

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXIX, NO. 18, Issue 4808

NOVEMBER 18, 2023

\$2.00

EU Foreign Ministers Agree to Expand Armenian Border Monitoring

BRUSSELS (Azatutyun) — The European Union's Foreign Ministers have approved the proposal to expand the border monitoring mission deployed in Armenia and to activate discussions on visa liberalization with Armenia, EU High Representative for Foreign Af-



fairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell said in Brussels on Monday, November 13.

The decisions were taken at the session of the Foreign Affairs Council, which also had the issue of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations on its agenda.

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Paris Mayor Condemns Azerbaijan for Destroying Karabakh's Armenian Heritage, Arresting Officials

PARIS (News.am) — The mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, in a post on Twitter (X) on November 7, detailed her discussions with the former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno Ocampo.

"The tragedy continues in Armenia. Azerbaijan is guilty of arbitrarily arresting the former officials of Artsakh [(Nagorno-Karabakh)] and destroying the Armenian heritage in this territory.

"Yesterday I had the opportunity to discuss it with Luis Moreno Ocampo, the former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, the author of the report on the process of genocide carried out by Azerbaijan during the blockade of Lachin corridor.

"Our thoughts are with the casualties, their families, 100,000 [Armenian] refugees and political prisoners held by Azerbaijan. On December 10, on the occasion of international Human Rights Day, I will hand honorary citizenship of Paris to the representatives of Artsakh Armenians.

"Also, Paris calls for the immediate release of all Armenian captives being held by Azerbaijan," Hidalgo wrote.

Karabakh's Armenians Struggle to Cope with Displacement

By Siranush Sargsyan

YEREVAN (IWPR) — When 86-year-old Julieta Shahbazyan looks around the room she now shares with 23 members of her family, she is overwhelmed by memories. Her new home is a former kindergarten in Artashat, western Armenia; she had previously never left her native village of Aygestan in the Nagorno Karabakh.

On September 19, Baku launched a 24-hour military offensive in which it regained control of the region. Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but since the mid-1990s large areas had been controlled by ethnic Armenians.

When Shahbazyan fled the fighting, she did not expect that her displacement would be permanent.



The journey to Armenia was particularly hard for old people like Julieta Shahbazyan, who, at 86, left her native village of Aygestan for the first time. She is living in the kindergarten with 23 members of her family. © Siranush Sargsyan

"I left the doors of the house open and went out, thinking of returning soon. What I regret the most is leaving the graves of my relatives behind."

Shahbazyan arrived in Armenia on

September 28, after a nearly 72 hour-long journey along the Lachin corridor, the serpentine mountain road connecting Karabakh to Armenia. It normally see REFUGEES, page 3

Jerusalem Armenians in Bitter Fight to Save Their Land Amid Focus on Gaza

By Thomas Helm

JERUSALEM (The National) — Jerusalem's Old City, which has been deserted since the Gaza War, just had its most significant explosion of anger since the recent conflict erupted.

The Old City is no stranger to tension. It is arguably the main cauldron of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

What made Sunday's eruption different was where it took place: a normally quiet car park in the Armenian

Quarter, tucked away in the south-east corner of the Old City.

On the face of it, an increasingly heated quarrel in this corner of Jerusalem is about property development. But it cuts to the heart of the agony so many communities in Israel and Palestine have experienced in more than 100 years of conflict.

The current war, the Armenians say, has focused global attention on the unbearable violence in Israel on October

7 during Hamas' surprise attack, and the subsequent massive Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

That crisis, in turn, has empowered radical Israeli settlers to seize more Palestinian land and intimidate communities

Armed men with guard dogs descended on part of the car park right next to a private garden over which an Armenian flag stands tall.

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Standoff at Cows' Garden of Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

No Plans to Withdraw from EAEU, MP Says

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia has no plans to withdraw from the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), pro-government MP Arman Yeghoyan said on November 14.

“There is no intention to quit the EAEU,” he told reporters.

Yeghoyan, who leads the National Assembly Standing Committee on European Integration, hailed the EU’s decision to expand its monitoring mission in Armenia.

Pashinyan to Skip CSTO Summit

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will not attend the upcoming summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Minsk, Belarus, his office reported on November 14.

Pashinyan held a phone call with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko at the latter’s initiative to discuss issues related to organizing the CSTO Collective Security Council meeting on November 23.

“The Armenian Prime Minister told the President of Belarus that he will be unable to attend the summit and expressed hope that his CSTO colleagues will treat the decision with understanding,” his office said.

Yerevan Welcomes EU Visa Liberalization Talks

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenia welcomes the EU Foreign Affairs Council’s decision to start negotiations around visa liberalization with Armenia, Deputy FM Paruyr Hovhannisyan told reporters on November 14.

Hovhannisyan said that the visa liberalization is one of the most difficult issues on the Armenia-EU agenda.

“This is a very positive development. We will continue to actively work with the EU and member states in order to accelerate this process,” Hovhannisyan said.

Menendez: ‘Top Priority Must Be to Address Threats Armenia Continues to Face’

WASHINGTON (news.am) — Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) on November 13 delivered [remarks](#) on the Senate floor against the Armenian humanitarian crisis, and called for Congress to end support for the Azerbaijani government.

“Wherever assaults are launched without warning whether it’s Russia’s unprovoked war in Ukraine, Azerbaijan’s invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, or Hamas’ barbaric terrorist attack on Israel we must always stand with our allies as they seek justice for victims in a way that upholds human rights and follows the laws of war,” Sen. Menendez said, in particular, from the Senate floor. “The eyes of the world are watching how the United States responds to these conflicts. And as we have done so many times before, we must leverage our position as a moral authority for good in order to deliver necessary aid to the affected regions.”

“Our top priority must be to stand in the breach and address the threats that Armenia continues to face,” Menendez stressed.

Armenia Receives New Indian Weaponry

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Armenia has received new state-of-the-art weaponry from India. In response to questions about the Zen drone system, the Armenian defense official said, “the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia are working intensively to increase the level of defense capability.” Armenia’s lack of drone countermeasures were a major factor in the 2020 war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. If confirmed, the Zen purchase would be the latest of a large array of Indian weapons now bound for Armenia.

In July 2023, India’s first-ever export of its domestically made Pinaka rocket system reportedly arrived in Armenia. Azerbaijan alleged the weapons systems were transported through Iran to Armenia’s southern border.

The Pinaka system is named after the bow of Indian deity Shiva. Its range of 40 kilometers is relatively short compared to some Soviet-designed rocket systems, but it has been dubbed the “Indian HIMARS” for its reported accuracy. The Armenian purchase was valued at \$260 million for several Pinaka launcher systems and associated ammunition.

In August 2023, Armenia received its first shipment of India’s Advanced Towed Artillery Gun Systems (ATAGS). Yerevan has reportedly ordered 84 of the weapons



Pinaka multibarrel rocket launcher is seen in West Bengal, India, in January 2023.

at a cost of \$155.5 million, and was the first country India sold

ATAGS are 155 mm howitzers designed to be towed by trucks, but can also drive short distances under their own power, reducing the “pack up” time required for moving the weapon out of position. The guns suffered multiple setbacks during their development, which began in 2013, with one exploding during training in Sep-

tember 2020. Several Indian soldiers were injured when a ATAGS gun barrel reportedly burst due to poor-quality steel.

In another sign of Yerevan pivoting away from Moscow, the country’s military — which has historically relied on Soviet- and Russian-made military hardware — also acquired three French-made Thales Ground Master 200 radar systems in October 2023.



A vehicle from the Indian-made Zen anti-drone system

Aliyev-Pashinyan Meeting ‘Possible in December’

By Haghine Buniatian and Karen Aslanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The European Union may succeed in organizing next month a potentially decisive meeting of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, a senior EU official said on November 10.

Aliyev and Pashinyan had been scheduled to meet on the sidelines of the EU’s October 5 summit in Granada, Spain. Pashinyan hoped that they will sign there a document laying out the main parameters of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty.

However, Aliyev withdrew from the talks at the last minute. He also appears to have canceled another meeting which EU Council President Charles Michel planned to host in Brussels later in October.

The EU official, who did not want to be identified, told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service that Michel and other EU representatives are now holding separate discussions with Yerevan and Baku in an effort to reschedule the trilateral meeting for December. Although no agreement has been reached so far, the summit may take place next month, said the official.

Pashinyan said, meanwhile, that he has not yet received “an invitation to the next meeting from Charles Michel.” Speaking during the annual Paris Peace Forum in the French capital, he said the peace accord can be signed “in the coming months” if Azerbaijan commits to mutual recognition of each other’s Soviet-era borders and a corresponding mechanism for delimiting the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Pashinyan questioned Baku’s willing-

ness to do that, saying that Azerbaijani officials, academics and government-controlled media are increasingly promoting “the concept of so-called Western Azerbaijan” encompassing much of modern-day Armenia. That is a “concept for preparing a new war against Armenia,” he claimed.

The EU official said in this regard that Aliyev repeatedly recognized Armenia’s territorial integrity during EU-mediated talks with Pashinyan. The Azerbaijani leader has not done so publicly, however.

The Brussels-based official also revealed that Aliyev pledged not to resort to a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict just days before the Azerbaijani army attacked Karabakh and forced its practically entire population to flee to Armenia.



ARMENIA

Karabakh's Armenians Struggle to Cope with Displacement

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takes about two-and-a-half hours to cover its 90 kilometres, but the large-scale evacuation jammed the only route out with over 100,000 people leaving in just a few days.

The operation came on the heels of a nine-month blockade that had left Karabakh's some 120,000 Armenians exhausted, with no access to essential supplies, including food, medication, gas, and electricity.

Artashat's kindergarten number 6 shelters Shahbazyan and 73 other Armenians from Karabakh. For many, it is the first time war does not loom over them.

"Children are particularly struck by the absence of gunfire," Karine Harutyunyan, the director of the kindergarten, told IWPR. "Yet, despite our efforts to provide them with the best possible conditions, they still want to return to their homes. [There is] one child, who cries non-stop, saying, 'I want to go back to our home'."

Collective centers have been set up across the country to accommodate the refugees. Addressing the European Parliament on October 17, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan highlighted that the government was providing asylum, shelter and support to Karabakh Armenians. Yerevan has funded Karabakh's state budget since the end of the First Karabakh War in the mid-1990s.

However, refugees and aid workers warn that the state aid program and the support of international organizations is not even close to addressing the needs of such a large number of people. Centres are in need of everything to support families, many of whom left in a rush, leaving behind their lives, memories and, in many cases, even documents.

Single parent Hermine Hayrapetyan, 35, is also living in the kindergarten with her daughter, her three sisters and her brother's families. She is worried about being able to find a permanent home as the 40,000 drams (about 100 US dollars) that the state pledged as a monthly allowance for households are not enough to cover rent costs.

"Rents are high and landlords often de-

mand several months' rent upfront," she said.

Madlena Ghahiryanyan, who shares a room with 16 members of her family, echoed Hayrapetyan's worries.

"After Azerbaijan invaded Artsakh [as Armenians call Karabakh] in 2020, we didn't live peacefully, but despite the challenges, we managed to repair our house, to

her family had to leave their village in Hadrut region after it fell under Baku's control in November 2020. She and family first moved to Armenia for safety and returned to Karabakh after the November 9 ceasefire, settling in Stepanakert, the main city, which Azerbaijanis call Khankendi.

The 35-year-old is frustrated over what she described as the international lack of

the world 'we are civilized' they will massacre us, poison us..." she told IWPR.

Fear and distrust are common among Armenians from Karabakh and are what drove nearly all of them away from their homes.

