

## Mirror-Spectator 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala a Smashing Success

By Aram Arkun  
 Mirror-Spectator Staff

BURLINGTON, Mass. — The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* culminated on Saturday, October 28 in a sold-out gala at the Boston Burlington Marriott, featuring celebrity comedian Sona Movsesian as master of ceremonies, and talks by four nationally prominent journalists, as well as entrepreneur and philanthropist Noubar Afeyan. The a cappella trio Zulal leavened the evening's talks with the dulcet sounds of traditional Armenian music, while money was raised not only to support the *Mirror-Spectator* but to aid Artsakh Armenians. Awards were presented in recognition of decades of service and excellence.



Noubar Afeyan offers his remarks.

Armenians from New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, the Mid-West, Washington, and further afield, including leaders of various Armenian organizations, see GALA, page 10



## Insightful Journalists' Panel at Tufts Held Before Packed Crowd

By Alin K. Gregorian  
 Mirror-Spectator Staff

MEDFORD, Mass. — The Joyce Cummings Center at Tufts University, on Friday, October 27, was the site of the journalists' panel sponsored by the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, kicking off its 90<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebrations.



From left, Aram Arkun, Charlie Mahtesian, Eric Hacopian, Carla Garapedian and Ken Dilanian (Ken Martin Photo)

The standing-room-only event, attended by about 120 people, was titled "Media Coverage of Armenia and Karabakh," with panelists Ken Dilanian of NBC News, filmmaker and former broadcast journalist Carla Garapedian, Eric Hacopian of CivilNet and Charlie Mahtesian of Politico. The moderator of the panel was Aram Arkun, the managing editor of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and the executive director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association. Arkun thanked Prof. Bruce Boghosian of Tufts University, who currently is in Yerevan serving as president of the American University of Armenia, for arranging to hold the event at Tufts, before introducing the speakers.

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## Standoff at Cows' Garden of Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter

ARMENIAN QUARTER, JERUSALEM (Save the ArQ, Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem) — On November 5, at around 3 p.m., a group of Israeli settlers entered the Armenian Quarter's Goverou Bardez [Cows' Garden]



Armenian clergy at Cows' Garden

where the Armenian community was stationed to prevent the further illegal demolition of the interior walls of the Cows' Garden.

Danny Rothman and George Warwar, representatives of Xana Capital, backed with about 15 armed settlers and attack dogs, demanded the expulsion of Armenians, calling it their land. Warwar threatened the community, exclaim-

ing that he'll "get them one by one." The settlers were also active, announcing that the Armenians are all "Goys and when the Messiah comes, [they] will all die."

The Armenian community refused to back down and stood firmly on the rightfully owned property. Save the ArQ Movement community leaders Hagop Djernazian and Setrag Balian and the legal team, led by international lawyer Karnig Kerkonian, convened an emergency meeting and a member of the team, Eitan Peleg, arrived on scene to negotiate the stand down.

Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem Archbishop Nourhan Manougian also arrived on the scene and stood side by side with the Armenian community of Jerusalem, along with priests and bishops. The community stood strong, with 200 members in unity to prevent the takeover and save the Armenian Quarter.

As of now, the Israeli settlers and united Armenian community have dispersed, but the situation is ongoing.

This standoff took place after the Armenian Patriarchate sent a letter stating that it considered the contract to rent the Cows' Garden territory null and void. According to the Chancellery of the Patriarchate, as of November 6, no answer had been received to this letter.



## Noubar Afeyan on CNN

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (news.am) — Noubar Afeyan, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, entrepreneur and philanthropist, as well as the co-founder and chairman of the Board of Directors of Moderna company, gave an interview to CNN commentator Christiane Amanpour. He spoke about what happened to Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and its Armenians, and the Azerbaijani authorities' arrest of philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan, another cofounder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

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Children's Author Meghri Dervartanian To Present New Book

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## NEWS from ARMENIA

## Azerbaijani Forces Have Not Left Armenian Soil

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Azerbaijani troops that invaded into sovereign Armenian territory in the direction of Jermuk in September 2022 have neither pulled back nor advanced, Vayots Dzor Governor Ararat Grigoryan said at a press briefing on November 2.

“There’s been no change in the situation, it is calm. The Azerbaijani troops remain in the same places where they invaded, there’s been no change. They’ve neither advanced nor pulled back,” the governor said.

He said there’s been no shooting incidents this year. “I can’t recall any incident during this one year,” Grigoryan said.

The Azeri troops have been occupying 7600 hectares of sovereign Armenian territory in Vayots Dzor since September 2022.

## Sotk Mine Operates Despite Repeated Azeri Attacks

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Sotk gold mine near the border that has been regularly targeted by Azerbaijani forces still operates partially, Governor of the Gegharkunik Province Karen Sargsyan has said.

Speaking at a press conference on November 2, Sargsyan said the gold mine functions only in the closed section.

“The operations in the closed mine continue, but the open section hasn’t been working for several months now,” he said.

Overall, the situation in the province is calm and there’s been no change in terms of security, the governor said.

## Greece Sends Aid for Forcibly Displaced Persons of Karabakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Greece has sent humanitarian aid to Armenia for the forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Ambassador of Greece to Armenia Evangelos Tournakis said recently.

Four tons of humanitarian goods were delivered to the Armenian authorities on November 2. A team of psychologists and social workers have also arrived to Armenia to provide psychological assistance to the forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh.

“Greece stands by Armenia, which is once again proven today,” the Greek ambassador said.

## Armenia’s Defense Budget to Grow 125%

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — In 2024, Armenia’s defense budget will increase by 125 percent or 309 billion drams compared to 2018, head of the ACSES analytical center, economist Haykaz Fanyan said in an interview with the Public TV on Monday, November 6.

According to him, the increase in the budget was facilitated by the economic growth of recent years, as well as improvements in administration.

# Armenian Army Chief Tours US Military Facilities In Europe

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia’s top general has visited the US military headquarters and two training centers in Europe, underscoring Yerevan’s efforts to deepen defense ties with the United States resented by Russia.

Lieutenant-General Eduard Asryan, the chief of the Armenian army’s General Staff, met with Lieutenant General Steven Basham, the deputy head of the US European Command (EUCOM), at the EUCOM headquarters in the German city of Stuttgart on Friday, November 3. They discussed “Armenia’s security environment, defense reforms and the defense cooperation with the United States,” read an EUCOM statement released afterwards.

“This was a milestone event as we deliberately and incrementally develop our defense relationship,” it quoted Basham as saying.

“The Armenian armed forces are currently undergoing significant reforms and transformation and we are interested in receiving support and learning about the best practices from our partners, and especially the United States,” Asryan said for his part.

According to the Armenian Defense Ministry, Basham expressed the US’s readiness to help the South Caucasus nation “professionalize” its armed forces, modernize their command-and-control structures and train military personnel on a larger scale. There was no word on potential US arms supplies.

Asryan visited the US military’s Joint

Multinational Readiness Center and Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in Germany before his talks with Basham.

His trip came less than two months after Armenia hosted a US-Armenian military exercise criticized by Russia as well

ly” actions in a note of protest handed to the Armenian ambassador in Moscow on September 8.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan insisted late last month that his government is determined to “diversify” Armenia’s foreign



Germany - Steven Basham (R), deputy head of US European Command (EUCOM), meets Armenian army chief Eduard Asryan in Stuttgart, November 3, 2023. (Photo by EUCOM)

as neighboring Iran. Syrian and Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan watched the exercise together with two US generals.

The drills added to the Armenian government’s unprecedented tensions with Moscow, its longtime ally. The Russian Foreign Ministry listed them Yerevan’s “unfriend-

and security policies because the Russians have failed to honor their security commitments to his country. But he again made it clear that he is not considering demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Armenia even if he sees no “advantages” in their presence.



US and Armenian troops start a joint exercise at the Zar training ground near Yerevan, September 11, 2023.

## Armenia Skips Another CSTO Meeting

By Astrghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ten days after joining multilateral peace talks initiated by Ukraine and condemned by Russia, the secretary of Armenia’s Security Council announced on November 7 that he will not attend the meeting of his Russian and other ex-Soviet counterparts on November 8.

A spokeswoman for Armen Grigoryan gave no reason for the decision to skip the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) meeting in Moscow when she communicated it to the official Armenpress news agency. RFE/RL’s Armenian Service could not contact her for further comment in the following hours.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sim-

ilarly declined to attend a CIS summit in Kyrgyzstan held on October 13. The effective boycott highlighted his government’s mounting tensions with Moscow.

Grigoryan added to those tensions when he joined security officials from more than 60 countries who gathered in Malta late last month to discuss Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s plan to end the war with Russia. He also met with Zelenskyy’s chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, during what Moscow condemned as a “blatantly anti-Russian event.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry called Grigoryan’s trip to Malta a “demonstrative anti-Russian gesture of official Yerevan” and accused Pashinyan’s administration of systematically “destroying” Russian-Ar-

menian relations. Armenian parliament speaker Alen Simonian rejected the criticism last Friday, saying that Russia is keen to maintain Armenia’s “existential dependence” on it.

Earlier this year, Yerevan also refused to participate in military exercises held by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and shunned a meeting of the defense ministers of ex-Soviet states making up the Russian-led alliance.

Pashinyan has repeatedly accused the CSTO and Russia of not honoring their security commitments to Armenia. But he has so far stopped short of pulling his country out of the alliance or demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops.



ARMENIA

# German Foreign Minister Calls for New Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Talks

YEREVAN (DW) — German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock traveled to the southern Caucasus on Friday, November 3, beginning her trip in Armenia, laying a wreath at the memorial to the victims of the Armenian genocide.

In a meeting with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, she discussed the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, which was ruled by ethnic Armenian forces until Azerbaijan took control of it in a lightning offensive in September.

The mediation efforts of European Council President Charles Michel “are a bridge that can show the fastest way to peace,” Baerbock said.

“That is why it is so important that a new round of negotiations can take place as soon as possible,” she added.

The trip comes a day after Baerbock spoke at a conference on EU expansion in Berlin in which she urged Ukraine to become a member of the 27-country alliance. She also discussed the southern Caucasus, saying that the EU must not allow Russia to “isolate” Georgia from the bloc.

On Saturday, she will meet with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in Baku.

Ahead of the trip to Armenia on Friday, Baerbock said Germany and the EU wanted to work alongside countries in the southern Caucasus to “build a region that overcomes the shadows of the past” and looks towards a better future for the region’s population.

The foreign minister stressed that it was important that countries “take the path of mutual trust” in the name of peace.

She said the conflict had inflicted deep wounds on both sides which “can heal in the long term.”

Baerbock said the EU was ready to make the region concrete offers on the path to peace, including a submarine communications cable through the Black Sea that would help “bring Armenia and Azerbaijan



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock at a press conference in Yerevan with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan. (Arka photo)

on the various problems, including demarcation, she said, and that has “raised hope that you can come to a peaceful solution.”

Mirzoyan acknowledged Germany’s efforts to achieve peace in the region but also said Azerbaijan had broken its promise to not engage in hostilities.

“Armenia has the will to take the path of peace in the region,” he said, but he also noted humanitarian problems, Armenian prisoners of war, and the need to recognize the territorial sovereignty of both countries.

cease-fire saw Azerbaijan retake areas surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh that had been held by ethnic Armenian forces.

In September of this year, Azerbaijan retook Nagorno-Karabakh, and the vast

majority of the territory’s residents fled to Armenia. Yerevan has accused Baku of “ethnic cleansing,” while Azerbaijan argues that ethnic Armenians left voluntarily. (RFE/RL contributed to this report.)



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in Armenia, visiting refugees from Artsakh (RFE/RL photo)

closer to each other and closer to us.”

Half of the cost of construction of €45 million (\$48 million) would be funded by the EU Global Gateway initiative, which aims to expand the bloc’s global influence through infrastructure investment.

According to the German Foreign Ministry, Baerbock visited a reception center for refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia.

Yerevan and Baku have made progress

Talks are also planned with members of the civilian EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA), which aims to monitor the security situation along the Armenian side of the border.

The Armenian-majority Nagorno-Karabakh region broke away from Azerbaijan in a war in the 1990s. Its independence was not recognized by any country, including Armenia.

After a war in 2020, a Russian-brokered

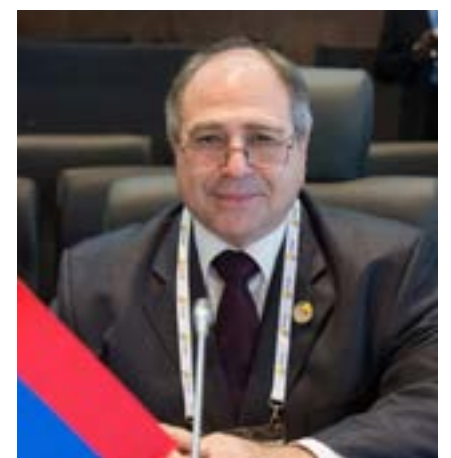
## Armenia’s Ambassador to UNESCO Christian Ter-Stepanyan Dies

PARIS (Public Radio of Armenia) — Christian Michel Ter-Stepanyan, Armenia’s Permanent Representative to UNESCO and Personal Representative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to the International Organization of La Francophonie, has passed away at age 72, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported on November 7.

“Christian Michel Ter-Stepanyan has long been a part of the diplomatic service of the Republic of Armenia, making his invaluable contribution to the promotion of Armenia’s priorities on international platforms,” the Foreign Ministry statement noted.

Ter-Stepanyan was born in France in 1951. He graduated with a degree in History from the University Paris VII. In 1991, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, where he served as Director of the Department of Europe until 1993. From 1993 to 1996, he served as Adviser and subsequently Minister plenipotentiary, Deputy Chief to the Mission of the Republic of Armenia to the European Union in Brussels.

He was then named Minister plenipotentiary to the Embassy of Armenia in France from 1996 to 1998, before becoming the Representative of Armenia to the Council of Europe from 1999 to 2001. After his promotion to the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Pleni-



Amb. Christian Ter-Stepanyan

potentiary by presidential decree in March 2001, he was named Permanent Representative of Armenia to the Council of Europe.

He was then named Adviser to the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs in charge of La Francophonie from 2008 to 2013, and subsequently Ambassador, Representative of Armenia to the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) in Paris from 2013 to 2019.

In 2019, Ter-Stepanian was named Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Armenia to UNESCO and Personal Representative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to the OIF.

## INTERNATIONAL

**Azerbaijan Again Claims 8 Armenian Villages**

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry issued a statement on November 8, which they call “Victory Day,” marking Azerbaijan’s occupation of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) after the 44-day war in 2020.

In the statement, Baku reiterated its claims on eight Armenian villages.

“Armenia has not yet de-occupied eight Azerbaijani villages,” the ministry said.

Also, Azerbaijan accused Armenia of “undermining” the talks on a bilateral peace deal.

**Number of Tourists to Armenia Increases Again**

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — According to the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, in January-September of the current year, 1, 839,000 tourists visited Armenia, compared to 1,239,000 people last year.

“The rise amounted to 48.4 percent, according to the National Statistical Committee.

The majority were from Russia (50 % of the total), followed by Georgia and Iran.

**PACE Reps to Make Factfinding Trip to Armenia**

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Kimmo Kiljunen (Finland SOC) and Borianna Aberg (Sweden, EPP/CD), co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of obligations and commitments by Armenia, will make a fact-finding visit to the country from February 17-23, the Council of Europe said in a statement.

