the Ottoman Turks — a crime that Turkey denies to this day. And while Ataturk is credited with turning Turkey into a progressive nation-state, he shared the same hate and animosity toward minority communities including Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians. He saw these groups as a threat to the Turkification and Islamification of Asia Minor and embarked on a campaign to drive these communities out of the country, which culminated in the burning of Smyrna in 1922 by Turkish forces, which destroyed the city and drove its residents — many of whom were Greek and Armenian — into exile.

In many ways, Ataturk tried to finish what the Young Turks started in 1915, and even went a step further to ensure that history would judge him and his country

favorably. It is one of the reasons why he founded the Turkish Historical Society as one of his last acts right before he died, which was responsible for guarding and maintaining the state's official history. It was his way to make sure that Turkey's role and responsibility in committing these crimes against humanity would somehow be forgotten or swept away into the dustbin of history.

That mentality and mindset has carried on throughout the last 100 years with Turkey still trying to control its narrative and history. It is why the Turkish government spends so much money today on lobbyists to manufacture and shape its image. And it's also why Turkey's current authoritarian president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has taken exception to any country that recognizes the Armenian genocide or holds them accountable for human rights violations. The image-conscious leader has even gone as far as rebranding the world's perception of Turkey by officially changing the country's name to Türkiye to part ways with any bird comparisons.

Turkey's anniversary also comes at a very precarious time for the Armenian people. In the fall of 2020, Turkey's ally, Azerbaijan, launched an unprovoked

**AZERBAIJAN IS TAKING A PAGE RIGHT OUT OF TURKEY'S HISTORY BOOK AND PROMOTING A CLIMATE OF HATE TOWARD ARMENIANS. THAT HATE HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF THROUGH WORDS AND ACTIONS. IN RECENT SPEECHES, WE'VE HEARD AZERBAIJAN'S PRESIDENT, ILHAM ALIYEV, UNEQUIVOCALLY CLAIM THAT ARMENIA IS THEIR HISTORICAL LAND, WHILE CALLING ARMENIA “WESTERN AZERBAIJAN.”**

war against ethnic Armenians living in their ancestral homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh. The war which lasted 44 days, has been followed by a campaign to ethnically cleanse Armenians from the region.

For Armenians around the world, they see what is happening in Nagorno-Karabakh through the lens of their painful history. They see these latest acts of aggression, with the help of Turkey, as a continuation of the Armenian genocide and an existential threat to their very existence.

Ataturk's legacy and the conflict over Na-

gorno-Karabakh are not mutually exclusive. To a large extent, history is happening again. By disavowing its history, Turkey is essentially giving Azerbaijan a level of confidence that it can say or do anything they want, without consequences.

That type of self-assurance allowed Azerbaijan to launch their war against Armenia and has given them license to illegally block the only road linking more than 120,000 Armenians to the outside world for more than seven months without any accountability.

Additionally, the rhetoric stemming from Azerbaijan today harkens back to the final days of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Republic of Turkey, which is rooted in the same type of xenophobia and racism felt toward Armenians.

So, while the messenger might be different, the message is the same. Azerbaijan is taking a page right out of Turkey's history book and promoting a climate of hate toward Armenians. That hate has manifested itself through words and actions. In recent speeches, we've heard Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, unequivocally claim that Armenia is their historical land, while calling Armenia “Western Azerbaijan.”

We have seen this hate carried out through the treatment and torture of Armenian POWs and blatant execution of captured Armenian soldiers. And Azerbaijan continues to plant seeds of hate by enacting a state policy that hatred toward the Armenian people be taught to school children across the country.

Azerbaijan is taking its cues from Turkey and proving once again that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. That is why Turkey should use the upcoming anniversary and festivities as a moment in time to fully reckon with its history and accept and formally acknowledge its role and responsibility in the Armenian genocide, and stop with its genocide denial campaign which started under Ataturk.

They need to put an end to this type of historical whitewashing and revisionism. It's dangerous and irresponsible, and it's costing lives. If Turkey is to be the model moderate Muslim-majority country that it wishes to be, it should come to terms with its past.

The Armenian people deserve it.