"We were hungry and there was no food," Shahbazyan told IWPR, recalling the journey to Armenia. "At one point, Azerbaijani and Russian soldiers approached us and offered sweets to the children. I took the first one and ate it to make sure it wasn't poisoned."

Hayrapetyan's 14-year-old niece, Marianna, is still grappling with the loss.

"After the 2020 war, we kept hoping that we would go back to Tumi, my native village [in Hadrut region]. We did not; then we lost all of Artsakh," she told IWPR.

"When the shelling started, my mother was making sweets with mulberry jam," she continued. "The next day was my brother's birthday. I made cards because I couldn't find any other gift for him during the blockade. All that was interrupted by my mother's panicked voice, 'Let's go down to the basement quickly.'"

Her father had served in Karabakh's army, Marianna explained, adding, "We couldn't sleep for two nights until we received the news that my father was alive. He was surrounded in the forest, but he couldn't get out. When they said that they should evacuate us, I told my mother that I wouldn't leave until my father's return."

Alvard Dadayan's husband also served in the army; he was killed during the first Karabakh war, in the 1990s. The 54-year-old from Stepanakert cannot hold back tears when she recalled that she no longer possessed a photo of husband in military uniform.

"I had it with me but on the way we were told that they [Azerbaijanis] would check all cars," she said. "I did not want to put my sons in danger, so I hid his photo under a stone along the way."

(This photo essay by Siranush Sargsyan originally appeared on the Institute for War and Peace Reporting website [iwpr.net] on November 8.)



The journey to Armenia was particularly hard for old people like Julieta Shahbazyan, who, at 86, left her native village of Aygestan for the first time. She is living in the kindergarten with 23 members of her family. © Siranush Sargsyan

have a livelihood, and, during the blockade we braced ourselves for the winter...I prepared pickles, dried beans and greens and ground wheat to create a winter reserve," explained the 62-year-old nurse, from Khramort village.

"During the military invasion, I lost contact with my two soldier sons, who were besieged. The important thing is they were eventually found," she said.

Many refugees lost their homes for the second time after Azerbaijan regained control of large swathes of territory in the 2020 war.

Hayrapetyan was among them: she and

interest towards the fate of Karabakh Armenians.

"For nine months [during the blockade] we had nothing, children were starving... European organisations, human rights defenders, NGOs, no one cared to see what was happening, to see how we were surviving. Now they [come in] and fill some forms. I don't care about their paperwork."

Hayrapetyan yearns to return to her home, but cannot imagine living with Azerbaijanis.

"We didn't want to leave. But it will be impossible to live under Turkish [Azerbaijani] rule. No matter how often they say to

Supreme Spiritual Council Addresses Status of Artsakh Diocese

YEREVAN — Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, presided over the latest Supreme Spiritual Council meeting, which convened at the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin from October 31 to November 3.

Pontifical Legate of Western Europe Archbishop Khajag Barsamian and Chancellor of Holy Echmiadzin Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan chaired the meeting sessions, which brought together high-ranking clergy from the church's worldwide jurisdictions.

Among those attending was Primate of the Eastern Diocese Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, joining his fellow church leaders for the first time as a bishop of the church.

While the meeting received reports on the Mother See's ongoing activities in education, outreach, and ecumenical relations, much of the meeting revolved around the topic of Artsakh and its people. The bishops discussed current initiatives by the Mother See to provide spiritual care, psychological support, and job training to the resettling refugees from Artsakh, in addition to providing for their physical sustenance and lodging. Pathways to preserve Artsakh's spiritual and cultural heritage against desecration and destruction were also addressed.



Pictured: Catholicos Karekin II and members of the Supreme Spiritual Council—including Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan—visit with refugees from Artsakh.

It was also announced that the Diocese of Artsakh will continue to maintain its status under the present conditions, with Bishop Vertanes Abrahamyan continuing to serve as Primate. "Tragically, the state of Artsakh is dissolved; but the dissolution of the Artsakh Diocese will not take place," said Bishop Abrahamyan in a report to the council. "His Holiness' announcement to

this effect was met with the greatest joy. Naturally, its functions will change; but the Diocese of Artsakh will continue to serve its people, and we will hold in our hearts the hope to return to our land again."

A tender expression of concern for the people of Artsakh came on November 2, when Catholicos Karekin II led members of the council to a camp in Armenia's

Kotayk diocese, where 38 families forcibly displaced from Artsakh have been sheltered. As the visiting clergy blessed the families and children, His Holiness stressed to the refugees that their Armenian brothers and sisters across the world are engaged in the critical work of taking care of their spiritual, humanitarian, and social needs.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Georgia Confirms Transit of French Military Equipment To Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Georgia-based APM Terminals Poti company has confirmed the transit of French Bastion multi-purpose armored personnel carriers to Armenia, RFE/RL's Georgian Service reported on November 14.

"In this particular case, the cargo arrived from France, an EU country, and was sent to Armenia, a country that is not subject to sanctions," the company said in a statement.

"In addition, in the absence of clear instructions from the Georgian government and restrictions imposed by international regulators, APM Terminals Poti is not authorized to unreasonably refuse to accept cargo that is not sanctioned," it added.

UK Minister to Visit Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — UK Minister for Europe Leo Docherty will visit Armenia next week, the UK Embassy said on November 14.

The UK will expand its trade and security ties with Armenia, building closer cooperation and diversifying Armenia's economic relationships, the UK Minister for Europe said at an event in London the previous day.

Docherty made the commitment to Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan at the first UK-Armenian Strategic Dialogue – based around discussions on shared interests.

He welcomed ongoing collaboration on governance and rule of law, which is helping to strengthen the stability of Armenia and build its political and economic resilience.

Following the dialogue, Docherty said: "It has been a really positive discussion during this inaugural UK-Armenia Strategic Dialogue. There is a significant amount of positive energy and opportunity to strengthen and deepen our bilateral relationship."

Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan Fail to Register For OSCE Meeting in Yerevan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan have not yet responded to an invitation to participate in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Yerevan, MP Sargis Khandanyan, chair of the Armenian parliament's foreign relations committee, said on November 13.

"The International Secretariat has sent invitations to all 56 participating states of the Assembly, as well as 11 partner states. There are no registered participants from Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Although the delegates from Azerbaijan raised the issue of security guarantees for coming to Armenia in advance, and the Armenian National Assembly expressed such readiness, at the moment they are not registered. There are only a few days left, so I assume that the Azerbaijani delegates will not attend the meeting," he said.

Lemkin Institute Condemns Artsakh Man's Conviction in Azerbaijan

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention on November 13 issued a statement in which it strongly condemned 68-year-old Artsakh Armenian Vagif Khachatryan's conviction in Azerbaijan and called for international efforts to help release all Armenian persons held by Baku.

The statement said, in part, "The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention energetically condemns the 15-year prison sentence handed down to Mr. Vagif Khachatryan on 7 November 2023 by the Republic of Azerbaijan."

ities of committing war crimes during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in the 1990s, charges he has repeatedly denied and for which Azerbaijan has offered no independent evidence," the statement continued.

"In this context, the Lemkin Institute recalls its 'Statement on the Ongoing Imprisonment of Armenian Officials of the Republic of Artsakh by the Republic of Azerbaijan,' issued on 27 October 2023. In that statement, the Lemkin Institute noted that: 'At the present time, [Mr. Khachatryan] is on trial in Azerbaijan's infamous

suaude the regime of President Aliyev into promptly releasing all Armenian persons under its jurisdiction and to refrain from providing any kind of assistance that could worsen the suffering of the victims of the Artsakh genocide or embolden Azerbaijan to perpetrate any unlawful act of aggression."



Vagif Khachatryan, at his trial, at left

Khachatryan was detained at a checkpoint on July 29 the Azerbaijani authorities had erected on Hakari Bridge illegally, after a similarly illegal blockade of Artsakh's Lachin Corridor.

"Mr. Khachatryan's abduction took place before Azerbaijan's military aggression against Artsakh on 19 September 2023, which resulted in massacre and atrocity and the consequent flight of almost 100 percent of its indigenous Armenian population to neighboring Armenia. The aggression, atrocity and forced displacement amount to a very thorough genocide of an ancient, continuous indigenous civilization. Upon his abduction, Mr. Khachatryan was immediately accused by Azerbaijani author-

judicial system, where violations of the fundamental guarantee of due process have become alarmingly common. In fact, according to one observer, Mr. Khachatryan's statements are intentionally being mistranslated for Azerbaijani and Turkish audiences. Additionally, photos of Mr. Khachatryan have raised concerns about his potential mistreatment and deteriorating health."

The statement concluded, "The Lemkin Institute exhorts the international community, which seems to have forgotten the commission of atrocity crimes in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, as well as the looming threat of an invasion of the Republic of Armenia by Azerbaijan, to per-

Aliyev Says 'We Showed the Whole World' at Military Parade In Karabakh

BAKU (AP) — Hundreds of Azerbaijani soldiers paraded on November 8 through Stepanakert, now named Khankendi, the capital city of Karabakh, that came under full control of Azerbaijan in September after a lightning rout of ethnic Armenian forces.

"We showed the whole world the strength, determination and indomitable spirit of the Azerbaijani people," Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev said in an address at the parade, which also included tanks and military equipment that was seized from Armenian forces.

Azerbaijan began blockading that road last winter, leading to severe food and medicine shortages in the Armenian-held area. Then in September, it launched a blitz that forced the separatist forces to disband.

More than 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled the region in the following days, leaving the city nearly deserted.

The parade marked Azerbaijan's Victory Day, a holiday that commemorates the retaking of territory in 2020.

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"The Council discussed how to strengthen cooperation with Armenia and support its democratically elected authorities, its resilience, its security and the continuation of reforms in the country. We decided to beef up our mission in Armenia with more servants and more patrols in the sensitive areas of the border. And we will explore a possible support to Armenia under the European Peace Facility and an option for visa liberalization for Armenia," Borrell said after the meeting.

The European Peace Facility is an instrument by which Brussels provides means to increase the defense capacity of countries that are not members of the Union, prevent conflicts, and strengthen peace. It is through this facility that Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have been receiving aid from the European Union.

Borrell also said that the EU has to be "very much vigilant for any attempt of destabilization of Armenia internally and externally."

"Our message to Azerbaijan has been clear: any violation of Armenian territorial

integrity would be unacceptable and would have severe consequences for the quality of our relations," the EU foreign policy chief stressed.

Borrell called for the resumption of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on the work done by the president of the EU Council.

"We need a peace treaty to be concluded, and we are committed to continue our mediation role," Borrell said, adding that the EU Foreign Ministers had decided to invite Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan to join them on the margins of the next or one of the upcoming Foreign Affairs Council meetings.

The decisions of the EU foreign ministers are to be submitted to the European Commission in the time to come. The Commission then presents proposals on their implementation. It is expected that at that time it will become clear to what extent and how the European Union mission (EUMA) deployed in Armenia can be expanded, and what kind of aid Yerevan can expect from Brussels. The decisions of the European

Commission, in turn, must be ratified by the 27 EU member states.

French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna said at a news briefing she believes it is necessary for the Council of EU Foreign Ministers to "clearly affirm today its support for Armenia, its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

In that context, Colonna highlighted the need for enhancing the European Union's border-monitoring mission in Armenia with "mandate and means", as well as providing support to Armenia through the European Peace Facility.

"I think it is important that this message be issued by our Council clearly and decisively today. It is time to do it. We have been talking about it for several weeks," the French minister underlined.

Colonna's statement came amid criticism from Azerbaijan against France regarding its supplying military equipment to Armenia – something that Azerbaijan claims "only bolsters Armenia's military potential and its ability to carry out destructive operations in the region."