“In Yerevan, Kiljunen and Aberg will meet the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Minister of Defense, the Chairperson of the Armenian delegation to PACE and representatives of the diplomatic community.

Meetings are also scheduled in the cities of Jermuk, Goris and Vardenis with representatives of the local authorities.

**Azerbaijan Announces Detention of Another Karabakh Civilian**

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The State Security Service of Azerbaijan on Thursday, November 2 announced the arrest of another man from Nagorno-Karabakh identified as Madat Babayan.

According to Azerbaijani media reports, the man was detained in the Karvachar district as part of Baku’s “anti-terrorist measures” back in September.

He is accused of participation in the so-called “Khojaly genocide” in 1992.

# Karabakh Armenian Convicted at Sham Trial in Azerbaijan

By Ruzanna Stepanian

BAKU (Azatutyun) — A military court in Baku sentenced an ethnic Armenian from Nagorno-Karabakh to 15 years in prison on November 7, three months after he was arrested by Azerbaijani security services during his aborted medical evacuation to Armenia.

The 68-year-old Vagif Khachatryan was among Karabakh patients escorted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to Armenian hospitals for urgent treatment. He was detained at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin corridor and then charged with killing and deporting Karabakh’s ethnic Azerbaijani residents at the beginning of the first Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

Azerbaijani authorities specifically implicated Khachatryan in the alleged killings of 25 Azerbaijanis from the Karabakh village of Meshali captured by Karabakh Armenian forces in December 1991. He lived in another village close to Meshali during and after the 1991-1999 war.

Khachatryan, who had been due to undergo a heart surgery in Yerevan, repeatedly denied the accusations during his trial that began on October 13. He said, in particular, that he was held in an Azerbaijani prison during the capture of the village.

“I’m an innocent person,” Khachatryan said in his concluding remarks made shortly after the announcement of the verdict in the case. The verdict mirrored the punishment demanded by an Azerbaijani prosecutor.

Khachatryan refused to be represented by an Azerbaijani government-appointed

lawyer at the beginning of the trial. He defended himself during the subsequent court hearings.

Prior to the trial, the Karabakh Armenian was allowed to call his daughters based in Armenia and send them letters through the ICRC.

“He didn’t ask anything from us,” one of

rested and prosecuted “in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.”

“Armenian POWs and civilians still held hostage in Baku should be released,” said a ministry spokeswoman.

They include eight former political and military leaders of Karabakh who were arrested at the Azerbaijani checkpoint during



Vagif Khachatryan at his trial in Baku

the three daughters, Venera, told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on November 7. “He only asked us to take care of ourselves.”

The Armenian Foreign Ministry condemned Khachatryan’s “sham trial” last month. It insisted that Khachatryan was ar-

rested and prosecuted “in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.”

## Catholicos Aram I of Great House of Cilicia Visits Eastern US

By Florence Avakian

NEW YORK — Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Prelate of the Eastern Armenian Prelacy, has announced the visit of Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia to community Armenians on the eastern U.S. coast.

“At this time of turmoil internationally and in Armenia, *Vehapar* is taking this long journey to bring his message of faith and hope, and also to express his great support to Artsakh and its brave people,” the Prelate stated.

He arrived in the US on November 6, landing at Dulles Airport in Washington, DC, and will stay until November 21. During this visit, his schedule has been packed with visits, lectures and meetings with religious, humanitarian and governmental leaders.

In the nation’s capital, the Catholicos gave the opening prayer in the US Congress on November 9, paid visits to the Lebanese and Armenian Embassies, presented a lecture at George Washington University and celebrated the Pontifical *Badarak* on Sunday at Holy Cross Church and conduct a youth forum.

Other stops include visits to Maryland, Philadelphia, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

On Saturday, November 18, there will be an Ecumenical Service at St. Illuminator’s Cathedral in New York, honoring the 850 anniversary of St. Nerses Shnorhali, a renowned priest, poet and musician. His legendary and holy “I Confess in Faith” will be recited in 24 languages during the Ecumenical Service, followed by a fellowship

hour in the church hall, and a youth conference at St. Sarkis Church.

On Sunday November 19, Bishop Torcom Donoyan, Prelate of the Western US Prelacy, will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at St. Illuminator’s Cathedral with the Catholicos delivering the homily. A gala banquet will follow at the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center, with a reception at 2 p.m. and a luncheon at 3 p.m.

The trip of Catholicos Aram I will conclude with several Board meetings at the Armenian Prelacy with the Karagheusian Foundation, the Armenian Medical Fund Board, the Near East Foundation Board, St. Vladimir’s Seminary’s, and with Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Gabriele Caccia.

Born in Beirut in 1947, Catholicos Aram I was consecrated leader of the Great House of Cilicia in 1995. His educational background was extensive and included the American University of Beirut, the Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, England’s Oxford University and New York’s Fordham University, where he earned two Master’s degrees and a Doctorate of Philosophy.

A prolific writer of many articles and books in Armenian, English and French, he has been an early advocate of the international Ecumenical Movement. A multi-year member of the World Council of Churches, he is currently one of eight presidents of the World Council of Churches and also one of the founding members of the Middle East Council of Churches, serving as its president since 2007.

Catholicos Aram I first visited the Eastern Prelacy in 1997. This was followed by visits in 2001 for the 1700 anniversary of

Christian Armenia; 2005 for the 75th anniversary of the Cilician See’s Theological Seminary; 2012 - a Pontifical visit; 2015 for the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide; and 2016 for the 20th anniversary of his spiritual leadership as Catholicos.

The Eastern Prelacy Prelate, Archbishop Tanielian recently returned from a trip to Armenia, with a group commissioned by Catholicos Aram I. The group also included Bishop Torcom Donoyan, Jirair Habibian of the Prelacies’ Arab Gulf Countries, and Hagop Lousararian, a member of the Executive Council of the Lebanon Diocese.

The group had meetings with Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, and the Artsakh refugees, in several provinces, especially the 40,000 refugees in Kotayk, giving them cash donations.

Archbishop Tanielian pointed out that Kotayk is especially unique in that it has no borders with any neighboring countries.

The Eastern Prelacy Prelate called the trip to the Artsakh refugees “emotionally devastating. Not only have they lost their homes, schools, churches and been cut off from their ancestral land, but they cannot visit the tombs of their loved ones. And now they don’t know what the future holds. This is a renewal of the Genocide.”

On the current trip of Catholicos Aram I to Eastern U.S. communities, Archbishop Tanielian stated, “the presence of Catholicos Aram I in this current situation will bring us, especially the young generation, new hope and faith in our community at large, as well as a new understanding of the Diasporan role in pan-Armenian advancement.”



INTERNATIONAL

# U.S. Investigating Whether NYC Mayor Adams Received Illegal Donations From Turkey

By William K. Rashbaum, Dana Rubinstein and Jeffery C. Mays

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Federal prosecutors and the F.B.I. are conducting a broad public corruption investigation into whether Mayor Eric Adams's 2021 election campaign conspired with the Turkish government to receive illegal foreign donations, according to a search warrant obtained by the *New York Times*.

The investigation burst into public view on Thursday, November 2, when federal agents conducted an early-morning raid at the Brooklyn home of the mayor's chief fund-raiser, Brianna Suggs. Ms. Suggs is a campaign consultant who is deeply entwined with efforts to advance the mayor's agenda.

Investigators also sought to learn more about the potential involvement of a Brooklyn construction company with ties to Turkey, as well as a small university in Washington, D.C., that also has ties to the country and to Mr. Adams.

According to the search warrant, investigators were also focused on whether the mayor's campaign kicked back benefits to the construction company's officials and employees, and to Turkish officials.

The agents seized three iPhones and two laptop computers, along with papers and other evidence, including something agents identified as "manila folder labeled Eric Adams," seven "contribution card binders" and other materials, according to the documents.

There was no indication that the investigation was targeting the mayor, and he is not accused of wrongdoing. Yet the raid apparently prompted him to abruptly cancel several meetings scheduled for Thursday morning in Washington, D.C., where he planned to speak with White House officials and members of Congress about the migrant crisis.

Instead, he hurriedly returned to New York "to deal with a matter," a spokesman for the mayor said.

Appearing at a Día de Muertos celebration at Gracie Mansion on Thursday night, Mr. Adams defended his campaign, saying that he held it "to the highest ethical standards."

He said he had not been contacted by any law enforcement officials, but pledged to cooperate in any inquiry. Mr. Adams said that he returned from Washington to be "on the ground" to "look at this inquiry" as it unfolded.

The warrant suggested that some of the foreign campaign contributions were made as part of a straw donor scheme, where donations are made in the names of people who did not actually give money.

Investigators sought evidence to support potential charges that included the theft of federal funds and conspiracy to steal federal funds, wire fraud and wire fraud conspiracy, as well as campaign contributions by foreign nationals and conspiracy to make such contributions.

Mr. Adams has boasted of his ties to Turkey, most recently during a flag-raising he hosted for the country in Lower Manhattan last week. The mayor said that there were probably no other mayors in New York City history who had visited Turkey as frequently as he has.

"I think I'm on my sixth or seventh visit," he said. At least one of those visits happened while he was Brooklyn borough president, when the government of Turkey underwrote the excursion, The Daily

News reported.

Ms. Suggs, who could not be reached for comment, is an essential cog in Mr. Adams's fund-raising machine, which has already raised more than \$2.5 million for his 2025 re-election campaign.

A person with knowledge of the raid said agents from one of the public corruption squads in the F.B.I.'s New York office questioned Ms. Suggs during the search of her home.

An F.B.I. spokesman confirmed that "we are at that location carrying out law enforcement action," referring to Ms. Suggs's home in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

The agents also served Ms. Suggs with a subpoena directing her to testify before a federal grand jury hearing evidence in Manhattan.

Nicholas Biase, a spokesman for the federal prosecutor's office in Manhattan, declined to comment.

The construction company was identified in the warrant, portions of which were obtained by The Times, as KSK Construction Group in Brooklyn. Indi-

viduals who listed their employer as KSK donated nearly \$14,000 to Mr. Adams's 2021 campaign, according to campaign finance records. A person who answered the telephone at the company declined to comment.

Charles Kretchmer Lutvak, a spokesman for Mr. Adams, said Ms. Suggs was not an employee of City Hall and referred calls to the mayor's campaign team.

"The campaign has always held itself to the highest standards," said Vito Pitta, a lawyer for Mr. Adams's 2021 and 2025 campaigns. "The campaign will of course comply with any inquiries, as appropriate."

Mr. Pitta added: "Mayor Adams has not been contacted as part of this inquiry." The search warrant sought financial records for Ms. Suggs and any entity controlled or associated with her; documents related to contributions to the mayor's 2021 campaign; records of travel to Turkey by any employee, officer or associate of the campaign; and documents related to interactions between the campaign and the government of Turkey, "including persons acting at the behest of the Turkish government."

Investigators specified documents relating to Bay Atlantic University, a tiny Turkish-owned institution that opened in Washington, D.C., in 2014. The following year, Mr. Adams visited one of the school's sister universities in Istanbul,

where he was given various certificates and was told that a scholarship would be created in his name. The warrant also sought electronic devices, including cellphones, laptops or tablets used by Ms. Suggs.

Ms. Suggs, 25, is the latest in a series of individuals tied to Mr. Adams who have attracted interest from law enforcement, including several connected to the mayor's fund-raising efforts.

In September, Eric Ulrich, Mr. Adams's former buildings commissioner and senior adviser, was indicted by the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, on 16 felony charges, including counts of conspiracy and bribetaking. Mr. Ulrich, as well as three others indicted at the time, helped organize a 2021 fund-raiser for Mr. Adams.

In July, Mr. Bragg indicted six individuals, including a retired police inspector who once worked and socialized with Mr. Adams, on charges of conspiring to funnel illegal donations to the mayor's 2021 campaign.

The Department of Investigation is also investigating the role of one of the mayor's top aides in a violent altercation last month at a migrant center in Manhattan.

Mr. Adams has tried to distance himself from these inquiries, arguing that he had limited insight into the events that precipitated them. But the investigation of such a close and longtime adviser might be harder to keep at arm's length.

In the past two years, Mr. Adams's re-election campaign has paid Ms. Suggs nearly \$100,000 for fund-raising and campaign consulting services via her company, Suggs Solutions, according to city records.

His first mayoral campaign paid her more than \$50,000.

Ms. Suggs has also registered as a lobbyist. State records indicate that the East Broadway Mall, a Chinatown real estate concern, hired Ms. Suggs, via an intermediary, to lobby the mayor's office and the City Council on its behalf in 2022.

Ms. Suggs worked as an aide to Mr. Adams when he was Brooklyn borough president, and is particularly close with Ingrid Lewis-Martin, who was his deputy at the time and is currently his top adviser.

Ms. Suggs is deeply embedded in outside efforts to advance the mayor's agenda. A key ally's political action committee, Striving for a Better New York, which promised to support state candidates aligned with Mr. Adams on policy matters, has paid Ms. Suggs roughly \$100,000.

Ms. Suggs also lists the Brooklyn Democratic Party, with which Mr. Adams has close ties, as a client on her LinkedIn page. Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, the as-

semblywoman who leads the Brooklyn party, said Ms. Suggs was a volunteer fund-raiser who mainly handled logistics. She said she was surprised to learn of the F.B.I. raid.

"What I know of Brianna Suggs, she's a bright young lady. I think she's a very honest person, organized. She's very mild-mannered, a very professional person," Ms. Bichotte Hermelyn said. "She knows the rules."

Mr. Adams's decision to cancel high-level meetings with senior White House officials about an issue that he has warned will hollow out New York's budget and destroy the city suggested an unusual level of urgency.

The White House appeared to have been taken by surprise. The mayor's office called Thursday morning to inform them of the cancellation, a White House aide said.

"I can't speak to his schedule and why he had to, he could not attend," said Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary.

The mayor was scheduled to meet with representatives from Congress along with the mayor of Chicago, Brandon Johnson,

and the mayor of Denver, Mike Johnston. At 7:41 a.m. Thursday, Mr. Adams posted a video on X, formerly known as Twitter, of himself sitting aboard an airplane. He said he was heading to Washington to meet with White House officials and members of the congressional delegation about the migrant crisis, which he described as a "real issue."

The mayor promised to keep the public updated throughout the day, but after he canceled the meetings, officials at City Hall would not explain why. They said the meetings would be rescheduled.

By 8 a.m. Thursday, around 10 agents could be seen standing on Ms. Suggs's block, according to a video of the scene taken by a neighbor and viewed by the *New York Times*. One agent wore a light green tactical vest with the letters "F.B.I." stamped on the back. Another official could be seen leaving the apartment with a cardboard box.

Ms. Suggs was standing on the stoop with her father as the agents searched her home, according to the neighbor, Christopher Burwell.

"Whatever it is, she must have been tricked into it, because she's a great woman," Mr. Burwell said. "I've known her all my life."

Reporting was contributed by Emma G. Fitzsimmons, Michael D. Shear, Wesley Parnell, Michael Rothfeld, Rebecca Chao and Melissa Kravitz Hoeffner.

In the past two years, Mr. Adams's re-election campaign has paid Ms. Suggs nearly \$100,000 for fund-raising and campaign consulting services via her company, Suggs Solutions, according to city records. His first mayoral campaign paid her more than \$50,000.