(Stephan Pechdimaldji is a communications strategist who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. He's a first-generation Armenian American and grandson to survivors of the Armenian genocide.)



# Podcast Brings Storytelling to Armenian Experience

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“One of the great things about a podcast is you can hear it anywhere,” including Apple and Spotify, Abrahamian added.

The producers share narration duties. As of July 21, the podcast, which is in English, had been downloaded 1,179 times.

“We thought about language a lot and thought about audience a lot. Like Jeremy said, we want this to reach a wider audience but we want it to resonate with the people living through these things,” Abrahamian said.

Dalmas said, “A lot has been happening in Armenia in the past five years and one good way of understating that is storytelling and understanding what is happening to real people, living through the things happening to them.”

“It is covering all the big things happening here, but understanding them through what is happening to the people, a different way than understanding it through breaking news,” Dalmas said.

“It helped us process everything we’ve been going through,” Khachatryan said. “It really makes us think about it in a different way.”

Dalmas said, “It is a chance for people who have lived in Armenia through all this to speak about these things in different ways and process them.”

## Trip to Turkey

For the second season, on which the team is currently working, the focus will shift to Turkey and the Armenians there.

Khachatryan said this summer the group went to Turkey with a travel grant from the Hrant Dink Foundation.

Dalmas said that they had been thinking about going to Turkey and were thrilled that the foundation was offering grants. They applied and received them.

This time, the story was more personal for Abrahamian as the podcasters headed to Vakfili. “Vakifli is one of the villages of Musa Dagh. It’s the last Armenian village of Turkey. My family is from there,” she said. “People continued to live there after the Genocide.”

By the late 1930s, however, most, but not all, had moved to Lebanon.

Abrahamian still has cousins who live there. “It’s a region that was very badly affected by the earthquake in February. The stories we’re covering there are multilayered. It’s my family’s personal connection to that place and the fate of the ‘last Armenian village’ of Turkey, which was already in a precarious situation before the earthquake and now thinking what its future looks like,” Abrahamian said.

In season 2, all the interviews are in Armenian.

## Research Leads to New Ventures

“For the first season it was like here are the topics we would like to talk about and we thought what are the people that can exemplify that interestingly or poke around to see what would work for a story,” Dalmas said.

One idea was about the influx of Russians what that means for Armenia, he said. To explore the topic, they went to an artist’s residency and living space in Hovhanness Tumanyan’s village, Apastan, in Lori, where a large number have settled. “Two years ago they were living in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Now they are living in a small Armenian town,” he said.

Abrahamian added, “It took a lot of poking around, even a couple of other interviews, before we landed on one that felt like the right story arc.”

All the different research for Country of Dust, brought Abrahamian to another type



Nyree Abrahamian

of storytelling — a traditional one. She is the creative director of the Tumanyan International Storytelling Festival, which will be held August 25-27 in Lori.

She said, “We had our first prototype festival early last September. It was a full three-day festival. We were really testing out the concept. We wanted to contribute to the revival of the art of storytelling but think of it in a contemporary way,” such as telling stories through film, photos, etc.

This year August 25-27 the festival will take place.

“In Armenian *asmoonk*, a person stands in front of a group and tells a story that is a known tale, a folk tale,” she said. “There are still some older Armenian storytellers. What we’re trying to do with the festival is to bring that in,” while also bring in personal stories like “The Moth” and blend the two.

There will be many workshops on different topics, like visual storytelling with Scout Tufankjian and some first-person storytellers, including studying.

## Birthright Connection

Abrahamian was born and raised in Toronto. She graduated from York University and first came to Armenia with Birthright in 2007. She decided to extend her stay and the company where she interned offered her a permanent job. Soon after, she met her future husband, a fellow Birthright volunteer.

She has lived in Armenia since then, with a couple of sojourns to the diaspora.

She got her master’s degree in international education policy from Harvard. After graduating she came back. Among other jobs, she has taught at the American University of Armenia. “I always balance these hats as an educator and a creative,” she said.

“The war in Artsakh was a real turning point for me in setting my priorities. I had this moment of realization of the importance of telling our own stories in a way that is compelling and incites people to tune in and act when needed,” she said.