INTERNATIONAL

New Armenian Embassy in UK Officially Inaugurated in London

LONDON (Public Radio of Armenia) — The new site of the Armenian Embassy in the United Kingdom was officially inaugurated on November 13 during the official visit of Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan to the United Kingdom. UK Minister of State for Business and Trade

only our governments, but also our economies, our cultures and our peoples. Today, when we cut the ribbon, we are not only announcing the opening of the building, but also laying a new foundation for the deepening of our relations,” Minister Mirzoyan said in his opening remarks.

“We reaffirm our commitment to deepen our political dialogue, our economic and cultural ties. But also, by an interesting coincidence, immediately after this opening ceremony, we are preparing for the launch of a new level of our relations, the strategic dialogue between the Republic of Armenia and the United Kingdom,” he added.

The attendees also made a note in the guest book of the embassy, where Mirzoyan wrote: “For about three decades, Arme-



The Armenian flag at the new embassy

Timothy Minto attended the ceremony on behalf of the UK government.

“This embassy is a beacon of friendship and cooperation between our peoples, and this building is a bridge that connects not



UK Minister Timothy Minto, left, with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan of Armenia cut the ribbon.

nia and the United Kingdom have made efforts to develop bilateral relations. I am sure that the new Armenian Embassy will provide an opportunity to deepen the existing foundations in the coming decades, revealing new perspectives, facing modern

challenges and threats. The location of the Armenian Embassy in this building in the heart of London demonstrates our willingness to deepen and give new momentum to Armenian-British relations for the benefit of our two peoples.”

Jerusalem Armenians in Bitter Fight to Save Their Land Amid Focus on Gaza

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Hagop Djernazian, a community leader, stood in the fray surrounded by Israeli police, lawyers, clergy and large crowds of agitated residents.

“I was at home. At three o’clock I got a message that a group of armed settlers had arrived,” he said, amid the furor.

“They have pepper spray. They kicked us out of the property. When the police came we went back in. The priests arrived as did our lawyer.”

Tensions had already been high before the arrival of the armed men. The car park in which they were prowling is the center of a bitter and murky property battle, involving a private developer’s plan to build a hotel on the site, which makes up 25 per cent of the entire quarter.

The land was sold by the Armenian Patriarch with the involvement of a now-defrocked priest who was responsible for the Patriarchate’s vast property portfolio.

“The whole thing stinks,” Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli anti-settlement activist and lawyer, told The National.

“This patch of land is strategically located. In Camp David, [Prime Minister Ehud Barak] was willing to give Palestinians the Christian and Muslim Quarter, but only half of the Armenian Quarter. Israel wanted its road, one of the only vehicular routes in the Old City,” Seidemann added.

“I’ve said to my friends in the international community, ignore the legalities for now. There are hundreds of members of a community confronting armed people with dogs and weapons. It’s on the brink of an explosion. The last thing we need is an eruption of convulsive violence in Jerusalem. Sort out the legal issues later – make this go away.”

The Armenian community is indeed seething. They fear the deal might spell the end of their presence in the Old City.

Without a car park, the Quarter’s already dwindling numbers would not be able to keep its institutions going, turning the area from a center of Armenian life into a museum, they say.

Garo Ghazarian, a high-profile US-Armenian attorney and part of a group of international lawyers who have banded together to prevent the deal, summed up the

stakes at the end of a fact-finding mission in June:

“The Armenian Quarter is of national and international importance for all Armenian people all over the world,” he told a packed courtyard of residents and international journalists, flanked by peers from across the Armenian diaspora.

“It is of the highest historical value and wealth to the Armenian nation. It is an integral part in the identity of the Armenian people in general. It is living proof of the centuries-old history of our people. It is testament to our great civilization in world history.”

On October 26, the Patriarch announced that he had sent a cancellation letter to the developers, although no one from the community has seen it.

That same day, bulldozers turned up to the site and began knocking down walls, prompting members of the community to keep watch on regular intervals.

Although they were already on alert, Sunday was different. The arrival of anonymous armed men was a significant escalation.

Djernazian beckoned in rage in the di-

rection of one particular man, Danny Rothman, a figure at the heart of the property deal about whom very little is known.

Mr Rothman declined to comment on the reason behind his surprise arrival and the current status of the wider property deal.

Perhaps worst of all, many in the community feel betrayed by their religious leadership. Many believe the Patriarch was incompetent at best for signing away the property. Others believe corruption is the reason.

The breakdown in trust is dangerous for the tiny community.

Armenians in the Holy Land, numbering only a few thousand people, are mostly the descendants of victims of the Armenian Genocide, who scattered themselves throughout the Middle East to escape the Ottoman Empire’s oppression in the early 20th century.

There is also a much older religious community, whose presence for centuries makes the Armenians one of the foremost Christian denominations in Jerusalem.

Now, those two parts of the community, co-religionists in one of Israel’s worst crises, are bitterly divided.

There are, however, signs things might be improving.

Many priests joined the community in the car park on Sunday, not easy given their boss started the saga. A new bishop has just arrived from Armenia to deal with the institution’s property. A number of figures in the community told The National they hold him in high regard.

The Patriarch himself even turned up, according to a press release. “The community stood strong, with 200 members in unity to prevent the takeover and save the Armenian Quarter,” it read.

On Monday, quiet had returned to the car park. Mr Djernazian stood by the rubble kicked up by the bulldozers mere days previously.

“Jerusalem has been targeted for years, but it’s important to note that people are using the war in Gaza to target Armenians when they are most likely to be alone,” he said.

“We have had a presence here since the 4th century, so we will never give up. Losing this land would mean endangering not just the Armenian presence in Jerusalem but the Christian one, too.”

Iran Reaffirms Support for Transport Link for Azerbaijani Exclave

TEHRAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Iran on November 9 pledged to complete “as soon as possible” the construction of a new road that will connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through the Islamic Republic and bypass Armenia,” RFE/RL’s Armenian service reported.

Azerbaijani and Iranian officials broke ground on the road during a ceremony held on October 7. Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk said afterwards that Baku and Tehran have also agreed to build a similar rail link bypassing Syunik, the sole Armenian province bordering Iran.

Tehran has repeatedly warned against attempts to strip Iran of the common border and transport links with Armenia, responding to Azerbaijani demands for a presumably extraterritorial “corridor” for Nakhichevan.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has

implicitly threatened to open the corridor by force. Azerbaijani September 19-20 military offensive in Karabakh raised more fears in Yerevan that Baku will act on those threats.

Earlier in October, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi reportedly told a visiting Azerbaijani official the “Zangezur corridor” sought by Baku is “resolutely opposed by Iran.” Aliyev’s top foreign policy aide, Hikmet Hajiyev, said later in October that the corridor “has lost its attractiveness for us” and that Baku is now planning to “do this with Iran instead.”

Raisi and Aliyev discussed the issue on Thursday when they met in Uzbekistan’s capital Tashkent on the sidelines of an Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) summit.

“While expressing his satisfaction with the agreement between the two countries

to solve problems of the region, Dr. Raisi emphasized the determination of the Islamic Republic of Iran to complete the Aghband Route as soon as possible to connect the Republic of Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan,” the Iranian president’s office said in a statement on the talks.

Raisi also said that Baku and Tehran are expanding bilateral ties now that “conspiracies by the ill-wishers of the two countries have failed.”

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued to publicly press Armenia to open the special corridor. In a speech at the ECO summit, Erdogan stressed the need for Armenia to honor its “obligations to Azerbaijan.”

“It is very important to open in the near future transport routes that will connect Azerbaijan’s western regions to Nakhichevan,” he said.

Community News

Citi Targeted Armenian Americans and Treated Them Like Criminals, US Regulator Alleges

By Matt Egan

NEW YORK (CNN) — Citibank illegally discriminated against Armenian Americans for years by singling them out on credit card applications based on their surnames, a federal regulator alleged on November 8.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau found that from at least 2015 through 2021, Citi “targeted” retail services credit card applicants whom employees associated with Armenian national origin.

“Citi treated Armenian Americans as criminals who were likely to commit fraud,” the CFPB alleged.

Citi applied more stringent criteria to suspected Armenian Americans’ applications, including “denying them outright,” placing blocks on the accounts and requiring additional information, according to the regulator.

The CFPB said Citi targeted applicants with last names ending in “-ian” and “-yan” as well as applicants in and around Glendale, which is home to a large Armenian-American population.

Regulators painted the picture of an orchestrated effort by Citi to conceal the alleged discrimination, including by allegedly falsifying documents.

Citi is a major issuer of store credit cards, including retail cards for Home Depot, Best Buy and other chains.

To punish Citi for the alleged discrimination, the CFPB ordered the bank to pay \$25.9 million in fines and consumer redress. Those penalties include a \$24.5 million fine to the CFPB’s victims relief fund.

“Regrettably, in trying to thwart a well-documented Armenian fraud ring operating in certain parts of California, a few employees took impermissible actions,” Citi spokesperson Karen Kearns said in a statement to CNN. “While we prioritize protecting our bank and our customers from fraud, it is unacceptable to base credit decisions on national origin.”

The Citi spokesperson added that after an internal investigation, the bank took “appropriate actions” against those involved and imposed steps to prevent this from happening again. “We sincerely apologize to any applicant who was evaluated unfairly by the small number of employees who circumvented our fraud detection protocols,” the Citi spokesperson said.

According to the CFPB, Citi supervisors “conspired to hide the discrimination” by telling employees not to discuss these practices in writing or on recorded phone lines.

The bank then “hid” the discrimination by lying to consumers, giving them “false reasons” for credit denials, the CFPB said.

“Citi stereotyped Armenians as prone to crime and fraud,” CFPB Director Rohit Chopra said in a statement. “Citi illegally fabricated documents to cover up its discrimination.”

see CITI, page 7



Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber placing a rose and candle on the chapel steps (photo Princeton ODUS)

Princeton Armenian Student Vigil for Artsakh Engages Many, Including Princeton President Eisgruber

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Students, faculty and staff at Princeton University participated in a candlelight vigil for Artsakh on October 12, organized by the Princeton Armenian Society (PAS) to honor those who lost their lives in the cause of Artsakh’s freedom. The vigil was sponsored by both Princeton College Democrats and Princeton College Republicans, as well as the American Whig-Clisophic Society, with funding from the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students, and the university’s president was in attendance.

While according to the campus newspaper, the *Daily Princetonian*, about 50 people were present, PAS Co-President Katya Hovnanian, Princeton Class of 2025, estimated that at its peak, this number increased to 150. The participants included several Princeton Armenian alumni, such as Laurens Ayyvazian, Ed Tiryakian and Levon Avanesyan, who came specially to New Jersey for this event.

Students Hayk Yengibaryan (PAS co-president), Lena Hoplamazian and Mikaela Avakian delivered speeches, Hovnanian said, while representatives from the offices of New Jersey Congressmen Frank Pallone and Chris Smith read statements. Fr. Daniel Karadjian recited a prayer and Karinne Andonian sang *Groong* and *Der Voghormya*.

see PRINCETON, page 10



The candlelight vigil at Princeton with Fr. Daniel Karadjian (photo Princeton ODUS)

Armenian FEMINNO Conference on Women and Innovation Held In San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO — Recently, the first satellite conference of FEMINNO, the biggest female innovation platform in Armenia and in the Caucasus, was held in San Francisco.

“Having had serious success in Armenia for two years, we realized that it is time to export the unique brand we have created and start bringing together the women engaged in innovation in the diaspora and foreign communities as well as the men who support the cause,” says Seda Papoyan, the founder of FEMINNO.