# Community News

## Katcho Achadjian Government Center Unveiled

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — San Luis Obispo County unveiled the “Katcho Achadjian Government Center” during a heartfelt dedication ceremony last Friday morning. The newly renamed government building, situated in the heart of downtown San Luis Obispo, is a testament to the enduring legacy of Katcho Achadjian, a beloved figure in the community and an unwavering advocate for the people.

Dozens of friends, family members, and esteemed guests gathered to pay their respects and celebrate the life and contributions of Katcho Achadjian at the dedication ceremony.

Notable speakers at the event included Chairman of the Board of Supervisors John Peschong, Katcho’s beloved wife, Araxie, and their adult children Hratch and Nyri, all of whom shared poignant memories and heartfelt sentiments.



Katcho Achadjian

“We feel very humbled, and today is monumental. It’s almost surreal to see the people’s building named after the man who was the people’s advocate. We are very thankful to the County and the Board of Supervisors for this great honor,” said Araxie Achadjian.

The renaming of the government building stands as a profound tribute to the late Katcho Achadjian, who left a lasting mark on the community before his passing in 2020. His dedication to public service and tireless efforts in improving the lives of those he served are woven into the very fabric of San Luis Obispo County.

Katcho Achadjian’s legacy includes a significant dedication to public service. He was first elected to the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors in 1998. In 2010, his exemplary leadership led him to the California State Assembly, where he continued to champion the needs and aspirations of his constituents for six years until he was termed out.

The “Katcho Achadjian Government Center” serves as a lasting tribute to his dedication, compassion, and invaluable contributions to the residents of San Luis Obispo County and beyond.

Throughout his 18 years in public office, Achadjian supported numerous Armenian efforts, including the Armenian Genocide Education Act and the Return of Churches Bill: Achadjian introduced the Return of Churches. The latter resolution called on the Republic of Turkey to respect religious freedom and return church properties to its minority communities.

He received the Mkhitar Gosh Gratitude Medal from Artsakh President Bako Sahakian, in recognition of his significant contributions to the Armenian community and advocacy efforts.

He was named the Armenian National Committee of America-WR Legislator of the Year in 2013 for his commitment to advancing Armenian-American causes.



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan celebrates his first liturgy after his elevation. (Harout Barsoumian photo)

## Former Diplomat Spreads The Love for Fresh Lavash in Boston

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BELMONT, Mass. — Arman Manoukian always dreamed about being a diplomat as a child in Soviet Armenia. He achieved that dream, and recently made another one come true – making fresh lavash, the famous Armenian flatbread, available in the Boston area. In 2023, his family bakery, called House of Lavash, in the Boston suburb of Belmont (on Cushing Avenue), opened to the public at the end of March.

### From Diplomacy to Business

Manoukian graduated from Yerevan State University and came to Boston University to obtain his master’s degree in international relations from 1993 to 1995. His first job was with USAID (United States Agency for International Development) in Washington, but after two years, he went back to his newly independent homeland to contribute to the development of its foreign service. He worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1997 to 2000 in charge of security cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe, the United States and other countries.

He said that he was trying to get Armenian more integrated into NATO, but the country was not ready for that. Secondly, he wanted to increase his income, he said, and he realized that if he stayed there longer switching to other work might become more difficult. He found an opportunity at Marriott, which had a hotel in Yerevan, as director of sales and marketing, and he embraced this, enjoying working with people.

Manoukian by now was married with two young children, aged two and four, and said that he worried that Armenia’s development was not going in the way it should. He wanted his children also to get an American education while they were still young, so he returned to the United States. He said, “I continued what I was doing in Armenia in terms of sales and marketing and was with the Marriott company after moving here initially.” He switched to car sales, and after that, opened his own company, another dream of his, which provided furniture restoration.

### Lavash is the One

In 2018, Manoukian said he was able to take his first trip back to Armenia since he left the Marriott there. He noticed that new types of machines or production line ovens were being used to make lavash instead of the traditional clay or stone oven known as a *tonir*. They use a line of stones rotating so like a traditional stone wall oven, they produce the same heating effect. He met with the manufacturer of those machines in Armenia and picked his brain about it, thinking that it would be

see LAVASH, page 8

## Five Women in Armenian Municipal Government Visit Massachusetts Counterparts Through CYSCA

By Aram Arkun

*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BELMONT, Mass. — Five women in municipal government in Armenia spoke about their towns and jobs, and their working visit to the US, at a panel discussion organized by the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association (CYSCA) and cosponsored by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) as part of the latter’s Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues. The event took place at the NAASR headquarters in Belmont during the evening of October 19.

The five women were in Massachusetts from October 13 to 21 as part of a CYSCA program which is funded by the Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL, formerly known as the Open World Leadership Center), a legislative branch agency that supports the US Congress. They spent one week in Washington D.C. prior to their Massachusetts visit, and they were accompanied by a facilitator from the US embassy in Yerevan, a political assistant there named Lilit Antonyan, as well as interpreter Svetlana Hovhannisyian.

NAASR Executive Director Silva Sedrakian welcomed the audience, while Roxanne Etmekjian, NAASR



Silva Sedrakian (photo Aram Arkun)

board member and president of CYSCA, provided some background about the CYSCA program. Jonathan Hecht, a CYSCA board member and former Massachusetts State Representative and Watertown City Councilor, served as moderator and pointed out this was the fourth day of the group’s visit.

Each day, Hecht said, was chock-full of meetings. Monday the group met with Cambridge’s mayor and members of the city council and city government, discussing issues such as economic development, transportation and clean energy. They met with nonprofit organizations working on domestic violence issues and groups focusing on women’s rights and empowerment, in order to see how these issues are dealt with on the city level in Cambridge.

*continued on next page*

## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Five Women in Armenian Municipal Government Visit Massachusetts Counterparts Through CYSCA



Jonathan Hecht (photo Aram Arkun)

from previous page

Tuesday they moved to the state level and met state legislators representing Cambridge, Watertown and other municipalities at the State House, as well as with the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators, the League of Women Voters, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, a regional organization of the Boston area dealing with infrastructure, emergency response, immigrants and other important issues.

Wednesday they went to central Massachusetts, to the town of Lancaster and the city of Fitchburg, where they met with local officials, and toured Fitchburg's senior center and community television station, as well as visited Hollis Hills Farm. On Thursday, they visited the Perkins School for the Blind, Sheriff Peter Koutoujian at the Middlesex House of Correction, and the staff of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University's Kennedy School. They had one more full day of meetings to look forward to on Friday, Hecht observed.

Etmekjian later reported that on Friday, the group met with Senior Researcher Noorya Hayat at Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life: center for information and research on civic learning and engagement (CIRCLE). They also met with Emily Haber, CEO and president, and Yaritza DeJesus, Director of Economic Development, of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC). On Saturday morning, they had a tour and meeting at the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Boston Nature Center and learned about their various programs, including an on-site pre-school.

#### PowerPoint Presentations

After Hecht's general introduction, the panelists narrated a PowerPoint slideshow on Yerevan and their various towns of origin, presenting the highlights and touristic attractions of each area. Meri Harutyunyan, Deputy Head of Development and Investment Programs Department for Yerevan Municipality, was the first speaker. Her work focuses on sustainable development, environmental education, and encouraging citizen involvement in the capital city's decision-making process.

Lilit Hajatyan, a native of Artik, in Shirak Province, which is a 30-minute drive from Gyumri, noted that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Armenians immigrated there from Kars and Karin/Erzurum. Artik is famous for its pink tufa, which is excavated there. Hajatyan is the youngest of the 27 members of the Artik Consolidated Community Council. Municipal council members in Armenia work part-time without pay. She is also the founder and director of an environmental NGO.

Arusyak Avetisyan is the second youngest of the 27 member Vardenis Consolidat-



The Armenian visitors at Cambridge City Hall: back row, from left: Roxanne Etmekjian (president of Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association), Svetlana Hovhannisyanyan (interpreter), Meri Harutyunyan (Yerevan Municipality Staff), Quinton Zondervan (Cambridge City Councilor), Pat Jehlen (State Senator), Cambridge Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui, Marc McGovern (Cambridge City Councilor), Lilit Haroyan (Charentsavan City Councilor), Dennis Carlone (Cambridge City Councilor), Emmett Vorspan (aide to Dennis Carlone); front row, from left: Lilit Hajatyan (Artik City Councilor), Arusyak Avetisyan (Vardenis City Councilor), Shushanik Danielyan (Yeghegis Municipality Staff), Lilit Antonyan (facilitator for the program) (photo courtesy CYSCA)

ed Community Council, in Gegharkunik Province. Gegharkunik is the biggest province in Armenia, largely because it contains Lake Sevan in its territory. With 36 settlements, it is near Armenia's border, and agriculture and animal husbandry are the main sources of livelihood, Avetisyan related. Avetisyan is interested in job creation to keep the local population stable, and her main employment is at the Institute of Child and Adolescent Health of the Arabkir Medical Center.

Lilit Haroyan, member of the 27-person Charentsavan Consolidated Community Council, works on environmental issues, accessible schools for children with disabilities, and new playgrounds, and is a successful local entrepreneur. Charentsavan is part of Kotayk Province, she said, and was founded in 1947 as an industrial center. It had 12 large factories. Today, it is one enlarged (i.e. "consolidated") community with five villages. The non-active volcanic Gutanasar provides heat even during the winter snows, and Charentsavan also is the site of the largest of the three musical organs located in Armenia, Haroyan related.

The last panelist, Shushanik Danielyan, is from the Yeghegis Consolidated Community, which contains 12 villages, and is located in Vayots Dzor Province. Danielyan remarked that among its famous products is wine from Areni, which is both a toponym and the name of variety of grapes. Danielyan is Development Program Coordinator for the Yeghegis municipality, and works to promote tourism and economic development.

Even before the Artsakh Armenian population was forced to flee last month, Yeghegis had already hosted 300 forcibly displaced people from Artsakh. Danielyan noted that there is a youth organization founded in 2021 through which volunteers help the displaced Artsakh Armenians. Youth of the area also are active in the Syunik Development NGO, which was founded in 1996 [CHECK name].

The five visiting panelists spoke in Ar-

menian and their words were translated by Hovhannisyanyan. The last part of the slideshow was narrated by Antonyan, who spoke fluent English (she has an undergraduate degree from Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania and a graduate degree in political science from Villanova University). Antonyan emphasized that the number one issue facing Armenia today was its security and territorial integrity. The Armenian government has also raised the right of return

tice on the local level the political parties don't really work because local people don't consider ideology or party, according to one panelist. They just choose the group they think will win, so people switched to the Civil Contract Party (the party of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan) to get in power, but the same people were always involved in election fraud. Another panelist, Avetisyan, declared that in Vardenis all parties work together for the benefit of their com-



From left, Svetlana Hovhannisyanyan, Lilit Haroyan, Arusyak Avetisyan, Shushanik Danielyan, Lilit Hajatyan and Meri Harutyunyan (photo Aram Arkun)

of the displaced Artsakh people, with their need for safety and security. She said that the Armenian government attempts to raise these issues in various forums.

She also spoke about the problems of the refugees, who need immediate shelter, housing, economic integration and employment so they can stay in Armenia.

#### Discussion

The panelists then fielded a variety of questions from the audience. They described how the Artsakh refugees were distributed in all the different provinces of Armenia very quickly. They spoke about the difficulties of women in government. Though the law requires that at least 30 percent of municipal council members be women, they are not always given the same respect or authority as other members.

All council members must in theory belong to a political party slate, but in prac-

munity, though there were some emotions and complications during elections.

Danielyan noted that she and Harutyunyan, as municipal employees, were not members of political parties and so were nonpartisan.

Some of the panelists expressed their surprise at how clean the US was, and the sense of punctuality and responsibility of citizens. All of the panelists expressed thanks to the organizers of their visits. They declared they learned a lot and would use that information in their work back in Armenia.

Recently, Etmekjian revealed one more interesting bit of news to the *Mirror-Spectator*: shortly after the delegates left, COIL notified CYSCA that it would be awarded another grant on the topic "Cultural Heritage Preservation in Armenia," scheduled for July 10-20, 2024.

## COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

# Former Diplomat Spreads the Love for Fresh Lavash in Boston

LAVASH, from page 6  
great to have in Boston. However, he said that he realized it would not be easy to bring this machinery there and then convert the lavash recipe to accommodate the local water and salt available in the US.

Manoukian never cooked at home before. A few years after his Armenia trip, during the Covid pandemic, Manoukian said his wife began baking various types of sourdough bread, and he began helping. He said it was fun and again he turned his attention



One of the display cases at the House of Lavash

to lavash. He noted that the local Armenian markets all obtained lavash made elsewhere, and so there was an opportunity for providing fresh lavash in Boston.

Manoukian pointed out that when lavash is not fresh, but comes from somewhere else, it has to include preservatives for a longer shelf life and must be frozen for transport. By the time it comes on the shelf, it already has undergone a long journey. In other words, he said, "I always thought it was not the same as in Armenia, where you buy it and eat it fresh out of the oven. My

dream was to have that kind of experience here. It exists in Los Angeles but not in Boston."

Manoukian ended up not only changing the traditional lavash recipe to account for Boston water and salt, but also found a way to make the bread without any yeast or baking soda. Though it comes out drier than the one in Armenia, it goes through a sprinkler system so eventually it ends up feeling the same as lavash in Armenia. He said, "It does not look any different or taste any different, but it is easier on the digestion. It is a much lighter bread than what you may end up eating in Armenia."

### Family First

Manoukian is not alone in his enterprise. "I would not have probably taken the responsibility of starting this whole thing by myself," he said. "My brother-in-law and sister-in-law were also very interested in doing it and so it is more of a family business right now. We are all in it and it has a family feel to it. That makes it more enjoyable." When his wife and sons have the time, they also stop by to help, but it is



he packaging for the lavash bears a distinctive design (photo Aram Arkun)



Arman Manoukian at the House of Lavash (photo Aram Arkun)

usually just three people working.

Together they do the preparation of the dough, baking, packaging and selling. Right now, Manoukian said, supply meets the demand, and they start working around 8 a.m. so that every day fresh lavash is available when the store opens several hours later. Though the store itself is closed to customers on Mondays, even that day baking is done in order to prepare for the demand later in the week.

The store only makes one other thing besides lavash, and that is an Armenian pastry called *gata*. Manoukian said it is as popular as the store's lavash. It has a different baking and production procedure, in which Manoukian's brother and sister-in-law are involved. He said that it was less sweet than what is cooked in Armenia, and exclaimed, "I think it is unique. It is different from any other *gata* I have ever had,

including in Armenia."

The store does sell other items, such as dried fruits, preserves, sweet *sujukh*, herbs, spices, grains and canned fruit, all brought directly by plane from Armenia. Manoukian estimated that 70 percent of customers are ethnic Armenians, while the other 30 percent are locals who learned about lavash and Armenian food through contact with Armenians or by living in the countries surrounding Armenia.

Together with its welcoming family atmosphere, the store has a cozy artisan appeal. It not only showcases Armenian products as healthy and made without preservatives. Manoukian said, "We educate the locals not only about everything we do, but about Armenia too."

For more information on the House of Lavash, see its website: [houseoflavash-boston.com](http://houseoflavash-boston.com)

## OBITUARY

### Sophie (Bazarian) Balgochian

Dedicated to Family

WLEXINGTON, Mass. — Sophie (Bazarian) Balgochian, died on November 3, 2023.

Born in Watertown, on September 17, 1935, she was the youngest of the five children of Sarah "Hajigus" Saghbazarian and Avedis Ourfalian. Sophie had four older brothers: Harry, Joe, Aram, Marty.