“When we decided to do the podcast I flew out last summer to work on it in Armenia,” Dalmas said. “We were kind of batting the idea around for a year before it really started taking shape.”

Dalmas, who is half-Armenian, had lived in Armenia in 2008 through Birthright and again in 2019 as he worked with EVN report.

Dalmas is from the Bay Area and is now

living in Oakland. He first came to Armenia win 2008 with Birthright. “I’ve been going back and forth ever since,” he said. He is a professional podcast producer and musician.

“It’s very exciting to work on this one. It’s close to my heart,” he added.

The first season will have a total of nine episodes, with the first two episodes of the first season are about a soldier named Kolya (interviewed by Khachatryan) who volunteered for the 2020 war. The third episode is about Artsakh and living through the blockade. A trio of episodes about the 2018 revolution follow and what happened afterwards.

Khachatryan worked for nine years for Birthright and just left her position there.

“That’s how I met Nyree, Jeremy, and many others,” she said.

Gohar was born and raised in Yerevan. She studied economics and political science at the American University of Armenia. She had previously worked on another podcast, Akanjogh. She also teaches self-defense to young women.

“It [Birthright] brought me to Armenia and connected me with Armenia,” Dalmas said. “I don’t know if I would be spending all this time in Armenia without having this cool thing set up.”

While he experienced some culture shock, he said Armenia felt a little further apart from the US in 2008 rather than now.

Added Khachatryan, “It was an incredibly meaningful experience” working at Birthright. “I was able to connect with many diasporans from all over the globe and learn so much with them and grow with them.”

Seeing Armenia through their eyes.

Abrahamian added that her trip with Birthright created a “pivotal moment” in her life. While she had visited in 1994 as a young person, and formed a connection to Armenia, “Birthright really gave me the means to tap into that desire.”

She praised the “immersive activities” and excursions as part of the experience. “There were so many opportunities to engage in a meaningful way that went so far beyond visiting for a few weeks. It was a global experience that helped me find my place in Armenia.”

To listen to “Country of Dust,” visit <https://www.buzzsprout.com/2085279> or look for it on major platforms.

## UK Government: Daesh Committed Genocide Against The Yazidis

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Yazda, Free Yazidi Foundation, Nadia’s Initiative, Yazidi Emergency Support, the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute BAHRI and others.”

In the U.K., the determination is also important as over 900 British citizens joined Daesh in Syria and Iraq and participated in the atrocities. As such, it is a crucial element of establishing the truth regarding the events and facing often uncomfortable questions. Now that the atrocities are recognized for what they are, it is critical to explore what else needs to be done to ensure justice and accountability, including investigating and prosecuting the perpetrators for their involvement in the genocide (and not for terror-related offenses only). Furthermore, as [recommended](#) by Pieter Omtzigt, PACE Special Rapporteur on bringing Daesh to justice, is it pivotal to revive the attempts to establish an international tribunal for the crimes of Daesh fighters, to ensure that the trials have the necessary transparency and visibility to make a difference.

Furthermore, more must be done to support the community. To this day, over 2,700 Yazidi women and children are missing and there have been no international actions to find and rescue them. To this day, thousands of Yazidi people live in camps and cannot return home and resettlement options are severely limited. Until this day, the communities are not provided with the assistance they need, and even the limited support gets smaller by the day.

Brendan O’Hara MP, chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Yazidis said, “Today’s news is hugely welcome and is a testament to the hard work and dogged determination of parliamentarians from all sides of both Houses, who have campaigned for the past nine years to have the Yazidi genocide recognized by the UK government. Today’s announcement is not the end of our work however, and we will now redouble our efforts to put pressure on the UK government, the Iraqi government and others to step up their efforts to find and rescue the 2,700 kidnapped Yazidi women still missing since 2014. We will also continue to campaign for the Daesh perpetrators who are now back in the U.K. to be questioned and if possible, prosecuted for their role in the genocide and the sexual enslavement of women and girls.”

The determination of atrocities as genocide is not an end in itself. Action must follow and action in accordance with the obligations under the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and actions that help the community not only to survive the attempt to annihilate them, but to flourish.

(This piece originally appeared on Forbes.com on August 1. Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab is a lawyer, human rights advocate, and author.)