The theme of the FEMINNO satellite conference in San Francisco was “AI and Inclusive Innovation”, around which more than 100 Armenian and American specialists from both technology and other innovative fields gathered. Among the speakers, the organizers of FEMINNO managed to attract some very influential names in the Silicon Valley, includ-



Seda Papoyan

ing the former VP of Engineering of Twitter/X, now the Executive Director of Emerson Collective, as well as the Secretary of the Board of TUMO - Raffi Krikorian, the Head of Legal PMO at Meta - Emmanuelle Brissaud, serial entrepreneur in AI - David Yang, executive director of Excelerate Global - Seline Karakaya, SADA CFO Lusine Yeghiazaryan, founder of Generation She - Avni Barman, recognized Armenian serial innovator and entrepreneur Zarik Boghosyan, Armenian International Women’s Association’s (AIWA) San Francisco branch members and others. Leading specialists from Google, Slack and other technological and innovative companies were among the participants of the conference.

The first FEMINNO satellite conference was supported by a number of organizations from Armenia and the United States. The event was hosted by the Krouzian-Zekarian-Vasbouragan Armenian School of San Francisco, see FEMINNO, page 9



COMMUNITY NEWS

FBI Examining Whether Adams Cleared Red Tape for Turkish Government

By William K. Rashbaum, Dana Rubinstein and Michael Rothfeld

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Federal authorities are investigating whether Mayor Eric Adams, weeks before his election two years ago, pressured New York Fire Department officials to sign off on the Turkish government's new high-rise consulate in Manhattan despite safety concerns with the building, three people with knowledge of the matter said.

After winning the Democratic mayoral primary in July, Adams contacted then-Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro in late summer 2021 and urged him to allow the Turkish government to occupy the building at least on a temporary basis. The building had yet to open because fire officials had cited safety issues and declined to sign off on its occupancy, the people said.

The unusual intervention by Adams is being examined as part of a broader public corruption investigation by the FBI and federal prosecutors in Manhattan that led to the seizure of the mayor's electronic devices by federal agents early last week, the people said. The FBI has been asking top Fire Department officials about Adams's role in the matter since the spring, the people said.

Adams' intervention paved the way for the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose fondness for massive building projects was well known in Turkey, to preside over the grand opening of the \$300-million, 35-story tower on his September 2021 visit to New York for the U.N. General Assembly, despite numerous flaws in its fire safety system, according to the people familiar with the matter and city records. The skyscraper in the center of New York City reflected Turkey's "increased power," Erdogan said at its ribbon-cutting.

The federal criminal inquiry has focused at least in part on whether Adams's 2021 campaign conspired with the Turkish government, including its consulate general in New York, to illegally funnel foreign money into its coffers, according to a search warrant obtained by the *New York Times* for an FBI search this month of the home of the mayor's chief fund-raiser.

Asked for comment on Saturday morning, Adams's campaign issued a statement from the mayor, who served as Brooklyn borough president until 2021.

"As a borough president, part of my routine role was to notify government agencies of issues on behalf of constituents and constituencies," Mr. Adams said. "I have not been accused of wrongdoing, and I will continue to cooperate with investigators."

Federal prosecutors and the FBI are conducting a probe into whether Mayor Eric

Adams's 2021 campaign conspired with the Turkish government to receive illegal foreign donations.

A representative of the Turkish embassy in Washington, D.C., did not respond to requests for comment.

Spokesmen for the FBI and the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of New York, whose prosecutors are also investigating the matter, declined to comment.

At the time he contacted the Fire Department, Adams was completing his second term as Brooklyn borough president, a largely ceremonial job whose authority did not extend to the Manhattan site of the new consulate building, Turkevi Center, across First Avenue from the U.N. But his emergence as the mayoral primary winner in early July all but assured he would prevail in the November general election, given New York City's heavily Democratic electorate. His influence among city officials had grown accordingly.

Adams already had a long-running relationship with the Turkish consulate general, which paid for part of his trip to Turkey while he was Brooklyn borough president in 2015, according to a public filing.

The warrant to search the home of Adams's 25-year-old fund-raiser, Brianna Suggs, indicated that the investigation was examining the role of KSK Construction, a Brooklyn building company owned by Turkish immigrants that organized a fund-raising event for Adams on May 7, 2021.

On that day, 48 donors, including the company's owners, employees and their families, along with others in the construction and real estate industries, donated \$43,600, Adams's campaign reports show. Those contributions enabled him to obtain another \$48,000 in public matching funds for a total of nearly \$92,000. The city's generous public matching funds program, intended to reduce the influence of money in politics, provides cash infusions to candidates by increasing donations from city residents up to \$250 by a factor of eight. Mr. Adams's campaign filings do not specify which donations were made through the fund-raising event.

KSK Construction does not appear to have played a role in building the new consulate in Manhattan.

Neither Adams nor his campaign has been accused of wrongdoing, and no charges are publicly known to have been filed in connection with the investigation. The mayor, who retained lawyers last week to represent him, his campaign and Ms. Suggs, has denied knowledge of any impropriety and de-

fended the campaign's fund-raising.

After the *Times* reported on Friday that the FBI had seized the mayor's electronic devices, Adams and his lawyer, Boyd Johnson, issued statements saying that Adams was cooperating fully with the investigation and had instructed his employees to do the same.

"I have nothing to hide," Adams said in his statement.

FBI agents pulled the mayor aside after an event at New York University on Monday and seized two cellular phones and an iPad, which were copied and returned within days, the mayor's lawyer has said.

The agents who searched the Brooklyn home of Suggs the week before took computers, cellphones and other evidence, according to records obtained by *The Times*. The warrant for that search indicated that the inquiry was focused at least in part on whether anyone associated with Mr. Adams's 2021 campaign had a motive or intent to "provide benefits, whether lawfully or unlawfully," to the Turkish government, its nationals or the construction firm in exchange for contributions.

It was unclear precisely when the investigation began, but this spring, two FBI agents assigned to the same New York public corruption squad that executed the search warrant at the home of Ms. Suggs interviewed at least one senior Fire Department official who had been involved in the Turkevi Center approval process, three people with knowledge of the matter said. They asked detailed questions about the safety issues, the approval process and whether pressure had been brought to bear and by whom, the people said.

Several months later, in midsummer, at least one other high-ranking Fire Department official was interviewed and asked similar questions, according to two of the people.

And on Nov. 3, the morning after the search of Suggs's home, FBI agents knocked on the door of Commissioner Nigro and questioned him about Adams's intervention and his communications with Nigro in the late summer of 2021, three people with knowledge of the interview said.

Adams's ties to the Turkish government and community stretch back years. As Brooklyn borough president, he actively wooed wealthy members of the Turkish community in south Brooklyn.

In August 2015, the Turkish consulate in New York paid for Adams's airfare, hotel and ground transportation for a trip to Turkey, according to financial disclosure records. There, Mr. Adams signed a sister-city agreement with Istanbul's Uskudar municipality, one of several he executed with for-

eign cities he traveled to as borough president. He also visited Bahcesehir University, founded by the same Turkish philanthropist who founded Bay Atlantic University in Washington, D.C.

The FBI warrant for Suggs's home also sought information about contributions from Bay Atlantic employees. Adams's campaign filings show he received a total of \$10,000 in contributions from five Bay Atlantic employees on September 27, 2021, a week after the unveiling of Turkevi Center, and refunded the donations the following month.

As recently as late last month, to honor the 100th anniversary of the Turkish republic, Adams presided over a flag-raising in Lower Manhattan and attended a celebration held at the Turkish consulate.

Now housed in the new, 35-story glass tower, the consulate was erected at the cost of nearly \$300 million, a sum that drew criticism in Turkey in 2021, when students protested the high cost of housing. It is reportedly Turkey's most expensive foreign mission. Its curving facade was inspired by the crescent on the Turkish flag, while its tulip-shaped top is a nod to the country's national flower, according to the architecture firm that designed it. The building includes not only consular offices, but apartments, a prayer room, an exhibition space and an auditorium, according to its architects.

City records reveal problems for months before Mr. Erdogan's visit in 2021 as Turkish government contractors sought to gain city approval to complete and occupy the building. On July 26, 2021, the Fire Department rejected the fire protection plan submitted by a consultant for the Turkish government, asking for changes. Around the same time, the Buildings Department issued a violation after a glass panel on the 17th floor fell off and plummeted 10 stories.

Only 10 days before Mr. Erdogan was to preside over the opening of the new building, a senior Fire Department official informed Sparc Fire Protection Engineering, a consultant on the building project, that the department would not object to a temporary certificate of occupancy that would allow the building to be used if the consultant affirmed that the alarm system complied with the city building code, the records show.

But a week later, on September 17, the consultant reported numerous "deficiencies" involving smoke detectors, elevators, fans, doors and other issues. Sparc's president told the city that the building would be staffed with guards on "fire watch" until the problems were resolved. The building is still operating under a temporary certificate of occupancy, records show.

Citi Targeted Armenian Americans and Treated Them Like Criminals, US Regulator Alleges

CITI, from page 6

Under the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, it is illegal to intentionally deny credit to groups of people based on national origin.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a frequent critic of big banks, condemned Citibank.

"Citibank's intentional discrimination against Armenian Americans is illegal, outrageous and just plain wrong," Warren, a Democrat from Massachusetts, told CNN in a statement. "The CFPB is right to hold the bank accountable."

Dennis Kelleher, CEO of financial reform advocacy group Better Markets, called the allegations against Citi "stunning" and questioned whether the punishment fits the crime.

"That fine amount is meaningless to Citi," Kelleher told CNN, noting it amounts to slightly more than 0.1% of the bank's \$20 billion in third-quarter revenue.

"Individual bankers, including executives and supervisors, must be personally punished with meaningful fines and barred from working in the industry."

During a call with reporters on Wednesday, Chopra said the people hurt thought they would be treated fairly by banks.

"Many Armenians have arrived in the US both because of opportunity but also because of physical dangers back home," Chopra said, noting Armenia was a satellite of the Soviet Union before its collapse. "Those who immigrated to the United States should not be subjected to illegal discrimination on the basis of their national origin."

The CFPB noted that Citi has a history of recently violating consumer financial protection laws. It paid \$335 million in 2018 to 1.75 million consumer credit card holders for allegedly violating the Truth

in Lending Act. In 2015, Citi paid almost \$750 million for "deceptive and unfair practices" linked to overcharging credit card customers.

"I am concerned about Citi's longstanding problems when it comes to managing its sprawling lines of businesses," Chopra said. "The public has provided Citi with very large bailouts because of its past management failures. It is unfair for consumers to continue paying the price."

Rep. Anna Eshoo, the only Armenian-Assyrian member of Congress, told CNN in a statement on Wednesday that her family members were turned away from a hotel in Fresno, Calif. in the early 1930s due to their last name.

"My relatives had no power to address the discrimination directed at them, but today, an agency I voted to create, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, has

brought the justice needed," Eshoo said, noting the penalties against Citi. "May their shocking behavior be relegated to the dustbin of history and never be forgotten for their fraud and deceit."

Anthony Barsamian, co-chair of the Armenian Assembly of America, called Citi's alleged discrimination "absolutely outrageous."

"I'm just appalled," Barsamian told CNN in a phone interview.

Barsamian, a trust and estate attorney in Massachusetts, said he's been a Citibank customer for 20 years and even keeps client funds at the bank. Now, Barsamian said he is "absolutely" considering ending his business relationship with Citi.

Citi CEO Jane Fraser is scheduled to testify before Congress on December 6 as part of the Senate Banking Committee's big bank oversight hearing.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Church Endowment Fund Appoints Executive Director

NEW YORK — The Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF), now celebrating its 50th anniversary, announced on November 6 the appointment of Lisa Kazanjian as its first executive director.

Gregory Zorthian, chair of ACEF’s Board of Directors, stated, “The need for an executive director was clear. Thanks to the expertise of our professional advisors and Investment Committee and our contributing participants, ACEF has grown from \$1.7 million in 1979 to \$140 million today.”