She attended Watertown High School and had many fond memories of her classmates.

At 17, she met her future husband, Peter Balgochian, Jr., at the Boston Latin School Purple & White Dance, where they were both with other dates (who, by the way, also married each other). During a blizzard on April 8, 1956, Sophie and Peter had a double wedding at St. James, along with her brother Aram and Peter's sister, Elizabeth. Sophie and Peter, just 20 years old, moved to Germany where Peter was in the Army.

During their 71 years together, they lived in 14 places (where sometimes she was known as JoAnne), and recently celebrated their 67th anniversary and 88th birthdays.

Sophie is the mother of Peter III, wife Karen and granddaughter Katarina; and daughter Mardi and her husband Paul Santos. She is survived by her husband Peter and many nieces, nephews and cousins.

Family was always the most important



thing to Sophie, and really the only way that Mardi and Paul were able to move her back to Boston. This family filled her final few years with happiness, love and laughter, and our wish is that you remember her by telling stories that keep her memory alive throughout the next generations.

Funeral service was at Saint James Armenian Church, Watertown, on Thursday, November 9. Interment was at Ridgelawn Cemetery, Watertown.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the American Cancer Society.

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## Reflecting Connecting Inspiring

# 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala a Smashing Success

GALA, from page 1

an honorary consul of Armenia, guests who were the third generation of faithful readers of the *Mirror-Spectator*, and others who were new readers of the paper in its online or mobile app versions, first gathered at a reception which included guitar music.

After the *Mirror-Spectator's* 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Committee Chair Nicole Babikian Hajjar welcomed the guests in the main hall, four Armenian clergymen from all three Christian denominations, Fr. Arakel Aljalian, Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian, Fr. Vasken Kouzouian, and Rev. Dikran Youmshakian, began the evening's formal program with prayers in Armenian and English dedicated to the Armenians of Artsakh and said grace. Hajjar expressed deep appreciation to the Afeyan Family Foundation for its leadership role as the Benefactor Host for the gala as well as two of the Event Patrons – the Vahe Fattal Foundation, and Carolyn Mugar.

Hajjar introduced Movsesian, who immediately lived up to her reputation by relating several witty anecdotes. Movsesian also confessed that articles about her in the *Mirror-Spectator* are the only ones that her mother will proudly post on Facebook.

### Appreciation

*Mirror-Spectator* Managing Editor Aram Arkun announced that though Sheriff Peter Koutoujian of Middlesex County could not be present in person that evening, the sheriff had sent a special framed certificate in recognition of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Mirror-Spectator*. Arkun went on to present Alin K. Gregorian, *Mirror-Spectator* editor for nearly a quarter of a century, with an award for excellence in journalism, prais-



Alin K. Gregorian

ing her steadfastness in maintaining journalistic standards, consistent sympathy for the underdog, as and wicked sense of humor. After some remarks of appreciation, Gregorian spoke about the work of Armenian newspapers, so important in the current climate after the 2020 Artsakh war and the recent capitulation of Artsakh.

She then spoke about the role of Prof. Elisha Chrakian, Barbara Tellalian's father, as founding editor of the *Mirror-Spectator*, as well as Tellalian's own decades of support of the paper, not to mention her significance in her own right as a prominent community leader, including



Barbara Tellalian with Alin K. Gregorian



Sona Movsesian speaks



Mirror-Spectator 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee members, from left, Carol Ishkhanya, Katrina Menzighian, Alin K. Gregorian, MaryJo Bazarian Murray, Anaide Nahikian, Kevork Marashlian, Chair Nicole Babikian Hajjar, Aram Arkun, Ani Stepanian, Rouzan Abrahamian and Piruz Bogossian (Missing Margarit Belorian)

in the establishment of the Armenian Heritage Park. Gregorian invited Tellalian to take the stage, where the latter spoke about the role of the newspaper in keeping the Armenian community connected and informed, and then surprised her with an award for community leadership. Both Gregorian and Tellalian received beautiful, inscribed creations from award-winning artist Michael Aram.

Arkun returned to the stage to present *Mirror-Spectator* Art Director Mark McKertich an award for excellence in design. He observed that McKertich had been with the newspaper for over four decades, making him the most senior of the *Mirror-Spectator* team, and attested that McKertich adds visual beauty to anything he touches. McKertich recalled his family's connection of many years with *Baikar* and the *Mirror-Spectator* and concisely expressed his thanks.

Arkun then introduced a video in memory of *Mirror-Spectator* Senior Editorial Columnist and Armenian Democratic Liberal Party and Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) leader Edmond Y. Azadian, prepared by *Mirror-Spectator* Video Correspondent Haykaram Nahapetyan and narrated by Raffi Arkun.

After the video screened, Arkun announced another surprise award, this time for Kevork Marashlian. In addition to being the chairman of the Eastern District Committee of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party and Vice President of the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, and playing an important role in Armenian community life, Marashlian is chairman of the Baikar Association, which is the publisher of the *Mirror-Spectator*. He has supported the work of the paper for decades. Arkun remarked that Marashlian was very modest and usually shied away from the limelight, but today the *Mirror-Spectator* team wanted to shine some



Mark McKertich



From left, Anna Afeyan, Noubar Afeyan, Armen Mkrtchyan and Tatevik Hakobyan



Aram Arkun, left, with Kevork Marashlian and the gift to the latter from the *Mirror-Spectator* Anniversary Committee

# Reflecting Connecting Inspiring



From left, Sean Murray, Mary Jo Bazarian Murray, Nancy Barsamian, Anthony Barsamian and Aram Arkun

Carla Garapedian, filmmaker, director, writer and broadcaster, quoted Turkish-Armenian lawmaker Garo Paylan as asking Armenians in America to mobilize and unite to support Armenia, facing an existential crisis, whatever they may think of the current government. An invasion of Armenia is looming, so American Armenians must act now and pressure Washington, Garapedian said, just as Armenians took to the streets in 2015.

Eric Hacopian of CivilNet in Yerevan said he wanted to “speak a bit from the heart” and described his reaction to the news the week of the Azerbaijani final takeover of Artsakh, including his realization that you are not dealing with political issues but “radical evil” which cannot really be understood in a normal political calculus. Armenia wasted several decades when it needed to build a proper state and governing system so it would not be poor, isolated or weak. Instead, Armenians for the second time in a century were subject to genocide. Yet, he said he believed Armenia would survive and thrive, and agreed with Garapedian that

light on his kind heart and dedicated service.

The stunning metal print inscribed to Marashlian, with a view of Mt. Ararat and Khor Virap, was designed by McKertich. Marashlian thanked many important past and present supporters of the *Mirror-Spectator*.

### Journalists

At this point, Movsesian returned to the stage to thank the Hajar Family Fund, not mentioned earlier due to the modesty of the Gala Committee chair, for serving as one of the event patrons, and one by one introduced three of the four journalists who took part in the *Mirror-Spectator*'s panel discussion on October 27 at Tufts University [See accompanying article in this issue], as well as special guest David Ignatius.



Eric Hacopian makes a point to Ken Dilanian.



David Ignatius



Dr. Carla Garapedian



Yervant Chekijian, left, speaks with David Ignatius



Eric Hacopian

Ken Dilanian, who covers the Justice Department at NBC News, declared that his colleagues in London who work in the international field affirmed that the story of the Armenians is being eclipsed by other conflagrations, and they don't expect that to change in the near future, though journalists do follow what is happening and continue to ask questions at the regular press briefings of the US State Department. Consequently, Dilanian said: “I think it is important that all of you keep doing the great work that you are doing and keep trying to make your voices heard on behalf of Armenia.”



Jean-Jacques Hajjar with Herman and Laura Purutyan



Nicole Babikian Hajjar and Jean-Jacques Hajjar



From left, Nicole Babikian Hajjar, Rouzan Abrahamian and Ani Stepanian



From left, Michael Douvadjian, Carol Ishkhanian and Sarah Ignatius

*ror-Spectator*. Going over the variety of articles in a current issue, he declared, “These articles don't tell you what to think. They inform you so that you can think.” He proclaimed, “I am a newspaper man and an Armenian-American, so I love the *Mirror-Spectator* twice over. The *Mirror-Spectator* survives because it is like the Armenian community. It serves, it is smart about how it does that, it is driven by fact, it embraces its community, it knows what it stands for, and it never gives up.”

### Closing the Evening

Philanthropist and entrepreneur Dr. Noubar Afeyan, co-founder of the biotech company Moderna through his venture capital firm Flagship Pioneering, was the final speaker of the evening. Cofounder of the Future Armenian, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and many other projects for Armenia and the Armenians, Afeyan first noted that his wife and life partner Anna's support of Armenian activities was much greater than his own, before confessing his special connection to the *Mirror-Spectator*.

He congratulated the newspaper on its anniversary and looked forward to its centennial, just around the corner. He said, “Throughout the four decades [he has lived in Boston], I have read the *Mirror-Spectator*, remarkably, and I see GALA, page 14



Oscar Tatosian, center, speaks with guests.

Reflecting Connecting Inspiring

# Insightful Tufts Journalists' Panel Held Before Packed Audience

TUFTS, from page 1

The panelists, each from a different segment of the media, offered their own views about why Armenia and Artsakh were failing to gain traction in the US media, while also pointing out some successes.

Mahtesian, the senior politics editor at Politico, had previously worked at NPR. He spoke about what attracts attention in US media outlets. Incidentally, he was part of the *Mirror-Spectator's* anniversary celebrations in 2012, when he received the newspaper's Award of Excellence.

Mahtesian said many of his childhood friends from the Armenian Sisters' Academy outside Philadelphia ask him, "Where the hell are you? Where is the media? Where is the coverage? The world has forgotten us."

The answer, he and others stressed, is not unique to Armenians: money is tight and fewer and fewer international stories receive coverage.

Said Mahtesian, "That conversation begins with talking about the news industry and the circumstances we are under. Our economics are in flux. Ken [Dilanian] can tell you a lot of news organizations are struggling. ... Newspapers are dying every day. Most [outlets] are a shell of what they used to be and nowhere is that clearer than on the foreign bureaus of most news organizations. It's not the way it was 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 50 years ago. ... There are just no bodies on these desks. They are all stretched incredibly thin."

In addition, he said, the Caucasus as a region is an unfamiliar territory, plus its geopolitical history is wildly complicated. "As we all know, we're dealing with a complicated situation in a complicated part of the world. There is not a whole lot of familiarity ... even among those people

question their integrity."

The lack of coverage irks him too, he said. Even Politico, which has global coverage now, "has other priorities. I understand how it works, what it looks like under the hood. Nevertheless, it is frustrating."

He spoke about trying to advocate coverage at Politico for when President Biden signed the Armenian Genocide resolution in 2021. His colleagues, he recalled, were not quite sure why it was important. "It's a great story. It's an important moment in politics and here's why," he told the newsroom. Upon further prompting, he ended up writing a first-person account, explaining what political and international forces and machinations were in play against the recognition of that genocide for so many years.

"It was probably the biggest story I will write in my career traffic-wise. One lesson I took away from it ... is to tell the best type of story, which is always the personal human story, rather than the dry, bloodless policy thing," he said.

Of course, the next step is what can be done about it. "There are some things that as a community we can do. I'm already seeing this and it is a hopeful sign. It is dominating social media. It is essential we dominate that space."

He called social media "the great equalizer."

"It won the narrative with storytelling," he said, affecting policy. "I felt diaspora Armenians were incredibly effective there" during the Artsakh war.

Next up was Dr. Carla Garapedian. Garapedian has produced documentaries on the Armenian Genocide ("Screamers"), as well as documentaries on Iran, North Korea, Chechnya and Afghanistan. She has previously worked at the BBC, where she was the first American anchor. She is working on a movie based on Eric Bogosian's book, *Operation Nemesis*, with Dustin Hoffman and Christoph Waltz. (The work is currently at a standstill pending the resolution of the SAG-AFTRA strike.)

Garapedian noted that she was proud to be a part of the *Mirror-Spectator's* 90th anniversary. "I look forward to opening up the newspaper every week," she said.

She offered a personal anecdote about her first experience with the media's coverage of the Armenian Genocide, during its 60th anniversary, when she was a teen.

"In Los Angeles, our local PBS channel agreed to broadcast a documentary by J. Michael Hagopian called 'The Forgotten Genocide.' It featured academics and survivors. The week of the broadcast I took a call for my father at our home in North Hollywood. It was a representative of the State Department. This gentleman said the State Department believed that the documentary should not air because it could 'damage us Turkish relations,'" she recalled.

Her father, Leo Garapedian, a journalism professor, reached out to a friend in Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley's office. The mayor, hearing about the interference, interceded and the documentary was broadcast as scheduled on KCET.

The whole episode baffled her as a teen. "I was confused about why my country would behave this way," Garapedian said. The series of events, in retrospect, she said, taught her about "the power of the media" and why governments fear it.

Garapedian was in place when much of the world first heard about Armenia, in 1988, when it was still part of the USSR, after the devastating earthquake there. At that time, she was in London working as a news producer for Channel 4. "I was charged with finding someone to get on

live TV quick," she said. Armenia, however, was closed to the outside world and one which few people in her orbit there knew.

Garapedian described how many people saw Armenia and the region: "a faraway exotic place within the Russian orbit."

She continued, "As for me, I was able to get an eyewitness to the earthquake, Ani King-Underwood. I didn't tell my boss she was actually Armenian because when she heard her name, King-Underwood, she thought 'good British girl.' Without her, I doubt we would have covered the story at all."

In 2005, commissioning editors for "Storyville," ran into an Armenian filmmaker in Prague, Vardan Hovnessian, who had exclusive footage of soldiers from the first Artsakh war. "The editor thought this could make an interesting documentary. SO the BBC funded that fea-



Eric Hacopian (Ken Martin Photo)



Eric Hacopian and Carla Garapedian share a light moment. (Ken Martin Photo)

writing about foreign affairs," he added.

"In many ways it's the last region they've ever thought about," he said, with many covering Europe, the Middle East or Asia, leaving them without "a deep-dive familiarity with Armenia or Artsakh."

There are other hot places politically experiencing this "lack of familiarity" now, including Kosovo, Niger and even Northern Ireland.

There are differences between media outlets, he advised. "It's important for the Armenian-American community to have a better grasp of the media ecosystem," Mahtesian said.

For example, he said, in places like Boston and Los Angeles, the main local papers, the *Boston Globe* or the *Los Angeles Times*, cover Armenia because of the large Armenian communities in those cities. In other places, he said, Armenians should reach out to the local media and familiarize them. "We need to educate them and that's ok. And that starts not with angry emails to those journalists who are covering it, but rather [try] to establish relationships," Mahtesian noted. "If you're trying to reach journalists ... you don't want to reach out once in your life angry and

ture-length documentary which came to be called "A Story of People in War and Peace."

The same BBC commissioning editor also commissioned "Screamers," Garapedian's massively successful documentary trailing System of a Down lead singer Serge Tankian as he explored the Armenian Genocide's legacy through his grandfather's story.

"That was two documentaries about Armenians the same year. The result was, not surprisingly, the BBC got a torrent of complaints from the British-Turkish community," Garapedian said.

The complainants, she said, asked why the BBC didn't give the Turkish side of the Genocide. "Well," she replied, "there aren't two sides to the Genocide. It happened. Should we get the Nazi point of view to the Holocaust?"