Kazanjian, who joined ACEF’s board



Lisa Kazanjian

in 2021 and served as its treasurer, will be responsible for managing day-to-day operations and promoting its mission to support those parishes and individuals who choose to create a legacy through long-term investment planning.

She will report to the board chair and work closely with its Executive Committee.

“I am excited about this opportunity, as it enables me not only to apply my background in business development, marketing and finance, but also to give back to the Armenian church and community, which gratefully has enhanced my life in multiple ways, said Kazanjian.

Kazanjian has spent most of her career with non-profit and for-profit healthcare organizations, recently worked in strategic marketing for Epsilon, a Publicis Groupe company. She earned a bachelor’s degree in economics from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania with concentrations in finance and marketing. She is a lifelong member of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church in Wynnewood, Penn.

Zorthian added, “Upon joining our board, Lisa quickly established strong relationships with our team and staff and became an active member of the Executive and Communications Committees. The board and I are confident that her organizational, interpersonal and creative skills will continue to enable her to significantly contribute to ACEF.”

NAASR to Host ‘Ghapama’ Fall-Themed Children’s Program Led by Teni Apelian

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will hold an “ԱԲԳ for Children” program of 2023 on Sunday, November 19, at 3 p.m. in the Shahinian Solarium in NAASR’s Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave.

Led by Teni Apelian, the event will be called “Ghapama,” after the Armenian pumpkin delicacy and will celebrate the autumn with traditional songs and games in Armenian. The event is free to all and children up to age 10 accompanied by an adult are welcome.

Apelian is one of the singers and arrangers in Zulal, the Armenian a cappella trio and collaborator on educational and language projects supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Her foremost passion lies in discovering and sharing the ancient melodies that help us define the Armenian musical character and connect to our roots. As an educator, she taught Armenian folk music at the Hovnanian School in New Jersey and has been a facilitator at Zarmananzan (an Armenian-language immersion program in the French Alps), since its inception.

For more information contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org.



Teni Apelian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian FEMINNO Conference on Women And Innovation Held in San Francisco

FEMINNO, from page 6 welcoming this unique initiative in their Sanyan hall.

“We are delighted with this initiative not only for its unique innovative content, but especially with the courage that this team of Armenian women was able to conceive, develop and implement such an event to bring it to San Francisco,” the speakers said.

Mariam Torosyan, the founder of the Safe YOU platform, also participated as a speaker of FEMINNO from Armenia. And since one of the main directions of the FEMINNO platform is the promotion of women’s participation in innovative fields, through a video address the organizers also made the voice of Artsakh women heard in San Francisco by involving Nina Shahverdyan, a young teacher and blogger who was displaced from Stepanakert, Artsakh.

“In the near future, we will launch a special “digital rebuilding” program for women forcibly displaced from Artsakh, for which the online fundraising continues these days,” said Seda Papoyan.

With the first outgoing conference in San Francisco, the founder of the FEMINNO platform announced the start of a series of satellite conferences, with the help of which it will be possible to create an active network of innovative Armenian and local women, as well as men who support them,



Emma Ohanian, Avni Barman, Nare Avagyan, Seline Karakaya, Lucy Abgaryan

and create bigger results together. FEMINNO 2024 will be held in Armenia on July 27-28, and before then the organizers plan to send at least one more “satellite” to a continent.



Hasmik Hayrapetyan, Alex Boghossian



Mariam Torosyan

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Armenia Artsakh Fund Delivers \$486,000 of Medicines for Artsakh Armenians in Armenia

GLENDAL — The Armenia Artsakh Fund (AAF) in partnership with Direct Relief of Santa Barbara delivered \$486,000 of emergency aid to Artsakh Armenians last week by an air shipment.

This valuable and timely shipment included medicines, medical supplies, emergency medical packs, emergency medical kits and several pallets of hygiene products. The shipped products will help many of the more than 100,000 Armenians of Artsakh who were forced to leave their homes in Artsakh.

Through the years, Direct Relief has donated to AAF tens of millions of dollars of

life saving medicines, medical supplies and equipment for Armenia and Artsakh. In the first 10 months of this year alone, Direct Relief has donated \$27 millions of much needed medicines to Armenia.

“AAF values and appreciates very much this long-standing partnership with Direct Relief,” said Harut Sassounian, President of AAF.

In the past 34 years AAF has delivered to Armenia and Artsakh a total of over \$1 billion worth of humanitarian aid on board 158 airlifts and 2,568 sea containers.

For more information, email: sassoun@pacbell.net.

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ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR

Princeton Armenian Student Vigil for Artsakh Engages Many, Including Princeton President Eisgruber

PRINCETON, from page 6

Armenian Student Clubs at Princeton

There probably have been individual Armenian students at Princeton since the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Some were brought through the efforts of American Protestant missionaries. While little is known of their early history, an organized group called the Armenian Students at Princeton was founded in 1977 (yours truly was one of the founding members). The



Karinne Andonian and Fr. Daniel Karadjian (photo Mona Marrin)

group died out some years later, as members graduated, due to the small overall number of incoming Armenian students at the university.

A new group was founded in 2015 under the current name. Hovnanian said that she

and Yengibaryan “are simply continuing the work of our predecessors. Ararat Gocmen [Princeton Class of] ’17, the former leader and rejuvenator of the Princeton Armenian Society, actively engaged students with field trips to venues like the Hovnanian School in Bergen County.”

For a few years, the group fell into inactivity, as sometimes is the case with small college organizations. However, on the one hand, the recent series of tragic events in Armenia and Artsakh seem to have energized the students. During the 2020 Artsakh war, for example, Arthur Sirkeyan wrote an [opinion piece](#) for the *Daily Princetonian*.

Secondly, Yengibaryan said that his own Class of 2026, with six Armenian students, may have contained the largest number of Armenians admitted in a Princeton class so far. This, and the end of Covid restrictions, also helped increase the level of activities.

Yengibaryan added, “Today, we are proud to have 16 members (12 undergraduate students and 4 graduate students). We have an executive board with appointed positions and we are trying to tackle issues at the university.”

President Eisgruber

Yengibaryan stated that on October 5, he and Hovnanian met with Princeton’s president, Christopher Eisgruber, during his office hours. At that meeting, Hovnanian said, “we had urged him to issue a statement on the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno Karabakh and to address the Armenian Genocide denial deeply rooted in Princeton’s Near Eastern Department.”

According to Yengibaryan, “While he was reluctant to release a statement (though he did release one on Ukraine and Israel),



From left, Princeton Armenian Society co-presidents Katya Hovnanian and Hayk Yengibaryan, with alumni Laurens Ayvazian and Ed Tiryakian



Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber with Princeton Armenian alumni and students (photo Princeton ODUS)



Princeton Armenian Society co-presidents Katya Hovnanian and Hayk Yengibaryan in front of the chapel (photo Princeton ODUS)

he did eventually commit to being at our vigil. We were thankful for his support, and he was there the entire time, lighting a candle and standing front and center. He even made a [LinkedIn](#) post about it shortly afterwards.”

In the post, Eisgruber wrote, “By commemorating and honoring more than 100,000 Armenians who died, suffered, or were displaced by the siege of Nagorno-Karabakh last month, the Society drew attention to a humanitarian crisis that has been overlooked by too many.”

Hovnanian reflected on the significance of Eisgruber’s actions: “For many Armenians at the University and in the surrounding community, President Eisgruber’s presence symbolized a hopeful beginning to reconcile Princeton’s troubling history of conspiratorial denialism. Our students remain vocal, despite often feeling unacknowledged by the university, and I believe this vigil perfectly encapsulated that sentiment.”

As for the future of the Princeton Armenian Society, Yengibaryan declared: “Today, we are continuing the work and trying



Princeton’s President Christopher Eisgruber, center right, speaking with student Yacub Kahkajian at the vigil (photo Princeton ODUS)

to build off the momentum of the event. Armenian studies should be in Ivy League institutions. Our country and culture has such a rich history and people would be interested to learn about it. We were the first country to adopt Christianity and had a powerful empire that students can be interested in. By the end of my time here in May 2026, I want to leave knowing that we have set up the next generation of Armenians at Princeton for success.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

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A benefit concert for the refugee crisis in Armenia supported by the Pan Armenian Council of New England & YerazArt Foundation in partnership with Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Relief Society, Friends of Armenian Culture Society, & Tekeyan Cultural Association together with our parishes & organizations.



Arts & Culture

My Son Goes to War Book Presented at Tekeyan Cultural Assoc. of Armenia

YEREVAN — The presentation of the book *My Son Goes to War*, by Ruben Grigoryan, a well-known businessman, philanthropist, public figure and member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia (TCA-Armenia), took place on October 26 at the Tekeyan Center here.

The book was written in 2021 in Russian, then translated into English and Armenian. The audience watched a video series about the various wars in Artsakh, as well as a clip from an animated film based on the book.

Ruben Mirzakhanyan, the president of TCA-Armenia, spoke about a number of Grigoryan's philanthropic projects and emphasized that he always supported the processes that are important for the country and the people. Mirzakhanyan observed that his articles about social and political topics, just like the book *My Son Is Going to War*, are written from the heart. Mirzakhanyan declared: "He writes in short but powerful sentences, in which there is boundless love for the homeland, the nation, and the people."



The book is a concise story not only of filial and paternal love, but also of all-consuming war, death and the right to life gained by means of the latter. For the hero, war seems to be a scale, on one side of which was the homeland, and on the other, the life of his son, whom he was sending off to war.

Among the descriptions of the events, he exhorts the readers to love the homeland, whose "land is worth as much as the lives of the people living on it."

The book strongly places an emphasis on the type of human being who can guarantee that a person will be alive and unharmed if another type of person appears next to him – the reckless and imprudent type of man who periodically leads to brutal wars. It must also be noted that all these passages are accompanied by descriptions of the beautiful natural scenery of the Armenian homeland.

While they serve as examples of the contrast between man and nature, they place a greater value on the homeland, for which its sons go to war.

see WAR, page 13



Lilit Hakobyan

Showing the "Real" Side Of Dance

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / HANOVER, Germany — Ballet dancer and choreographer Lilit Hakobyan has worked in Germany since 2007. A daughter of Armenian ballet artists, from 1998 to 2006, she studied at the Yerevan School of Dance. In 2006-2007, she performed at the Yerevan Spenidiyan Opera and Ballet Theater ("Gayane," "Don Quixote," "Giselle," "Carmen-suite"). Between 2007 and 2011, she worked at Flensburg Dortmund Ballet, Hof theater, dancing in ballets by Balanchine, Forsythe and Soto. Since 2011, Lilit has been a solo dancer at the Hannover State Theater; she has danced in productions by Marco Goecke, Jiri Kylian, Paul Lightfoot and Sol Leon, Hans van Manen, Medhi Walerski, Adonis Foniadakis, Jörg Mannes, Nadav Zelnor, Goyo Montero and Mario Schröder.



Lilit, a Japanese proverb says "All dancing girls are nineteen years old." Do you also agree?

I mean when you look to a dance performance, perhaps everyone looks 19-year-old, by the amount of energy it comes across, perhaps gives that very young feeling out there. For a while, I have not felt 19.

The male members of your generation's Armenian ballet dancers has been very successful working abroad. How do you explain that the girls were comparably fewer than the men?

There can be two aspects that I can think of. In Europe boys get scholarships easier than girls, so therefore it is easier to get free studies and jobs later. Another aspect, is, I think that as an Armenian girl, it is not that easy to convince your family to leave the country.

George Balanchine said that woman is first and men are consorts in his ballets. "God made men to sing the praises of women. They are not equal to men: They are better." Is he right?

I mean maybe. Maybe that is an old saying. I believe it is not about who is better. But can we make it better together and put aside the male and female?