She made a parallel with the Artsakh story 30-some years later when many in the Armenian community, she said, think the recent coverage of the Artsakh war and later blockade and ethnic cleansing were pro-Azerbaijan because of "moral equivalence and both-side-ism."

"I don't think the BBC was alone in this. But to call it a 'breakaway republic' takes us back to the late '80s, not 2023, and the idea of restoring territorial integrity, sorry, sovereignty of Azerbaijan, was a way of framing the issue. It was as if the people of Artsakh never had the right of self-determination," she added.

In addition, she observed, there was a tendency to minimize the situation, including the nine-month-long blockade of the enclave by Azerbaijani forces. Politico, she cited, represented the blockade as "weeks of deadly clashes," rather than what it was.

This ran counter to the characterization of the International Court of Justice ruling in February that said the blockade caused an imminent threat to the people of Artsakh, she noted. Similarly, she cited Judge Luis Moreno Ocampo, who in a lengthy opinion released in the spring, referred to that blockade as a "genocide."

Many Armenians now, Garapedian said, complain that what happened to Artsakh did not get a fraction of the

*continued on next page*

# Reflecting Connecting Inspiring

from previous page

coverage of what is happening in Gaza now.

“The stakes were perceived to be so minor that the mobilization of resources by media organizations was simply not there,” Garapedian said.

She said European coverage was better because the location seemed more European. By contrast, for American outlets, she said, “It was another far-away place, not really relevant.” In addition, she stressed, the deployment of a vigorous Azerbaijani disinformation campaign “can’t be minimized.”

She suggested that Armenians use the word “indigenous” to frame their ties to Artsakh. “Indigenous people fighting for their lands has a different ring,” she said.

Bringing the talk full-circle back to the call from the State Department several decades ago, and comparing it to Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying that Armenia’s territorial integrity should be respected, she concluded: “It’s now almost 50 years later. Has that calculus changed? I wonder.”

Next up was Ken Dilanian of NBC News, who is the justice and intelligence correspondent for NBC News, based in Washington. He is also the grandson of an Armenian Legionnaire who served with the French after the Armenian Genocide.

Dilanian, humble and softspoken, said it was probably the first time he had addressed an Armenian audience. “I’m very proud of my heritage and my grandfather who fought in the Legion,” he said.

“My dad grew up in the ’30s and ’40s, in the time of great assimilation. He barely spoke Armenian even though his father never spoke English,” he joked, saying it made for an interesting dynamic.

“Consider me a lapsed Armenian. ... It’s been an interesting exercise thinking about why the media — and as Charlie [Mahtesian] said, the media is — we aren’t covering this really significant and tragic and important story. The reality is ... even if there wasn’t a Russian invasion of Ukraine, a war in the Middle East and a former president facing four criminal indictments who is running for president again, even if those things didn’t exist, I don’t know if the story would have broken though,” Dilanian said.

One foreign correspondent for NBC, Matt Bradley, did a story on the Artsakh situation, for the network’s streaming service, he noted.

Dilanian explained that for broadcast television, the cost of foreign coverage is prohibitive. “TV is expensive. Particularly when you go to a war zone, you need security. TV is a big endeavor,” he said. Therefore, he suggested, there needs to be a certain amount of familiarity or marketability for a story to be worth it for the network.

He also concurred with Mahtesian that it is not just Armenian issues that are not covered fully. Currently, he said, there is a genocide in Sudan, among other place, and yet, there is limited interest in foreign issues amongst Americans. “Let’s face it. Americans can’t [even] find Ireland on a map. We are not great in geography,” he said. “We are all in a business where we are trying to grab an audience, grab eyeballs.”

NBC, he said, pays marketing specialists to see what topics would grab the most audience and Armenia does not make the cut for the news, he said.

As many noted, the story’s coverage contrasts tremendously with the current conflagration between Israel and Palestinians, which is getting wall-to-wall coverage. “One of the biggest reasons is that American strategic reasons are implicated in a major way,” he said; “There are American troops on the ground in Israel. ... That just isn’t the case in the Artsakh situation for better or worse,” he noted.

Dilanian also added, “I wonder how much that the fact that the Russians are involved and the long Armenian Russian alliance influences the way American media looks at the issue.”

He added, however, that the issue comes up in the State Department briefing every day but the answers often don’t make the news. He labeled those the “unforgiving nature of geopolitics” and “neck-snapping” speed of changing stories. There are only “a few big stories we concentrate on,” he said, adding “very few of those stories are foreign news at all.”

Dilanian’s major focus in recent months has been the story of former President Donald Trump’s multiple indictments. Even that story, major by any standard, he added, now is taking a back burner to the Israel-Gaza war. “Since the Israel thing happened, this story has faded a little bit,” he said.

“If the displacement of tens of thousands of people didn’t get television coverage, because that’s a TV story, my gosh — the emotion — if that didn’t make it, I don’t know what will,” he wondered.

Dilanian recalled that Arkun had asked him if demonstrations by Armenians helped increase coverage of the issue. “It can’t hurt. If they [people in newsrooms] are wondering why there are people outside our building downstairs, it might cause them to do some research and learn about it,” Dilanian said.

Panelist Eric Hacopian is a political analyst and consultant. He’s the owner of EDH and Associates, a Southern California-based Democratic consulting firm. Since 2017 he has been living in Armenia and is currently the host of the “Insight Show” on CivilNet television, which reaches as many as 80,000-100,000 every week.

He started by talking about journalism in Armenia.

“Journalism in Armenia generally tends to be quite poor, for the most part,” he said because of a “lack of understanding of the broader world,” he said. He quipped, “Anyone under 30 is dramatically better than over 30. If Armenia were full of 26-year-old women, we would be Switzerland in five minutes.”

The humorous Hacopian said that in Armenia, like the rest of the Caucasus, there is an inflated sense of importance. He cited as an example that he had recently flown into Tbilisi, Georgia, for a conference. A sign at the airport proclaimed it as “where Europe started,” giving short shrift to ancient Greece or Rome.

He next spoke about a recent program on the French television station, on which a French actor had stated that of the 100,000 to 120,000 Artsakh population, 30,000 were children and had asked, “What would the coverage have been, if there had been 30,000 dogs that were blockaded?” He replied, “They would have gotten a lot more coverage than what we would have got.”

Hacopian stressed that Armenians need to take responsibility for not being able to sell the story widely. “Nobody cares about other tragedies. You care about your own,” he said. “Eighty percent of the media problems are our fault. You are not telling the proper story.

As for the 20 percent, he said, “There is a very particular angst or pushback you get from what I call Anglo-Saxon media. For many of these people, we tend to be too



Ken Dilanian, at the podium, and Charlie Mahtesian (Ken Martin Photo)

dark for the right and too light for the left.”

The diaspora is also varied, and not always relatable to outsiders. “For the average European, if they know an Armenian, it’s a very wealthy jeweler in Belgium or it’s the Kardashians. It is not the farmer in Artsakh with seven kids that makes a subsistent living. The stereotype of the Armenian is not a sympathetic figure,” he said, “losing from both sides.”

Starting in December last year, he said, he and a small group started trying to promote the story of the blockade, but it wasn’t enough. “We failed miserably because frankly no one cared, no one knew where we were, and it was very easy to confuse the issues. We were essentially trying to catch up with 30 years’ worth of work that wasn’t done in nine months,” he said. Only the Ocampo report, he said, brought proper focus to the issue.

He suggested using social media rather than traditional media.

“One of our colleagues,” he said, spoke to the head of Edelman, the biggest PR firm in the world. “His response to this was, ‘Are you an idiot? Why are you calling me? Why don’t you just get Kim Kardashian?’”

There are four billion people on social media, he said. One out of four follow Kardashian or one of her sisters on social media. Hacopian did reach out to her through Eric Israeli and “it had impact,” he said.

“You have to think of the media in a much more elastic way,” he said. Traditional media is dying while social media is out of control and “oddly democratic,” he added.

“They [Azeri PR spinners] are very good at what happens behind closed doors,” he said, noting that they can be tripped up. One major faux pas was when the Azerbaijani presidential election results of 2013 were released accidentally one day before the elections were actually held!

Things in Armenia are more positive than we in the diaspora hear, he noted, adding that there are programs taking non-Armenians to the country, increasing familiarization so that they are not “writing stories simply about emergencies.” Also, he added, there are four IT startups in Armenia with a combined valuation of \$18 billion.

“What Ken [Dilanian] was too kind to say was no one gives a sh!t about you [as an Armenian] because you’re not relevant so what you have to do is make yourself relevant,” he said. For example, one way to position the story is make it about the pivot of Armenia from Russia to the West. “You don’t try to counter their prejudices; you use them,” he advised.

Hacopian added, “And then, if we’re being really critical of ourselves, if you really look at it, the entire narrative telling the Armenian side for the past 108 years is a total failure. [Instead] once you get people to come over and understand the issues, we win them over. Not because we are geniuses but because we had the better end of the argument.”

As an example he cited a tourism poll, which noted that only 25 percent of people polled were willing to come to Armenia, but 99 percent — the highest number ever recorded — would happily come back after the initial visit.

He added that instead of talking about the Armenian Genocide, emphasis should be put on “how you came back from it. The children, grandchildren of genocide survivors are leading the world in IT and chip design,” he said.

The other ways Armenians introduce themselves to others is saying they are the first Christian nation — a mistake, Hacopian said.

“Most of the Western world is becoming more and more secular,” he said. “What you’re saying is I am not really modern.”

Instead, he said, everything should be “about making the country relevant.”

He advocated what he called DIEM, diplomacy, intelligence, economy and military. “Those are the things you have to focus on,” Hacopian said.

During the lengthy question and answer session, references were made to the use of K Street Washington lobbyists by Azerbaijani and Turkish governments against the Armenian and Artsakh narrative.

“For a small community we have some dynamic voices who do good work down there,” Mahtesian said. “Armenians have a real grassroots lobby and members of Congress listen to that.”

“When they get lots of call and they get questions, They understand those are real votes as opposed to AstroTurf politics created by K Street,” Mahtesian said.

Hacopian, in answer to another question, said Armenians should not get caught up in a “magical notion of unity” among its people. The diaspora, he said, is so disparate because it could be “a cab driver in Buenos Aires, RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan or Cher.”

For example, he added that 300 Jewish Americans shut down the US Congress by demonstrating against Israel’s actions against Palestinians.

Instead, he said, all Armenians should try to make sure that Armenian is “never isolated, poor or weak.” Anyone helping those goals is doing their job. “Let’s not have unreasonable standards that can never be met. You’re either doing the work toward those three things or you’re not,” he added.

Garapedian concurred, as he referred to Garo Paylan who is touring the US, saying “Our goal must be to support the territorial integrity of Armenia, the democracy of Armenia, even if we don’t like who is in power,” she said. Canceling out politicians, she quoted him, is “not a luxury we can afford.”

“Unity in the goal of maintaining Armenia,” is important now, she said.

“The youth of Armenia is our future and we support them,” Garapedian said.

## Reflecting Connecting Inspiring

# 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala a Smashing Success

GALA, from page 11

can tell you it is probably the only newspaper that I read.” He reminisced about coverage of the Sayat Nova Dance Company, in which he was a dancer some decades ago, in the paper, and later commented that the newspaper’s coverage in general allows for “a moment of Armenianness in an otherwise sea of ‘otherness’ (the Armenian word is *odar-ness*). That should cause us to feel a special bond, and that special bond is the beginning of our comeback.”

Afeyan turned his attention for much of his talk to current events, especially the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh.



Bryan Ardouny, left, with Nelson Stepanian

Like Ignatius, Afeyan expressed his concern for the fate of the illegally detained Artsakh leaders, as well as the displaced refugees.

About Ruben Vardanyan, his close friend and collaborator in Armenian affairs for several decades, he said: “The former Artsakh state minister Ruben was detained by force, in my view, for one simple reason — that he is the most renowned Armenian citizen on the planet. Just ask yourself who is more renowned than Ruben? Who has been on the BBC, who has been in the *Financial Times*, who has met with state leaders? ... It’s Ruben. They have basically seized the head representative of the Armenian



State Rep. David Muradian speaks with guest

national population, the citizenry, and they will do with him what they would rather do with all of us, which is the reason why we have to fight back, as though it were us.”

He declared that everyone was trying their best, including, he believed, the Armenian government, to handle this difficult situation carefully.

Afeyan spoke about internal Armenian divisions. He said he wanted to coin a new word, “*knnatadaran*,” for a court of mutual criticism that is always in session for Armenians, and instead suggested, “If Artsakh is sending us one message...it is that we have to unite...As a small global nation in a world increasingly hostile, or indifferent, to our existence, this is the only tool we have.”

He proffered a forward-thinking approach: “We have to start looking to the future. Armenians are very proud of our history...and our present is kind of troubling – troubled, you know. We have some things to be proud of and some things to be ashamed of, but our future is completely



Members of Zulal entertained the delighted attendees.

unwritten.” He urged Armenians to cultivate patience to listen and the faith that engaging in civil debate is worth the time, urging them to look for the good in one another.

He concluded, “So we can just choose our future to be our best moments. I really would invite us to think about this call to action of a shared future. How do we create this shared future, how do we create a vision for this future?” Quoting William Saroyan’s message in his 1935 story, “The Armenian and the Armenian,” Afeyan said he believed that the Armenians will once again come back even stronger despite current difficulties and build a more secure and prosperous future in Armenia.

### Artsakh Aid

Somewhere around the mid-point of the gala, Hajjar had addressed the guests about the tragic situation of the expelled Artsakh Armenians, including the victims of a terrible explosion at a Stepanakert fuel depot. She announced that the *Mirror-Spectator* partnered with the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) to raise funds for these victims and families in need as they now try to settle in Armenia, and asked for the support of the audience. TCA already has an established program with a representative in Armenia personally interviewing each and every aid recipient.

At the very end of the evening, Hajjar took the stage with the welcome news that the gala guests raised over \$24,000 for this purpose, and this number reached \$26,870 several days later. This is on top of nearly \$50,000 raised already by the Tekeyan Cultural Association. Those who still want to participate can go to <https://givebutter.com/AGuStb> or contact the *Mirror-Spectator* office.



From left, Anna and Kael Nahikian, with Anaide Nahikian and Emmanuel Tronc



Four priests offered prayers.

### A Word of Thanks

The *Mirror-Spectator* thanks all of its supporters for making it possible for the newspaper to continue to survive in a period of transition in the media. It only has organized such gala campaigns every five years, and this time all records were surpassed, with \$360,000 raised.

No words of praise are sufficient to describe the excellent and most efficient gala benefit committee chair ever — Nicole Babikian Hajjar. The inspired work of gala committee members Mary Jo Bazarian Murray, Margarit Belorian, Yelena Bisharian, Piruza Bogossian, Katrina Menzigian Glorikian, Carol Ishkanian, Rouzan Khachatourian Abrahamian, Anaide Nahikian and Ani Stepanian, with advisor Barbara Chrakian Tellalian, made the gala the full success that it was, together with the unstinting participation of Hasmik Saroyan, administrative assistant at the *Mirror-Spectator*.

The TCA Friends of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* gratefully acknowledges the support of Storica Wines, which provided wonderful Armenian wines for the evening. The beautiful photography was compliments of Candid Memories Studies, and the guitarist compliments of Stage Music Center. Michael Aram provided several award gifts. Business partners for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary events include Signature Printing, SarVia Group, and David A. Medzorian of Daval Video Productions.