Of course, we can! You studied with the great masters of Armenian ballet pedagogy. What has each of them given to you?

Silva Hakobjanyan gave me the base, the most important one. Lola Gyurjian gave me doubts and questions, insecurities to make me sure if I really want to choose this profession. Anna Marikyan gave me the answers, gave me inspiration to continue. Maria Divanyan gave me sensibility to feel this art form truly. And her performance on stage inspired me every day as well. She was the teacher that made me understand why I am doing this and why I am here. Armen Grigoryan was my last teacher. He gave me the physicality in dance performance, strengthening and an enormous amount of discipline. Hovhannes Divanyan gave me all of this together; he is the heart of it all and he is the reminder of why I love this art form so much!

And now you are involved in directing. This year you participated for the second time in Armenia's Summit International Dance Festival. Your choreography titled

see DANCE, page 13

Arpa International Film Festival Celebrates 26th Year at Historic Montalbán Theatre

HOLLYWOOD — The Arpa International Film Festival, the longest-running independent film festival in Hollywood, is celebrating its 26th anniversary this year, with its first in-person film festival since the 2020 pandemic on November 18 and 19 at Hollywood's Iconic Ricardo Montalbán Theatre. The festival's longstanding mission has been to feature films cultivating cultural understanding and global empathy.

This year's nominated selections that will be shown in theater will continue to explore socially relevant themes such as diaspora, war, genocide, dual identity, exile, and multi-culturalism. The diverse tapestry of inspiring films to be featured worldwide will inspire our local and worldwide community to connect and advance progressive cinematic art.

The festival's highlight will be the closing night ceremony, free of charge, on November 19, which will have an awards ceremony for the winning filmmakers and Inna Sahakyan, director and producer of Aurora's Sunrise, recipient of the prestigious Armin T Wegner Humanitarian Award.

This year, the festival will have Q&As after screening four films: "The Motel Room," "The Echoes of Kef Time," "The Uncanny" and



Mary Apick

"Carnivore." Guests of the festival, up-and-coming filmmakers, and student filmmakers can attend a free-of-charge exclusive panel discussion on November 19 featuring industry professionals, including Roger Kupelian, Michelle Alexandria, Mary Apick, Micky Levy and Ara Soudjian.

Arpa International Film Festival's virtual event kicked off on October 29 and is streaming over 80 films from 26 countries on Eventive until November 17, free of charge globally.

For tickets and information, www.arpafilmfestival.com.



Ara Soudjian



ARTS & CULTURE



Gorky Masterpiece Sells for \$23 Million

NEW YORK — Arshile Gorky's masterpiece "Charred Beloved I" (1946) was sold on November 9 at Christie's auction house in New York for \$23.4 million. The painting was being sold by David Geffen, who had owned it for 30 years; it had a great provenance, including having been owned by publishing magnate S. I. Newhouse.

Gorky's previous record of \$14 million was set in November 2018 by the 1944 painting "Good Afternoon, Mrs. Lincoln," which was sold as part of the collection of Barney Ebsworth.

Gorky's "Charred Beloved I" emerged as a phoenix-like

response to a devastating studio fire in January 1946. This tragic event consumed not only 20 of Gorky's paintings, but also his cherished books and drawings. Undeterred, Gorky embarked on what would become known as his "ballroom series" on the 17th floor at 1200 Fifth Avenue in New York City. Among the masterpieces born from this period were the four canvases, including the iconic "Charred Beloved I."

The Gorky was part of a Christie's auction of 20th-century art which pulled in nearly \$641 million and set artist records for Richard Diebenkorn, Joan Mitchell and Gorky.

My Son Goes to War Book Presented

WAR, from page 12

The book is a story about the war, the love and pain of a parent and a son, and the homeland, covering a range of human emotions. However, the most important thing is the indifference of people to everything, even to the loss of close ones.

Professor Suren Danielyan observed at the TCA-Armenian event that the truth is revealed through history when we **cannot process the effects of the war**. "The war entered the homeland and disturbed our peace. We were not ready for that war. History once again forced us to think about indifference, to reflect on the evaluation of war with a new perspective, to have new approaches," Danielyan said, adding that the work attests to the closeness of the genres of the novel and the essay.

Writer and public figure Felix Bakhchinyan, speaking at the same event, was of the opinion that for Grigoryan, the 44-day war with its territorial and human losses was a sad occasion instigating reflection on why that tragedy happened. "Evaluations of this global problem would remain abstract if the writer did not show how the war enters every home and destroys it from the inside and out. The tragedy of war, its deadly breath, is visible and palpable on every page. The writer's finger is constantly on the bleeding wound, but it does not have the purpose of merely localizing the war. As gruesome as the war scenes are, war is not all about the sound of guns or even dying soldiers. War has its wonderful poetry, its spirituality, without which no war has been won yet," said Bakhchinyan. Quoting writer Mark Aren, Bakhchinyan suggested the author should write a continuation of this story, titled *My Son Returned*.

According to Grigoryan, the book presentation provided an opportunity to once again think about and understand what happened to us, and to break a great evil that exists in us, which is the cause of the current misfortunes of the people: it is called indifference. "Indifference has settled in us in such a way that we don't even notice deaths in the way we should treat these phenomena. This story is a question and an answer as to how to act when you have lost or may lose the most precious thing and find yourself in the midst of people's indifference. What path will you choose: to go and protect your dignity, your identity, your right to be a human being, or to remain in the unknown and perish?" Grigoryan noted. He noted with regret that God tried to teach humanity a lesson because God was unable to bring it to its senses. Humanity has not matured enough to understand that it is not necessary to destroy its own kind, intelligent creatures.

Grigoryan was born on December 5, 1953 in Yerevan. From 1970 to 1975, he studied at Yerevan's Karl Marx Polytechnic Institute, majoring in radio engineering. In 2002, he graduated from the Academy of State Administration, defending a dissertation on "The Motivational Mechanism of Small Enterprise Management." **He is a candidate in the field of economy.**

Since 1990, he has been the president of one of Moscow's leading investment and construction companies, called Rutsog (PVLIOГ) Holding. This company stands out for the implementation of charitable projects, particularly in the field of church construction. Over the years, Grigoryan provided financial support for the renovation work of **many** schools and kindergartens. In 2015, he founded the Museum of Armenian National Culture in Moscow, which is the largest museum project implemented outside the borders of Armenia. In 2006, Grigoryan was awarded the title of Honored Builder of Russia.

Lilit Hakobyan: Showing the "Real" Side of Dance

DANCE, from page 12

"Heartless" with the Petersburg Kannon Dance artists was the final and major part of the festival. We all were just fascinated by your usage of the movements unusual for contemporary dance and the nerve and drive of the whole performance! What inspired this outstanding piece?

First of all, thank you very much for your words! It was an honor for me show my piece to the Armenian audience.

The inspiration for "Heartless" came when I was sitting in a café on the beach in Greece. It was very calm and quiet. I was reading *Fragility of Facts* book of essays by Hannah Arndt, having so different dynamic from the calmness around me. When

I arrived in Petersburg, I knew I am going to make these essays into a dance piece, no matter how hard it would be, to turn an essay to a dance performance.

Inspiration itself can come in very different forms. But it can also be as simple as a good book, a cup of good coffee, but in this case, I felt extremely inspired in the city of Petersburg with the really amazing dancers of the Kannon dance company.

Agnes de Mille once said: "Modern dancers give a sinister portent about our times." Do you agree?

Well, and it continues by saying "The dancers don't even look at one another, they are just a lot of isolated individuals jiggling in a kind of self-hypnosis and dancing with others only to remind themselves that we

are not alone in this world." But when did she say this? In 1960s? I do not agree, at least in the world I create, it is not my intention. And maybe because modern dance shows the "real" side of the dance, without faking anything. Does it come across like a sinister portent? When you see the raw reality, it is always a bit scary, right?

Well, right... Have you ever fulfilled a project that can be called Armenian?

No, I have not! But I choreographed a little dance film called "Sleep Easy" that is inspired by some movements from Armenian folk dances and it was dedicated to our soldiers. I think making a good Armenian project or a dance piece its really, really hard; it is a very fragile topic that I am afraid to touch it yet...



ARTS & CULTURE

Armenian American Museum Hosts LA Philharmonic Reception

GLENDALE — The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California hosted a special reception at Walt Disney Concert Hall in collaboration with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and its presentation of Dudamel Leads Khachaturian featuring Composer Aram Khachaturian's

internationally acclaimed and timeless musical compositions.

"It has been a wonderful evening of arts, culture, and community on a grand stage," stated Board of Governors Member Margaret Mgrublian during her welcoming remarks. "The event serves as a reminder

of how iconic venues such as the Walt Disney Concert Hall and soon-to-be Armenian American Museum play an important role in the work of cultural preservation and celebration."

The Los Angeles Philharmonic is an internationally renowned orchestra that harnesses the transformative power of live music to build

community, foster intellectual and artistic growth, and nurture the creative spirit. During the moving performance, Director Gustavo Dudamel led an exploration of Aram Khachaturian's distinct voice first with a suite from his ballet Spartacus featuring the stirring Adagio followed by the intense and heroic Piano Concerto with the help of Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

The museum hosted a special reception at the Walt Disney Concert Hall Founders Room following the musical performance. Attendees included Naming Opportunities,

Benefactors, and Legacy Council donors of the museum. The event was sponsored by longtime supporters of the museum.

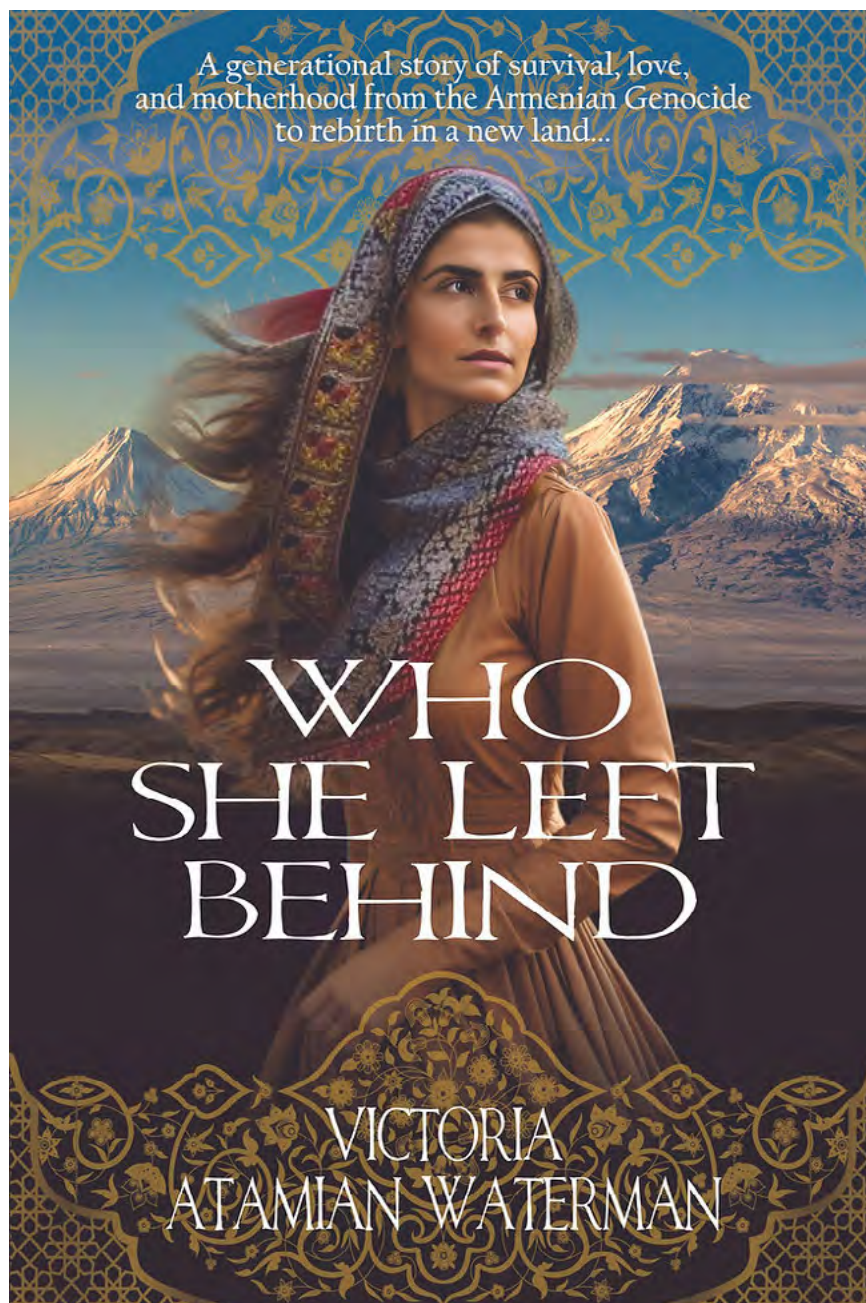
"We are excited to share that the Armenian American Museum will be rising to the horizon early next year with the installation of the museum's structural steel," announced Executive Chairman Berdj Karapetian to a roaring applause. "We are grateful to our generous donors for supporting the community's vision for a landmark center that will be our gift to future generations."