# Arts & Culture

## Michael Barakiva

Writer, Director, Maker  
Of Feasts

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/NEW YORK — Director, writer, producer Michael Barakiva of Israeli-Armenian descent, was born in Haifa, Israel and grew up in the suburbs of New Jersey. He attended Vassar College, and Juilliard School as an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Directing. In 2014, he published his first young-adult novel, *One Man Guy*, and its stand-alone sequel, *Hold My Hand* (2019). Other writings include *The Nature of Things*, *Paradise Lost* and *Stringy Theory* (co-author). He served as the artistic director of the Hangar Theatre in Ithaca, NY from 2013-2020. Michael is the founding artistic director of the Upstart Creatures theatre company. As a stage director, Michael has worked all over the US and world staging classics and developing new work (“Moriarty,” “Into the Woods,” “Perfect Arrangement,” “Up,” “Chicago,” “In Every Generation,” “The Clean House,” “A Doll’s House Part 2,” “White People,” “Blithe Spirit,” “The Turn of the Screw,” “The Seagull,” “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,” “Stage Blood,” etc.).



Dear Michael, a couple of years ago I read your play, “The Nature of Things.” There are lots of interesting things - philosophical thoughts of the heroes, various relationships, but I could not imagine it on the stage. I understand your intention is not to write a historical play, yet the usage of historical terms and Latin phrases made me check them all the time. What the spectators will do?

I find that I love using lots of languages in the things that I write, probably because the house in which I grew up was full of many languages. My parents would switch back and forth between English and Hebrew all the time, and use French when they did not want the kids understand what they were saying (my sister would study French, in no small part, I am sure, to decode our parents). My mother spoke Armenian with her family, and there were always phrases from Arabic thrown in. My husband is also a polyglot: Spanish, English, French, Italian, Russian, and now Portuguese.

Which is all to say – I hope I have seen BARAKIVA, page 16



## Children’s Author Meghri Dervartanian to Present New Book

BELMONT, Mass. — Join Meghri Dervartanian on Friday, November 10, at 5 p.m. for an Armenian children’s book reading, to be held at 47 Lawndale St., Belmont. The evening will serve as a fundraiser for the Armenian Youth Federation’s new “Sponsor an Artsakh Student” initiative and will take place in her classroom. Dervartanian will debut her new book, titled *Վհուղը և իր Աւելը* (“Vhooghuh yev ir Avele, or the Witch and Her Broomstick”).

“It is more important than ever to preserve and promote our language and culture. Our language is a huge part of our Armenian identity, and we must find ways to keep it alive and pass it on to future generations,” Dervartanian said.

Parents or caregivers may stay with their children throughout the activity or drop them off. Light snacks and refreshments will be available for those who stay. There is a 15-person capacity, so respond to Dervartanian by email at [m.dervartanian@gmail.com](mailto:m.dervartanian@gmail.com). Donation is \$30 and includes a copy of the book.



Meghri Dervartanian



Meghri Dervartanian at NAASR

## ‘Dusty Girl’ Who Turns Tuff into Art

By Mihran Aroian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GYUMRI, Armenia — The people in Gyumri may not know her name, but they recognize Narine Poladian as the self-proclaimed dusty girl – the local artisan, covered in dust, who turns Armenian tuff stone into beautiful *khachkars* (stone crosses) and decorative art. Cross carvings, dating as far back as the fourth century, continue to be a vibrant and iconic part of Armenia’s cultural heritage, and intricate one-of-a-kind *khachkar* designs can be found in nearly every corner of Armenia. And as Armenia’s first female *khachkar* master, Narine takes them a step further.

From Beirut to the Birthright Armenia program, Narine began teaching architecture in 2018 at the Gyumri TUMO Center for Creative Technologies. She then began working for a Yerevan architectural studio when she met Hambik Hambardzumyan, a master stone cutter. She worked with him for the better part of a year, learning the craft of stone cutting and understanding the long history of *khachkars*.

What started as a hobby soon became an obsession as she took classes to learn about the original Armenian patterns that she now majestically brings forth from inside each stone. In 2019, she married her husband Kevork and moved to Gyumri, where she set up a workshop to continue exploring her love of carving.

Narine has since turned plenty of tuff into works of art. During the 2020 44-day war in Artsakh, for example, she made it her mission to preserve the intricate Artsakh *khachkar* patterns that Azeris were destroying so that a unique part of the Christian world’s earliest heritage would live on.

As a skilled stonecutter, Poladian has the ability to look at a fresh slab and sense what the stone should become. Whether she creates the symbol of infinity or a gathering of flowers, she adds her own unique artistic touch to each creation.

Recently, she has been commissioned to carve wedding stones, a relatively new tradition to commemorate the nuptials of young couples.

Each year Narine offers classes in Gyumri for adults, children, and travelers to learn the art of stone cutting at her studio. She recently held a masterclass in Romania where some 60 people learned the basic skills of this ancient art. She hopes to one day bring her masterclasses to the Boston area, where her sister lives.

Narine is in the midst of planning an ambitious project to create a *khachkar* that 1,000 people will have a hand in carving. When guests visit her workshop, she will have them work on a small area of the *khachkar* that will one day be a reminder of how Armenians from around the world came together to create art.

To learn more about Narine Poladian, Gyumri’s dusty girl, follow her Instagram at [narinepoladian](https://www.instagram.com/narinepoladian) or contact her via email at [narine.bolachian@gmail.com](mailto:narine.bolachian@gmail.com).



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

#### THE ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK PROGRAMS

**NOVEMBER 12** — Sunday at 2pm **GIVING THANKS! TOGETHER IN CELEBRATION** Meet & Greet. Walk the Labyrinth. Tie a Ribbon on the Wishing Tree. Share the Warmth: ABCD Winter Drive Sunday, December 10 at 4:30pm

**DECEMBER 10** — **CANDLELIT LABYRINTH WALK: IN PEACE & HARMONY** "Boston's Newest Holiday TradiWon" Walk the Candlelit Labyrinth. Meet & Greet. Hot Chocolate & Luscious Cookies. Share the Warmth: ABCD Winter Drive .

**NOVEMBER 11** — Annual Church Bazaar of Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, Saturday, 12 to 5 p.m. Delicious Armenian Food, Lamb, Chicken, Shish, and Losh kebab, Dinners, Kheyma, and Vegetarian Plates. Armenian Cuisine and Pastries. Booths and Table with Products from Armenia. Gift Baskets and Cash Raffles. Armenian Cookbooks for Sale. Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, 1280 Boston Road (Rte 125), Haverhill (Exit 106 off Rte 125). For more information visit <http://www.hyepointearmenianchurch.org> or call (978) 372-9227.

**NOVEMBER 12** — reArmenia has Arrived in the USA! Please join Gevorg Poghosyan, reArmenia Chief Executive Officer, at 1pm, First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont. Topic is "Mobilization of Diaspora Knowledge and Expertise." reArmenia is a collaboration platform for Armenians all over the world, where projects solving different problems are presented to receive needed resources: knowledge, experience, network and funds. You may also attend the church service starting at 10:30 am and the Fellowship Coffee hour at 12:00 pm. Interactive program to be hosted by Berge Ayvazian, Co-Moderator.

**NOVEMBER 18** — The Armenian Catholic Youth Group of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church invites members of all the community to A Thanksgiving Dinner, Featuring Famous Stand-up Comedian, Pierre Chammassian, on Saturday, November 18, 2023, Dinner starts at 7 PM, at Nishan and Margrit Atinikian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont, MA 02478, Ticket: \$75, For Reservations Please Contact: Harout 617-461-7411, Arpy 617-240-4438. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the displaced residents of Artsakh.

**NOVEMBER 18** – Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church Food Festival. 11 a.m. – 7 p.m., 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Eat-in or Take-out. The Food Festival menu includes lamb, chicken, and losh kebab dinners, and a vegetarian

platter; a country store with a variety of Armenian specialties and deserts. The festival also features a jewelry table, an antique treasures boutique, gift items from Armenia as well as tours of the church s sanctuary. For further information, call the church office at 978-256-7234.

**NOVEMBER 21** — Saturday from Noon to 7 pm, First Armenian Church FAC FallFest 2023. 380 Concord Avenue, Belmont. Delicious Kebab Dinners: Lamb, Beef, Chicken and Losh. Combo Platters and Vegetarian Dinners Available. All dinners served with Salad, Pilaf and Pita Bread. Armenian Desserts, Cookies and Choreg. Pre-order and Take-out on-line at <https://www.facbelmont.org/fallfest2021> For more information contact (617) 484-4779 or [office@facbelmont.org](mailto:office@facbelmont.org)

**NOVEMBER 21** — **SAVE THE DATE.** Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Symphony Hall, Boston, 8:00 PM. Details to follow

**NOVEMBER 22** — Wednesday at 8 pm, "The Mountains Remember: Benefit Concert for Artsakh Refugees" Featuring: John Baboian (jazz guitar), Raffi Semerdjian (folk art guitar), Yalla Hilda (guitar- Laura Zarougian, drums - Michael Alan Hams), Armadi Tsayn Duo (oud - Samuel Sjostedt, upright bass - Filippo Goller), and The Tony Donatalle Jazz Quartet (details TBD). The Square Root, 2 Corinth St., Roslindale. Admission: \$20 at the door, \$10 students. Co-sponsored by Zoravik Activist Collective. Join Armenian American musicians for a night in support of Artsakh refugees. Weaving a thread between traditional folk songs, electric jazz, twangy songwriting and loop pedals, these artists gather inspiration from their ancestral homeland while exploring new, universal sounds. The evening will showcase five artists who are broadening our definition of what it means to make Armenian music.

### RHODE ISLAND

**NOVEMBER 17** — Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church's Cultural Committee Proudly presents its Armenian Spiritual and Classical Music Concert titled "Sird Im Sasani (My Heart Quivers)" dedicated to the loving memory of the Rev. Archpriest Nersess Jebejian. Featuring Asatur Baljyan, Opera singer, laureate of many Internationals competitions, Armen Ghazaryan, Violin, Levon Hovsepian, Organ, Piano, Mari Megrđichian, Soprano. Friday, 7 p.m., in the church sanctuary. 70 Jefferson St., Providence. Refreshments following concert. Donations greatly appreciated.

Send Calendar Items to the Mirror-Spectator: To send calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator, email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://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.

## Michael Barakiva: Writer, Director, Maker of Feasts

BARAKIVA, from page 15

written that play in a way that you do not need to understand the Latin to enjoy it in the play.

**Your biography says that your established non-profit theatre company, The Upstart Creatures, presents (meta) physical feasts, feeding bodies and souls. Could you please explain it a bit? I understand theatre nourishing souls, but also bodies?**

I would be delighted to! The Upstarts presents readings of texts from historically excluded artists, and we make multi-course, gourmet meals inspired by the material. Then we serve it all for free in the Metro Baptist Church off of Times Square. They are wonderfully, loving, community-building events.

**In literature and theatre, you inspired from old Greek myths ("Stringy Theory"), ancient Roman poetry ("The Nature of Things" according to Lucretius), medieval English literature ("Paradise Lost"). Might it happen one day you will be inspired by Armenian myths and literature?**

I very much hope so! A re-telling of how Armenia was the first nation to convert to Christianity is a key passage in my second book, "Hold My Hand." What books about Armenian mythology would you recommend I read?

**I will recommend some of course. Michael, your novels are the first young adult novels featuring an Armenian protagonist and a queer Armenian protagonist. It is interesting what was the reaction of the Armenian audience sensitive for queer matters?**

The reaction, as I'm sure you can imagine, ran the gamut. J. P. Der Boghossian, who runs the Queer Armenian Library reached out to me early on and was invaluable in connecting me to other writers who are both Armenian and queer. Arno Yeretzian runs Abril Bookstore in Los Angeles, and he's been kind enough to host readings of both my books there. It's been amazing to be connected to the queer Armenian community, and find organizations like GALA.

I've also been deeply moved by how people from other Christian denominations and other faiths altogether have reached out to me to share their own stories of reconciling their queerness with their religion. *Hold My Hand* has a substantial plotline in which Alek, the queer Armenian protagonist, goes through this journey.

**For many people of Jewish-Armenian extraction, unfortunately, the Shoah and the genocide are the crucial components of their identity. Is it true also for you?**

I think it is, but I do not necessarily find it unfortunate. It is a lot to carry around, for sure, but I think it also gives me a keener sense of social justice, greater empathy, and the ability

to be an ally for other groups. I also think it is important to find the joy in the identities that transcend the trauma — like food!

**Your mother's last name is Boghossian. What is her family history? Do you intend to write it one day?**

My mother's family fled Turkey during the genocides, when my grandmother was just a baby, and ended up in Palestine. (Nana's (granny's) family, Yalenezian, was from Adana (southern Turkey). Dede's (grandy's) was from Kayseri in Central Anatolia. I would very much like to write that history one day, but even more, hope that my mother will write it.

**Are you in touch with Armenians and have you ever been in Armenia?**

I have never been to Armenia, but very much want to go. As does my husband! He's traveled most of the world, and I would say that his desire to go will probably be the thing that inspires me and my family to finally make the trip.

**You call yourself an avid food-lover and maker. Do you have any preferred Armenian and Jewish foods?**

As anyone who read my first book *One Man Guy* will tell you, stuffed grapevine leaves are my favorite of the traditional Armenian dishes. My mother makes *bureks* from scratch — the spinach and cheese ones I can eat all day long. It is hard for me to keep baklava (with pistachios, of course) in

the house because the temptation to eat it is so great. And I was just talking yesterday about how much I want to perfect my *lahmajoun*.

Being from Israel and spending my adult life in New York City, also gives me a love for the Ashkenazi Jewish culinary tradition: brisket, latkes, lox, kugel.

**It is said you routinely cooked dinner for 100+. How so?**

Through the Upstart Creatures events!

**At the end I would like to know what you consider in your person typical Jewish and typical Armenian?**

It is so hard for me to separate these. For most of us, I think, the household we grow up in is the norm, and it is not until decades later that you try to sort out how your childhood was different than other people's. The Armenian side of my family are the aesthetes. The Jewish side of my family is where I can my work ethic. Together, they have produced me and my unlikely life: as a writer, a stage director, and a maker of feasts. I could not imagine it any other way, nor would I have it any other way!

**Thank you for your answers, Michael! I hope we will meet in Yerevan in near future!**

What fun to have this interview! I am sending you all my love and hope that the current horrible situation in Armenia corrects itself very soon.



## COMMENTARY

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# US Media Coverage of The Armenian Exodus From Nagorno-Karabakh

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On September 19, Azerbaijan launched its gruesome attack against the civil population of Artsakh following a nine-month total blockade, committing atrocities resulting in the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population. This was covered in the US media. Below we have singled out what kind of issues were discussed and the manner in which they were presented.

## 'Separatists' instead of 'Armenians or Karabakh Armenians'

The first and foremost problem that one can encounter when reading several articles in such American media outlets as the Associated Press, *Wall Street Journal*, Fox News and NPR covering the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict is the use of the term "separatists" instead of "the local Armenian population" or "NK Armenians," and "separatist government" instead of "the unrecognized NK government." The shift in the discourse can indicate two things: either some circles in the United States are trying to delegitimize the Armenian entity that existed in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh or that Azerbaijan is paying huge sums of money to do that job.