Walt Disney Concert Hall



Los Angeles Philharmonic Reception Group Photo, from left, Executive Vice Chairman Zaven Kazazian, Major Gifts Director Mary Khayat, Board of Governors Member Margaret Mgrublian, Board of Trustees Co-Treasurer Talin Yacoubian, Board of Trustees Member Dr. Nazareth Darakjian and Executive Chairman Berdj Karapetian Executive Director Shant Sahakian



WATERTOWN — Author Victoria Atamian Waterman, pictured above, will speak about her new book, *Who She Left Behind*, at a program with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Stephen Kurkjian, on Tuesday, December 12, at 6 pm.

The program, co-sponsored by the Armenian Museum of America and Watertown Free Public Library, will take place at the Watertown Free Public Library, 123 Main St.

The novel is a work of historical fiction based on Waterman's family history, spanning multiple generations, from the final days of the Ottoman Empire to Armenian neighborhoods in Rhode Island and Massachusetts in the 1990s.

Light refreshments will be served and books will be available for purchase.

Space is limited and registration is required at <https://reservations.watertownlib.org/evening-victoria-atamian-waterman-who-she-left-behind>.



National Philharmonic Orchestra of Armenia on International Tour in Greece, US and Canada

NEW YORK — The National Philharmonic Orchestra of Armenia, under the leadership of artistic director and chief conductor Eduard Topchjan, will perform concerts in Greece, USA and Canada.

The guest performances are dedicated to the 120th anniversary of Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian and are supported by the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports.

The concerts will take place in the following prestigious concert halls: November 12 at Megaron Concert Hall in Athens, November 13 at Thessaloniki Concert Hall, November 15 at Carnegie Hall in New York, November 17 at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, November 19 at the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, at La Maison Symphonique, November 21 at Boston Symphony Hall. The program includes Aram Khachaturian's Violin Concerto, excerpts from the Spartacus ballet, and Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 3 and Symphony No. 2.

The soloists of the concerts are world-renowned Armenian musicians pianist Sergey Babayan and violinists Sergey Khachaturian and Anush Nikoghosyan,

with conductor Topchjan.

The concert to be held on November 21 at Boston's Symphony Hall is a charity concert, the proceeds of which will be used as humanitarian aid to support Armenians forcibly displaced from Nagorno Karabakh as a result of the military aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan. The supporters of the concert are Pan Armenian Council of New England, AGBU New England District, Armenian Relief Society, Friends of Armenian Cultural Society, YerazArt Foundation and the Tekeyan Cultural Association. The concerts to be held in Greece are supported by the RA Embassy in Greece.

The National Philharmonic Orchestra of Armenia was founded in 1925. This almost 100-year-old orchestra has a rich musical tradition and history. It has performed with many famous conductors and musicians in various prestigious concert halls of the world. Since 2000, the orchestra's artistic director and chief conductor has been Eduard Topchjan, under whom the orchestra has recorded a high level of performance and received high praise from the audience and music critics everywhere.





ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Za'atar (Thyme) Vegan Cookies by Wafa Shami (Photos and recipes courtesy of Wafa Shami)

Wafa Shami: Za'atar Bread Cheese Balls

This recipe for Za'atar Bread Cheese Balls comes from the kitchen of the Palestinian author and blogger Wafa Shami. Za'atar is a culinary herb or family of herbs. It is also the name of a savory spice mixture that includes the herb along with wild oregano, marjoram or thyme, cumin, coriander, toasted sesame seeds, dried sumac, often salt, as well as other spices. If you've never tried this Middle Eastern spice blend, get ready to fall in love. It has a nutty, earthy and tangy flavor. It is delicious on breads, dips, and much more.

For Palestinians, za'atar has historical significance; some consider its presence to be a sign of a Palestinian home. For Palestinian refugees, plants and foods such as za'atar also serve as signifiers of the house, village, and region from which they hailed. "Za'atar is an herb used in many recipes in Palestine. One of the most popular is the dried ground za'atar mixed with spices and sesame and dipped in bread with olive oil, or sprinkled over chicken, beef, lamb, fish, or salads," says Shami. "The herb is a rich source of important vitamins such as B-complex vitamins, beta carotene, vitamin A, vitamin K, vitamin E, vitamin C and folic acid. It is worth mentioning that studies have shown that za'atar may have great health benefits for memory and the brain."

"Spring is the za'atar season, and that is when the fresh za'atar recipes appear. I love these bread balls stuffed with white cheese, they can be made ahead of time and stored in the freezer. They are light, filling, and can be a pleasing side dish for any gathering, or a snack for the kids, my son really loves them," she adds. "Za'atar is comfort food and celebrated in Palestine and across the Middle East. For example, for 'Manakeesh' (za'atar pizza), combine equal amounts of olive oil and za'atar, and spread on bread and toast or on a pizza crust and bake. Top with cheese if desired. It is perfect for sprinkling on pasta, pizza and other foods."

According to the Love & Lemons food blog, once you have za'atar on hand, there are many ways to use it, such as:

- * Stir it into olive oil to make a dip for pita or crusty bread as an easy, flavorful appetizer.

- * Sprinkle it over <https://www.loveandlemons.com/hummus-recipe/> hummus, baba ganoush, or white bean dip topped with a drizzle of olive oil. (Don't forget the fresh veggies or pita for dipping.)

- * Toss it with roasted vegetables like potatoes, fennel, or cauliflower.

- * Use it to dress up on grilled vegetable kebabs or grilled zucchini.

- * Sprinkle it over homemade focaccia before it goes in the oven.
- * Toss it with quinoa, bulgur, couscous, or rice and olive oil for an easy side dish.
- * Sprinkle it over sliced tomatoes or cucumbers for a fresh side dish or snack.
- * Dust it onto avocado toast.
- * Use it to punch up simple hardboiled eggs or other egg dishes.
- * Toss it with crispy roasted chickpeas for a healthy snack.

Shami adds, "With this recipe, if fresh za'atar leaves are not available, dried ones should work just as well. I store dried za'atar leaves in my refrigerator and keep them throughout the year. If you are using the fresh ones, chop them lightly. And all you need is about 3/4 to 1 cup of the za'atar. As for the type of cheese, I like to use cheese that is lightly salted, what I use here is Nabulsi Arabic cheese, which can be found at any grocery store that sells Middle Eastern foods and spices. Since this cheese is more salty than I'd like, I soak it in water for about an hour to remove some of the salt. Then I chop it into squares."

INGREDIENTS:

- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups warm water
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons instant yeast
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 3/4-1 cup za'atar leaves, either dried or fresh
- White cheese, preferable lightly salted, cut in squares

PREPARATION:

In a large bowl, mix together 2 cups of flour, 2 cups of water, salt, sugar, and yeast. Cover and let it rest for 10 minutes. The mix should rise during this time.

Add the remaining 3 cups of flour and the oil. Knead the dough until you have a consistent dough that you can work with. Cover and let it rest for 20-30 minutes. Add the za'atar to the dough, and mix well to combine.

Take a small piece of dough, place the cheese in the middle, and round altogether. Place on greased baking sheets. Continue with the same process until you're done with the dough and the cheese. Preheat the oven to 375 F and bake for about 20 minutes.

This recipe makes about 40-42 small cheese balls. They can be stored in resealable plastic freezer bags or freezer containers for up to 2 months.

For this recipe, see:

<https://palestineinadish.com/category/recipes/appetizer-and-mezze/>

Also see:

Wafa's Mana'eesh Za'atar at:

<https://palestineinadish.com/recipes/manaeesh-zaatar/>

Wafa's Za'atar (Thyme) Vegan Cookies at:

<https://palestineinadish.com/recipes/zatar-cookies/>

Wafa Shami was born and raised in Ramallah, Palestine. She moved to the United States to pursue higher education and graduated with a Master's degree in International Studies. Since moving to the United States, Wafa has maintained her engagement in Middle Eastern issues as a volunteer. After her son was born she was inspired to write children's storybooks based on her childhood memories. Her stories, *Easter in Ramallah* and *Olive Harvest in Palestine* were published in the last few years. Besides being busy raising her son, Wafa, who lives in California, has a passion for cooking and writes a food blog, in which she shares her family's recipes. Visit her blog at www.palestineinadish.com and follow her on social media @palestineinadish for delicious recipes.

Follow Shami on Instagram or Facebook at "Palestine In A Dish," and watch for the new projects she is currently working on.

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ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

THE ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK PROGRAMS

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 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 Atinjian 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

NOVEMBER 21 — The Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra will appear in a special benefit concert in Boston. Tickets to benefit the ongoing relief efforts for the displaced people of Artsakh. KHACHATURIAN 120th & RACHMANINOFF 150th - A Tribute. Eduard Topchjan, conductor, Sergei Babayan, piano. 8:00 PM. Symphony Hall, Boston. TICKETS: <https://www.bso.org/events/armenian-philharmonic-2023> or call Symphony Hall Box Office 617-266-1200.

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 Donatelle 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.

DECEMBER 4 — Monday, Saint James Men's Club Dinner and Fellowship Gathering. Guest Speakers, Dr. Anna Ohanyan Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Stonehill College. She is also a Non-resident Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace/Russia and Eurasia Program., also Attorney Anthony Barsamian, Co-Chair of the Armenian Assembly of America's Board of Trustees. Anthony just returned from a trip to Armenia. The topic will be "The Fall of Artsakh, the forced displacement of Armenians, and its implications in the South Caucasus Region." Losh Kebab and Kheyma Dinner 6:15 pm Mezza and social / 7:00pm Dinner \$20 per person. All our Welcome. 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown.

DECEMBER 12 — Author Victoria Atamian Waterman will present her new book, Who She Left Behind, at a talk with Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist Stephen Kurkjian, co-sponsored by the Armenian Museum of America and Watertown Free Public Library. 6 p.m. Tuesday, Watertown Free Public Library, Watertown Savings Bank Room, 123 Main St., Watertown. Registration required at <https://reservations.watertownlib.org/evening-victoria-atamian-waterman-who-she-left-behind>

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



Armenian-American Musicians Join Together For Concert to Benefit Artsakh Refugees

BOSTON — Local musicians are coming together at a concert titled "The Mountains Remember: Benefit Concert for Artsakh Refugees," on Wednesday, November 22, at 8 p.m., at the Square Root, 2 Corinth St., Roslindale.