## US Assistance to Armenia and the Visit of Samantha Power

The American media portrayed the US official response to the situation in Artsakh. The response came in two directions: one in the form of financial assistance provided to Armenia, specifically the \$11.5 million in humanitarian aid announced by the Biden administration, and the second was in the form of a statement calling for respect of the "sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and democracy" of Armenia. That statement was made by Samantha Power, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) during her visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan days after thousands of Armenians were forcibly displaced from NK. Power's visit and the announcement of US assistance to Armenia was covered in a number of US media outlets.

## Deteriorating Relations between Armenia and Russia

Another key point that received wide coverage in the US media was the deterioration of relations between Armenia and Russia, and the issue of Russian peacekeepers.

First, US media highlighted that the Armenian government accused the Russian peacekeepers of failing to protect the Armenian

population, which also led to mass protests in Armenia, including the one outside of the Russian Embassy in Yerevan.

However, it was also stressed that the tension between the two countries emerged way before the exodus of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. Among the reasons, two were particularly emphasized: joint military exercises with the US and ratification of the Rome Statute. Another reason highlighted by the US media is the sending by Armenia of humanitarian aid to Ukraine and the visit of the Armenian prime minister's wife to Ukraine. CNN even cited the Armenian prime minister stating, "We are not Russia's ally in the war with Ukraine."

Last but not least is an analysis referring to Russia's actions. The *New York Times* concludes that Russia acted within its own interests: it tilted away from Armenia towards Azerbaijan, which is "much richer and militarily stronger than Armenia." and "offers a bigger market for Russian goods, particularly weapons, and sits astride roads and railway lines vital for Russia's trade with Iran and Turkey."

Thus, the US media coverage of Armenian-Russian relations widely emphasized the tensions and problems developing between the two countries, putting specific emphasis on issues related to or of concern to the West.

## Prime Minister Pashinyan's Western Orientation

As already mentioned, the relationship between Armenia and Russia was highlighted in a number of US newspapers including the Western orientation of Pashinyan. Some news outlets such as *Newsweek* went so far as to state that the dissolution of NK is a "win for Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan" in realpolitik terms, as it was a "political burden and a barrier to regional peace and integration." According to the same controversial article, "Peace will also allow Yerevan to cooperate with Azerbaijan and Turkey, which could accomplish Pashinyan's goal to reorient Armenia to the west."

Other articles highlighted the fact that Pashinyan and his government were critical of Moscow and its peacekeepers and that mutual accusations were made. Pashinyan is represented as someone "who has sought to strengthen ties with the US and the EU" while he is viewed "with suspicion" by Russia's president who abhors so-called "color revolutions." Also, Pashinyan's comments, including criticism of Russia, the lack of the need for continuing the Russian military base in Armenia and the need to diversify Armenia's relationships, are often cited in the US media.

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

# On the Self-Organization of the Armenian Diaspora

By Hagop Avedikian

The defeat of the 44-day war, the capture of important positions and territories from the border zones of Armenia proper, and especially most recently the abandonment of Artsakh and the exodus of its population, naturally cast the people living in our homeland into a severe depression. This is so especially since the coming days do not promise anything hopeful. On the contrary, new military and political threats endanger the regions of Syunik, Tavush and Ararat, with threatening Turkish-Azerbaijani demands for roads, corridors and enclaves, against which Armenia remains completely alone, in part a result of the successive mistakes of the authorities.

In a spiritual and intellectual sense, the situation is the same in the more or less organized communities of the diaspora. There is however the difference that if the depression, in its turn, causes a wave of rebellion and protest in domestic Armenian civil and national circles, in the diaspora it becomes a cause of alienation, indifference and apathy, which is more destructive from the point of view of the future of the diasporan Armenians.

I have friends in different diasporan communities who have been very closely following all the details of life in their homeland for decades, but now, of their own free will, they refuse to be interested in life and new events in "Hayastan." The previous subjects of interest inviting curiosity do not exist, because there are no prior proud accomplishments. How can we not remember the poet and intellectual Vahan Tekeyan's words again and again about our need for pride "like air, water, bread"? Without that pride, without giving meaning and reason to patriotic feelings, how can we keep the assimilated diaspora Armenians, especially the diaspora Armenian youth, united, and attached to their national roots? How can we otherwise keep the youth united around Armenian national structures: the Church, the school, charitable, educational and social organizations, and political parties? This is important especially since beyond those structures lies the abyss of assimilation, into which hundreds of thousands have long since fallen and continue to fall.

"Why should I stay Armenian," asks the young diasporan Ar-

menian, "when it is easier and more beneficial not to stay Armenian. There can be no national preservation without a struggle, without a goal and without a target. This is all the more important now since there are no stimulating impulses from the Armenian state nor from Armenian organizations, including first of all, from political parties.

At one time, during the first period of independence, diasporan Armenian organizations, the political parties in particular, demanded to be allowed to create representative bodies in Armenia. After the adoption of the relevant laws, this demand became meaningless, and the political parties began to directly participate in the domestic political life of Armenia, being included in the legislative, executive and other state structures, and often directed their party members and followers abroad to come to Yerevan. There was work, plans, a victorious struggle, the reconstruction of Artsakh, and the prospect of the development of the motherland. Now, what can those national organizations recommend from Yerevan, with their existence no longer even noticeable, at least in the case of two of them? They, the latter ones, have actually stopped having a point of view and are waiting for the blissful day when they will again sit near the prime minister's chair, take photos and, considering that they had fulfilled the supreme duty of their charter, go home with a satisfied heart to do nothing again.

Meanwhile, there *is* work to do — terribly difficult work. The diaspora should develop its own agenda issues and commit to their implementation. It is necessary, without waiting for any guidance from the state, to tackle pan-Armenian issues, including the return of the Artsakh Armenians to their homes and the protection of Armenia from future Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression, and help the homeland with the means it has in the international arena, without waiting for the government's encouragement or persuasion.

The diaspora really needs to reorganize and gather its forces now, as a century ago, when the first and second congresses of Western Armenians were convened in Yerevan in the fateful years of 1917 and 1919, as well as in New York after World War II, in 1946.

see DIASPORA, page 20

# Positive Neutrality:

## Between the Russian Bear and the American Eagle



By Philippe Raffi Kalfayan  
Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

International news attests to the blatant injustices and the end of an international legal order built in the aftermath of the disasters and atrocities of World

War II. Major powers, such as the United States, Russia and China, through their postures and actions, have slowly but surely neutralized the principles of international law by not respecting them. Among the small but powerful states, Israel is the best example of a country that has considered itself above international law since its occupation of the Palestinian territories: The UN system has adopted more than hundred resolutions condemning Israel since 1947; they have never been implemented. The most recent calls for an immediate ceasefire in present hostilities.

“There can be no double standards when we speak about human rights. The rights of one group of people are not higher than that of the other,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk. He added: “The rules apply equally to everyone.” The decline of respect for human rights and the principles of international law is not recent but the crisis has reached a new peak through the forced, massive displacements of the populations of Karabakh (Artsakh) and Gaza.

It is appropriate to analyze the perspective of the strategic challenges posed to Armenia and the Armenian nation in the light of the current events, geopolitical changes and democratic declines worldwide. This article sets out the reasons why Armenia should adopt a diplomatic strategy of positive neutrality with its various international partners, and what the immediate legal and political challenges are that it faces.

### A Disaster Predicted in Karabakh

In an article written at the end of January 2022 (“Autodétermination du Haut-Karabakh: un pronostic engagé ou réservé?” in *Haut-Karabakh, le Livre Noir*, [Eds. Eric Dénécé, Tigrane Yégavian], Centre Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement (2022)), I concluded that the only realistic solution for Artsakh “could draw inspiration from the experience of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Since Russia already is the de facto administrator of security and police in the disputed territories, it would be appropriate for a mandate to be given to Russia by the UN Security Council. This solution would have the advantage of easing immediate tensions, giving adequate time for discussions on the future status, allowing a controlled return of displaced Armenian and Azerbaijani families to their homes, and observing in time the behavior of the communities towards each other. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic should take advantage of this respite to demonstrate its capacity for self-government. Azerbaijan should use this time to end its policy of institutional hatred and racial discrimination. This transitional stage would be long but inevitable to reestablish trust between the two populations.”

It was specified that the implementation of such a solution depended on three factors: the consent of all stakeholders, the resolution of governance problems in Armenia and the evolution of the regional geopolitical situation.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine and the new proxy war between the Western bloc (United States, Canada, Europe) and the Eastern bloc (Russia, China, Iran) precipitated the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The region was emptied of its Armenian population in record time, without resistance.

The abandonment of Karabakh was a scenario written and planned since the Prague agreements. Russia, the United States, France and Turkey pressured Armenia to abandon Artsakh. In this context, it is regrettable that September 19 cost new human lives. It is likely that the Turkish President himself informed Nikol Pashinyan of this attack during their telephone conversation on September 11. Is there any *quid pro quo* for the concessions made by Armenia? We don't know yet.

Looking for culprits and past and present responsibility is not a priority although the time will come for that. The diaspora also has its own responsibility in this collective failure and there is much to say about that. No consideration has been given to the objective problems of constitutional order, democratic governance and respect for the rule of law in Armenia. There are political prisoners and

other human rights issues, the judiciary independence is not guaranteed (World Bank report “Supporting Judicial Reforms in Armenia: A Forward Look” [2023]), and the legislative and executive powers are controlled by a single political party, while the dangers of a lack of national concord and of a global pan-Armenian strategy in a threatening external environment were anticipated.

The ceasefire agreement of November 10, 2020, had territorial and sovereignty consequences beyond the cessation of hostilities. It should have been discussed in Parliament — the only constitutional body empowered to ratify international agreements. Violations of constitutional law have also occurred in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh): President Samvel Shahramanyan dissolved the self-proclaimed republic without referring it to its parliament or to the people. Whatever the circumstances and external pressure may have been, the decree he issued is unconstitutional and has no legal value.

### Is Armenia's Security Guaranteed?

The authentically Armenian territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was sacrificed by Armenia for hypothetical guarantees of its own national security and territorial integrity. At the same time, the leaders of the Republic of Artsakh did not undertake serious steps on the diplomatic front and demonstrated their inability to establish themselves as a politically autonomous entity. For example, a three-stage plan presented in early April 2023 to Artsakh authorities suggested organizing the signing of a petition by the people of Artsakh calling directly for the UN Security Council to decide on protection measures. This plan was not considered at all.

The radical change in the situation on the ground (i.e., there are no more Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh) makes the implementation of this plan more challenging, but it remains legally valid. Its first step is no longer the prevention of ethnic cleansing but the return of Nagorno-Karabakh's displaced Armenian population, under international protection. Their right of return is absolute. All legal and diplomatic efforts should focus on this goal. The priority must be the adoption of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council establishing the right of return of the Armenian populations of Artsakh to their native territory under the provisional administration and protection of the United Nations, as well as the release of all prisoners of war detained illegally in Azerbaijan. These priorities must be at the top of claims in the negotiation rounds to come between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But is Armenia in a position to bear that legitimate claim?

The psychological balance of power between the negotiators has been unequal since the military defeat in November 2020. It is even more so today. The establishment of a government of national unity is vital because the coming set of events is even more critical for the future of the Armenian nation. There is now talk of a possible attack on either the sovereignty of Armenia or on its territorial integrity.

Currently, the construction of roads and other communication links is underway in Syunik. The issue is who will retain control of the territory and oversee the security of these axes of communication. Azerbaijan makes no secret of its territorial ambitions over Armenia, while Iran defends Armenia's territorial integrity, and Russia, scalded by the harsh criticism of the Armenian Prime Minister and his close lieutenants, could do without Armenia. If a rapprochement of Armenia with the West at the expense of Russia were to be confirmed, it would take place under the control of Turkey, hence weakening Russia's influence in the region.

### International Context and Weakening of Russia

Russia is entangled in the Ukrainian conflict. Its actions in Artsakh were meant to appease Turkish and Azerbaijani appetites in the South Caucasus so as not to open a second front, just as the Stalinist power had pursued the same policy a hundred years ago by transferring Armenian Karabakh to the Azerbaijan SSR to appease inter-ethnic conflicts.

If the Karabakh Armenians do not return home, the loss of territory will be fatal not only for the Armenians but also for Russia: Azerbaijan would have the legitimate right to request the withdrawal of Russian troops maintaining the ceasefire. In the long term, Turkey's neo-imperial ambitions in the Caucasus and Central Asia, which are loud and clear, will seal Russia's fate in these regions: Turkey's defense budget is growing sharply (+150% in 2024) just

as the widespread rearmament in all NATO countries are warning signs of increased tensions.

The United States, France and the European Union have promised security and protection to Armenia. Without an army on the ground, these promises have no value. For the time being, the Western aid concerns democracy and rule of law, which is of little help.

The Armenian Prime Minister maintains his agenda for signing a peace agreement with Azerbaijan by the end of 2023. He hoped to obtain a first commitment from Azerbaijan during the European summit in Granada on October 5. President Aliyev, having obtained the evacuation of the Armenians from Artsakh, is no longer rushing to sign the peace treaty: he did not even go to Grenada. It is now in his interest to raise the stakes.

Azerbaijan and Turkey will bide their time and prefer to achieve an alternative commercial route which passes along the border on the Iran side. This creates additional pressure on Armenia to concede passage through its territory, the so-called “Zangezur corridor.” The principle of a regional integration plan (3+3 format, Armenia/Georgia/Azerbaijan + Turkey/Russia/Iran) seems to satisfy all the protagonists except Georgia.

### Will Armenia be sacrificed too?

If the West and Turkey aim for a common objective — eliminating Russia from the South Caucasus — they have different positions in relation to the territorial integrity of Armenia. France is unclear about its objectives, even as it champions Armenia. It is not the same for the United States, whose policy in the region, just as in the Middle East, is dictated by Israel (anyone who wants to understand what is happening in the region must read or reread the best-seller by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt: *The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy*). The US Department of State has reaffirmed its strong support for Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity but at the same time, its closest ally, Israel, leads the regional strategy.

Israel's next target is Iran. This fact has just been confirmed by Netanyahu and high-ranking military officials but also by the American administration. The Israeli media machine aims to convince the world that Iran is the real architect of the Hamas attack (a claim that is not confirmed by the Pentagon nor Secretary of State Blinken). In 2002, it was the neo-conservatives (Wolfowitz, Feith, Perle, Adelman, Woolsey, Libby, Bolton, Wurmser and Abrams) who convinced George W. Bush that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (which was notoriously false) to justify the military invasion. The pro-Israeli lobbies have all discreetly but effectively supported this version in Washington DC.

The strategy to destabilize Iran rests on Azerbaijan. The latter has a double interest: to circulate freely in the south of Armenia and to reunite the Azeri peoples of Nakhichevan and North-West Iran with Azerbaijan. The interest for Israel is also twofold: Isolating Iran by cutting its geographical link with Armenia and agitating the Azeri population of Iran with the aim of disintegrating Iran and neutralizing its regional influence (Syria, Lebanon, Gaza).

As part of its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, Israel has been complicit in the criminal enterprise of ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Karabakh, not only by supplying high-precision weapons for the last three years but also by advising its proven method: establishment of checkpoints, siege strategy, forced expulsion, arrest of leaders and the forced colonization of newly conquered territories to create a fait accompli on the ground, which would hinder the return of the displaced.

The anti-Russian discourse in certain Armenian circles is not foreign to the cooperation established with neoconservative groups (John Bolton et al.), the American Enterprise Institute and Christian Zionists. These groups pursue objectives contrary to the security and sovereignty of Armenia as explained.

Others in Armenia and in the diaspora have bought into the vision of the West as a savior angel that would come to protect Armenia in the event of a Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression. The same miscalculation prevailed at different periods of Armenian recent history (End of 19th century until the genocide, Post genocide protection in Ottoman Empire until withdrawal of allied countries in 1922). Were this option to exist, the reaction time of Western powers would be operationally too late, given the smallness of the Armenian territory and the existence of two fronts.

The West will not engage militarily. It doesn't have the will nor the capacity. It should be remembered that Cyprus has been occupied by Turkey since 1974, and that Crimea, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria have come under Russian control over the last 15 years. The fate of other Ukrainian regions is still uncertain.

France has decided to initiate military cooperation through supplying defensive weapons and training military personnel. These means will not be operational for a

*continued on next page*

## My Turn



by Harut Sassounian

## FBI Investigates Links Between NYC Mayor's Campaign and Turkey

Mayor of New York City Eric Adams seems to have a special affinity for Azerbaijan and Turkey. We will soon find out if that special relationship has overstepped the bounds of legality.

A year ago, I wrote an article about Mayor Adams who notoriously had declared: "After I retire from government, I'm going to live in Baku."

The New York Daily News published an article in 2021 under the title: "NYC mayoral candidate Eric Adams accepted foreign travel to countries with a history of corruption." The article disclosed that "Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams has accepted thousands of dollars in travel and other perks from China, Turkey and Azerbaijan, three countries with a well-documented history of suppressing their citizens."

Adams recently acknowledged that he had traveled to Turkey eight times. In August 2023, he boasted during a Turkish flag-raising ceremony in Manhattan that there were probably no other mayors in New York City history who had visited Turkey as frequently as he has. In August 2015, the Turkish government paid thousands of dollars for then-Brooklyn Borough president Adams to visit Turkey for six days where he signed a sister city agreement with Istanbul's Uskudar district. The Turkish consulate paid up to \$4,999 for his airfare, hotel stay and ground transportation, according to Adams' disclosure with the city's Conflicts of Interest Board (COIB). The New York Daily News reported that in 2016, "Azerbaijan's tourism ministry paid up to \$4,999 for Adams to visit its capital Baku for four days, according to the borough president's COIB disclosure." Adams has held fundraising events for his campaign in the Azeri and Turkish restaurants Baku Palace and Ali Baba in New York City. On Sept. 19, 2023, Mayor Adams attended an event hosted by President Erdogan's wife Emine at the Turkish House in New York City.

Last Thursday, 10 FBI agents raided the home of the Mayor's chief fundraiser, Brianna Suggs, to investigate "whether Mayor Eric Adams's 2021 election campaign conspired with the Turkish government to receive illegal foreign donations, according to a search warrant obtained by the New York Times." The 2025 reelection campaign of Adams paid Suggs' company nearly \$100,000 for fund-raising and campaign consulting services.

"Investigators sought to learn more about the potential involvement of a

Brooklyn construction company with ties to Turkey, as well as a small university in Washington, D.C., that also has ties to the country and to Mr. Adams," the NYT reported. "According to the search warrant, investigators were also focused on whether the mayor's campaign kicked back benefits to the [KSK] construction company's officials and employees, and to Turkish officials." The City news website reported that 84 donors, most of them employees of KSK Construction Group, whose founders are from Turkey, had contributed over \$69,000 to the Mayor's campaign. However, "multiple people listed in Adams 2021 campaign donation records as KSK employees either said they did not donate to Eric Adams or refused to state whether they had ever donated," The City reported.

During last Thursday's raid, the FBI searched for records of travel to Turkey and documents linking the government of that country and its intermediaries to the Adams campaign, seizing three iPhones, two computers and various files from Suggs' home. Investigators also sought documents regarding Bay Atlantic University, a Turkish-owned university in Washington, D.C. that opened in 2014. In 2015, Adams "visited one of the school's sister universities in Istanbul, where he was given various certificates and was told that a scholarship would be created in his name," according to the NYT.

Last Thursday, the New York City Mayor, who had traveled to Washington, D.C. for meetings with Senior White House, Members of Congress and other mayors, abruptly cancelled his meetings and returned back to New York City the same day as the FBI raid.

The NYT reported: "The [search] warrant suggested that some of the foreign campaign contributions were made as part of a straw donor scheme, where donations are made in the names of people who did not actually give money. Investigators sought evidence to support potential charges that included the theft of federal funds and conspiracy to steal federal funds, wire fraud and wire fraud conspiracy, as well as campaign contributions by foreign nationals and conspiracy to make such contributions."

In July, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg indicted seven individuals who fundraised for the Mayor's 2021 campaign on multiple counts, including conspiracy and bribe-taking and conspiracy to funnel illegal donations, according to the NYT.

The FBI investigation has not targeted Adams personally. He said that he "had no clear knowledge, direct or indirect, of any improper fundraising activity—and certainly not of any foreign money."

But if it is proven that he had conspired with the Turkish government to receive illegal campaign funds, the Mayor may have to retire in Baku or Istanbul much earlier than he expected.

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certain time, the time necessary for an army to assimilate a new military doctrine, integrate new weapons into its defense system and train its personnel. Azerbaijan continues to purchase numerous weapons and has much more at its disposal.

### Balancing of Relations between West and Russia

Bitterness reigns in all political circles in Armenia and in the diaspora over the fact that Russia has failed in its role as protector of the Armenians. This fact is indisputable but it is appropriate to recall several other facts that mitigate and nuance this assessment.

First, it is too easy to say that Russia has abandoned Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia has never recognized the Republic of Artsakh statehood since 1991 and it did not resist its reintegration into Azerbaijan.

Second, the mandates of peacekeeping or interposition forces rarely include the use of military force against warring parties. The most tragic example of that was the failure of United Nations forces to prevent the genocide of the Bosnians of Srebrenica by Serbian paramilitary groups.

Third, Armenia cannot take the risk of completely divorcing itself from Russia in a period of such acute regional and international turbulence. More than half of the country's economy depends on Russia (banking system and exports), while even more importantly, energy supplies are 100 percent under Russia's control. The nuclear power plant and mining operations are also under Russian control. Its borders are still guarded by Russia and long-term military cooperation agreements were signed in 2010 and 2013.

Separating completely from Russia today means handing over the keys of Armenia to Turkey. A Russian presence allows the deadlines to be pushed back, giving Armenia time to strengthen itself militarily and develop a new foreign policy.

Fourth, one needs to be more measured about what will ultimately emerge from the current international crises. The effects of the moral failure of the West (United States and Europeans) must not be neglected. They are less credible due to their proper violation of the values they impose to others. The destruction of international public order and the challenge to Western hegemony mainly the American one by the rest of the world, are also key factors.

### West Losing Moral Legitimacy

Is Russia less respectable than the United States? It is in terms of democracy and rule of law. It is not in terms of vi-

olations of international law? The war between Russia and Ukraine appears to be a balanced war compared to Israel's completely asymmetrical war and disproportionate military response in Gaza. Hamas has committed indiscriminate terrorist acts, which constitutes a fundamental error and a reprehensible act that deserved a targeted reaction. However, the trapped civilian population is the main victim of the internationally wrongful collective punishment by Israel. One must understand that the Palestinian youth are desperate because they have always lived in conditions of siege, humiliation, bombing, and are offered no political perspective. They prefer to die resisting. Hamas' influence grew out of Israel's intentional policy of rejecting any diplomatic solution based on the two-State principle on the basis of pre-1967 borders. Israel has systematically sabotaged all efforts in this direction, weakened or eliminated those who could have negotiated a peace plan. The sixteen-year siege of Gaza (this territory was already an open-air prison because the border with Egypt is under Israeli control) has strengthened Hamas.

Religion has nothing to do with the roots of the conflict. The designs are above all nationalist and the ambitions are territorial: the ongoing destruction of Gaza has two objectives: the first one is to destroy the visible and underground infrastructures of Hamas and the combatants; by doing so, the territory becomes uninhabitable and this forces its Palestinian population to leave it: a second "Nakba" is underway. The annexation of the territory may well be Israel's second objective.

The parallel between the processes of forced displacement of the native populations of Artsakh and Gaza is striking. But in their implementation, that of Presidents Erdogan and Aliyev could almost earn them the qualification of humanists.

France, Europe and foremost the United States bear heavy political, moral and legal responsibility in the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Gaza. They are complicit in the crimes committed: ethnic cleansing and violation of international humanitarian law. These are serious and blatant violations of peremptory norms of international law.

We are also witnessing an unprecedented repression of civil and political rights and freedoms at the domestic level: banning of gatherings in support of the Palestinian population and arrests of demonstrators. The assimilation of criticism of the State of Israel to anti-Semitism has reached a new level. Students and professors are threatened with

sanctions from their universities, due to pressure from donors.

The restructuring of the international order will take place and it is not certain that the United States and the Europeans will emerge victorious because their moral legitimacy is collapsing and resentment against them is increasing; their abysmal public debt will force them to stop financing the wars waged by their permanent or circumstantial allies; their disastrous policies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East trigger crises and increase the flow of migrants towards Europe, a process that will increase political and social tensions within European states and encourage a political refocusing towards nationalist and xenophobic parties.

Hence pro-American statements in Armenia deserve to be more nuanced and the Executive's political decisions must be temporized. The Prime Minister, usually provocative, looks wiser. He has been criticizing Russia but in an objective and measured manner because he does not close the door to constructive dialogue. Could the silence of the opposition in recent months and their resignation as to the forced evacuation of Karabakh be a sign of a national political consensus?

In the current state of the regional and international crises, and in consideration of West's moral bankruptcy and weakening, Armenia should keep a balanced policy in its relations with the Eastern bloc (Russia, Iran, India, China) and Western powers (Europe, France, Canada, United States). It should also establish a government of national unity and develop a strategy of positive neutrality if it wishes to protect its territorial integrity and preserve the chances of Armenians returning to Artsakh under negotiated guarantees. The loss of Southern Armenia would be the end of Armenia, because the Armenian population, already prey to strong emigration would otherwise no longer see a viable future. The numbers suggest a dangerous trend: an expert report on demographic issues, presented at the Future Armenian Convention in March 2023 in Yerevan, indicates that at the current pace of depopulation, the Armenian population would reach 1.9 million in 2050 and 1 million in 2100.

(Philippe Raffi Kalfayan based in Paris, is a lawyer, lecturer in international law and a former secretary general of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), who has earned a Ph.D. in international law. He is a regular columnist for the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.)



## Charging Ruben Vardanyan Puts Psychological Pressure on Armenians

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To Amanpour's question as to how it happens that events take place in Nagorno-Karabakh in 24 hours that remain unnoticed and Nagorno-Karabakh is destroyed unnoticed, Afeyan responded that after 26 years of relative peace and negotiations, it was not possible to achieve lasting peace. He said that two years after the 2020 war, Azerbaijan blockaded the remaining territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, and in September of this year, Azerbaijan carried out a military offensive which led to the expulsion of the local indigenous Armenian people.

When asked about his personal motives for raising the alarm, Afeyan noted that he is an Armenian whose family was forced to be displaced for generations, and spoke about the Armenian Genocide and its consequences.

Amanpour asked also about the arrest of Vardanyan by the Azerbaijani authorities.

Afeyan said this issue is very painful for him, and noted that he has worked

with Vardanyan for 23 years, within the scope of dozens of humanitarian and charitable projects.

Afeyan said he saw Vardanyan's role and contribution not only in Armenia, but in the whole world. He said Vardanyan, deeply concerned about the fate of his people, moved from Russia to Nagorno-Karabakh last fall to help the people living there regain their dignity and try to help them endure Azerbaijani oppression. Afeyan said that during that time, Vardanyan held the position of Minister of State for three months. After that, he stayed there and carried out humanitarian projects, helping people overcome difficulties.

Afeyan noted that when this recent surprise one-day war started in September, Azerbaijan announced that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were free to leave, and therefore Vardanyan also tried to leave with others. However, he was arrested by Azerbaijanis and charged with no grounds, while no evidence was

presented.

Actually, Vardanyan is the symbol of Armenians all over the world, Afeyan said. He noted that Vardanyan, as a successful businessman and philanthropist, is the most famous citizen of Armenia in the world, and therefore arresting him, making a show of it, and bringing charges against him is psychological pressure on 10 million Armenians around the world.

Afeyan said when we are talking about 120,000 Armenians who are natives of Nagorno-Karabakh and had to leave their land, it is classic ethnic cleansing. That's the assessment of most international experts who have spoken in the past months. And at the end of it all, Vardanyan and seven other former Karabakh leaders were arrested and face show trials, Afeyan added.

Afeyan concluded by expressing hope that the international community will not remain indifferent because all this encourages more and more injustice and impunity.

## FASF Issues \$50,000 Grant to Armenian Soldiers' Families

YEREVAN — Friends of the Armenian Soldier and Family (FASF) issued a grant to the National Foundation for Servicemen Insurance (ZINAPAH, previously known as Insurance Foundation for Servicemen - IFS) for \$50,000.

The major sponsor of FASF is Adam Kablanian.

Donations and grants enable ZINAPAH to make compensation and ensure the dignity of the families of fallen heroes and soldiers who acquired a disability due to war. ZINAPAH receives donations from all over the world. Most donors are from Armenia, Russia, the USA, and Germany.

ZINAPAH was founded in 2017 to provide stable compensation for the well-being of fallen, missing, and 1st and 2nd group disabled servicemen and their families while defending the homeland and its borders for the peace and security of future generations. ZINAPAH is a non-political institution that operates according to the Law. ZINAPAH is governed by an independent Board of Trustees.

The following beneficiaries can receive assistance after a detailed and verified application process:

- servicemen who have (and maintain) a 1st or 2nd group military disability
- families of servicemen who fell or went missing including the servicemen's spouse, child(ren) and parent(s).

As of October 2023, ZINAPAH supports 5,179 servicemen and their families, around 12,000 people with a lump sum upfront contribution of 10 mln or 5 mln drams (\$24,000 or \$12,000) and 100,000-300,000 drams (\$250 to \$750) depending on the servicemen rank and disability group) monthly payments to the servicemen and their families to ensure their minimum financial stability with liability as per eligibility for the next 20 years and, in case of funds availability, possible extension. Since 2017 it has made more than 82 billion drams (\$203 million) in compensation.

Friends of the Armenian Soldier and Family (FASF) was founded in 2021 in response to the distressing humanitarian crisis affecting Armenian soldiers.

## On the Self-Organization Of The Armenian Diaspora

DIASPORA, from page 19

Those inclinations are there: the atmosphere and awareness are ripe. The proof: partial discussions in various European capitals, and recently in the hall of the Matenadaran [Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts] in Yerevan, a little more complete consultations, with the participation of diasporan and native Armenian, relatively young thinkers, activists and experts.

Such initiatives should be encouraged and promoted, especially when fresh minds are involved, which are able, considering the current geopolitical developments, to point out the path to be taken by Armenians, all Armenians, before a general conference. They will discard superfluous, outdated and unproductive stereotypes and adopt practical, new and influential principles for the national survival of diasporan Armenians, the preservation of Armenian identity, the growth of its influence in international arenas and the preservation and survival of Armenian statehood.

Conditions have changed. We too must change.

(Hagop Avedikian is the founding editor-in-chief of the Yerevan newspaper *Azg*, published since 1990. This article has been translated from the Armenian version published in *Baikar*)

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