The concert is co-sponsored by Zoravik Activist Collective.

The concert will feature 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 Donatelle Jazz Quartet (Tony Donatelle - trumpet, Grigori Balasanyan - piano, Roy Zilbersher - bass, Koren Berkovich - drums).

Admission is \$20 at the door, \$10 students.

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 the definition of what it means to make Armenian music.

On September 19, after a 9-month blockade, Azerbaijan attacked the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh. More than 100,000 Armenians were forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands. Proceeds from the show will be donated to Tufenkian Artsakh Refugee Relief- providing housing, education, and mental health support for the refugees.

The musicians who will perform on November 22



COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is
published weekly, except two weeks in
July and the first week of the year, by:
Baikar Association, Inc.

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02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.A.	\$80 one year
Canada	\$125 one year
Other Countries	\$200 one year

© 2014 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston,
MA and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

**Postmaster: Send address
changes to The Armenian
Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount
Auburn St.,
Watertown, MA 02472**

**Other than the Editorial, views
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Conundrum of Restoration of Communications In the South Caucasus

By **Benyamin Poghosyan***Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

The second Nagorno Karabakh War reinvigorated discussions about restoring communications in the South Caucasus. Article 9 of the November 10, 2020, trilateral statement articulated the vision of open communications between Armenia and Azerbaijan, emphasizing the routes connecting the western regions of Azerbaijan with the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic and envisaging a role for Russian border troops. The idea of restoration of communications as a part of an Armenia-Azerbaijan settlement was at the cornerstone of negotiations held since the end of the first Nagorno Karabakh war in the early 1990s, and all options elaborated by the OSCE Minsk Group contained some reference to that issue. The trilateral statement seemed to bring some clarity, and two months later, another statement was signed in Moscow to establish an Armenia-Azerbaijan-Russia trilateral commission chaired by deputy prime ministers to elaborate the technical details.

However, the text of the November 10, 2020, statement was vague enough to open a path for different interpretations and misinterpretations. It was probably done deliberately to create “strategic ambiguity,” as usual with these types of documents. Immediately after the document’s signature, Azerbaijan pushed forward the notion of the “Zangezur corridor,” which was to connect Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan (Nakhichevan) via Syunik Province of Armenia. Armenia pushed back against the term “corridor,” stating that only one corridor was mentioned in November 10, 2020, statement, the “Lachin corridor,” which was to connect Armenia with Nagorno Karabakh.

In December 2021, Azerbaijan clarified its position, arguing that there was no border and customs control along the Lachin

border troops in the process of opening up routes from Azerbaijan to Nakhijevan via Armenia. According to the November 10, 2020, trilateral statement, all regional economic and transport connections shall be unblocked. The Republic of Armenia shall guarantee the security of transport connections between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic in order to arrange unobstructed movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo in both directions. The Border Guard Service of the Russian Federal Security Service shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections. As mentioned earlier, the language is vague and can be interpreted differently. However, one thing is clear: according to the statement, the Russian Border Guard Service should have a role in the process.

Meanwhile, starting from mid-2022, and especially in 2023, the Armenian government started to claim that Russia should not have any role in opening up routes in Armenia to connect Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan. A few days ago, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a special statement, arguing that Armenia has never, in any document, agreed to any limitation of its sovereignty, and control of a third country cannot be established over any part of its sovereign territory. Recently, a special department was created within the National Security Service of Armenia to ensure the safety of communications and the safe passage of goods, cargo, vehicles, and people.

It is challenging to argue if the sentence in the November 10 trilateral statement, “The Border Guard Service of the Russian Federal Security Service shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections,” meant Armenia’s agreement to allow Russia to control part of Armenian sovereign territory, which now Armenia denies. However, it is also impossible to argue that there are no mentions of the Russian Border

AFTER NO ARMENIANS WERE LEFT IN NAGORNO
KARABAKH AND THE LACHIN CORRIDOR CEASED TO EXIST,
IT SEEMED THAT AZERBAIJAN SHOULD AGREE TO THE
EXISTENCE OF ARMENIAN BORDER AND CUSTOMS
CONTROLS IN THE ROUTES VIA THE SYUNIK REGION.

corridor, so there should be no border and customs control in the “Zangezur corridor.” Otherwise, Azerbaijan threatened to establish border and customs control along the Lachin corridor. Armenia rejected these claims, saying there could be no parallels between the Lachin corridor and routes connecting Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan via Syunik. The debates continued alongside the work of the Trilateral Commission. According to many leakages, the negotiating sides made progress in elaborating the modalities of the functioning routes between Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan via Armenia, emphasizing launching the Horadiz-Yeraskh railway first. The Armenian government even created three checkpoints along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border to facilitate the passage of cars from Azerbaijan to Nakhijevan via Armenia.

However, it seemed that Azerbaijan did not want to decouple the functioning of the Lachin corridor from opening routes via Armenia and continued to argue that these two routes should have the same modalities. Then Azerbaijan established a checkpoint along the Lachin corridor in April 2023, and in September 2023, launched a military offensive in Nagorno Karabakh, forcing the Nagorno Karabakh Republic’s president to sign a decree on the dissolution of the Republic by the end of 2023 and committing a de facto ethnic cleansing of Armenians, forcing all of them to leave Nagorno Karabakh.

However, while publicly acknowledging Armenia’s sovereignty over Syunik and rejecting any intention to use force to open the corridor via Armenia to Nakhijevan, Azerbaijan now claims that Armenia is not able to ensure the safety of Azerbaijanis who will pass via Armenia and “additional guarantees are needed.” This term is vague enough for interpretation and allows Azerbaijan to manipulate the situation.

Another issue of contention is the involvement of Russian

Guard Service playing a role in restoring communications. Meanwhile, there are concerns in Russia that by claiming that Armenia will never agree to any restriction on its sovereign territory, Yerevan wants to avoid providing any role for Russian border troops, thus effectively amending the meaning of Article 9 of the trilateral statement. Russia also has concerns that Armenia is doing so under the advice of the US and the EU, which want to reduce Russian influence in the region, and Russia believes that at the end of the day, Russian involvement in the process of securing/controlling routes in Armenia will be replaced by Western involvement/control.

Thus, three years after the end of the second Nagorno Karabakh War and two months after the forced deportation of all Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh, there is a lack of clarity on the future of the restoration of communications in the region. Azerbaijan speaks about the necessity “to provide special guarantees for Azerbaijanis who will travel via Armenia.” It argues that Armenia cannot provide those guarantees without elaborating further on what it means from the Azerbaijani perspective and how and by what country these guarantees can be provided. Armenia and Russia are arguing regarding the role of Russian border troops in the process. Meanwhile, as peace negotiations are effectively stalled, the issue of communications, alongside “enclaves,” can be a pretext for Azerbaijan to launch new offensives against Armenia in spring to autumn 2024.

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



LETTERS

Where Is Justice for Karabakh?

To the Editor:

Would you like to interview our fighters from Shahumyan? Asked me the *mamig* sitting at the desk on our floor in Hotel Armenia.

“Shahumyan?” “Where is Shahumyan?” I asked her. “You don’t know? They will tell you all about it. Let me call them to come,” she said without waiting for my reply.

It was March 1990. I was in Armenia as guests invited to celebrate International Women’s Day and to observe first hand and report back to the community on the December 1988 devastating earthquake in Armenia.

My two colleagues and I exuberant but with some reservation flew to Yerevan. Although I had been there before, I knew this time would be different. The 1988 earthquake in Armenia and the pogroms against the Armenians in Baku and Sumgait in Azerbaijan during the same year and the resulting refugee crisis had shaken the whole Armenian world. We did not know what we would encounter.

It was three o’clock in the morning when we arrived at the Marriott — then known as Hotel Armenia — in the center of Yerevan.

My lodging was a small, dimly-lit but neat single bedroom in the second building at the back of the main hotel, overlooking some construction across the road.

We spent the next day with our hosts who took us to Gyumri (Leninakan) and Spitak where the earthquake had struck. The scenes were catastrophic and our mood was somber as we strode back into the hotel lobby that evening for dinner.

Suddenly a great commotion took place. A group of ten or twelve men dressed in khaki uniforms hastily entered the hotel and headed towards the dining room across from where we were standing. A few minutes later the loud music that was playing there instantly stopped. The men came out and headed back to their car parked outside. All the bystanders in the lobby were startled. What was happening?

The uniformed men obliged and told us that two young border guards were shot dead during skirmishes on the border with Azerbaijan. They were going to bring their bodies to the Opera square in Yerevan the next day.

The hotel lobby went quiet. We were all alarmed. The people in the dining room started exiting the hall. We were totally unprepared for this. We were speechless. Fear overwhelmed us. What is going on? What on earth is happening?

Gathering our strength, we decided to go to the Opera Square the next day.

In the morning one of my colleagues, the late Alice Levonian and I walked to Opera Square carrying my hefty video camera. The square was already packed with people. We felt we had arrived too late, and that we had no chance to see anything up close. However, before we could decide what to do, a crack opened up in the crowd, everyone pushed aside and urged us to go forward. We were ushered through the masses and the people promptly helped us on to a platform on the side of the Statue of Alexander Spendiaryan in the middle of the square! We realized then, that as the public noticed a video camera in our hands they wanted to make sure that the whole thing is recorded for the outside world to see.

A crowd 100,000-strong had gathered at the square that morning, mourning the death of those two young soldiers.

Our hearts heavy and overcome by emotions we returned to our hotel. The *mamig* whose job was to check on the hotel guests, asked if we would like to interview the Shahumyantzi’s.

We were not journalists. We were three ladies from far away Australia who happened to be in Armenia to take some notes about the earthquake. We had little knowledge of Karabakh and knew nothing about Shahumyan.

We were taken by surprise. Where was Shahumyan anyway? Having witnessed the previous day’s events and the heart wrenching funeral on the day, we accepted the challenge. It seemed our video camera was doing a great job.

Promptly we were in my room frantically setting up an ad-hoc interview room. Alice had the job of holding the camera and Silva Kebourian, my other colleague, held the makeshift light we borrowed from the *mamig* who obliged and brought it from the store room.

We certainly did not have time to prepare questions.

Instantly, two well-dressed gentlemen with grim faces showed up at the door. They came in and sat down.

We need not have worried about the questions to ask, as soon as we started the video running, they started telling us their story.

We heard what had happened and how it all had begun. The Azeri Omon forces, without any warning, had raided the Shahumyan Council Chambers in January of that year and taken all 12 members hostage.

At the same time, the Omon soldiers had started the attack on the town. The citizens immediately organized a defense, protecting the civilian population who were in mortal danger.

This group of ex-Soviet officers was able to free the hostages and after fighting for over a month, the Azeris had retreated. This had stopped the attack for the time being.

However, they were troubled that they would suffer the same fate as the Baku and Sumgait Armenians if they did not receive any help. They added, “The Armenians can no longer live side by side with the Azeris.”

This was all too much for our thoughts to grasp. After the interview they asked if we would like to attend a rally where citizens of Getashen and Martunashen were gathering to discuss the fate of their provinces.

We knew we were caught up in a whirlwind and that it was crucial to register the events unfolding before our eyes.

The days ahead were solemn and hard to bear. With our visits to the devastated zones and seeing people stunned by the enormity of their losses as well as the tremendous pressure of an impending war with Azerbaijan took most of our moments.

The situation was fluid. The terrible pogroms against the Armenians in Sumgait in February 1988 was still fresh in our minds. Following the Soviet Union’s new policy of Glasnost (openness), Nagorno Karabakh Armenians demanded secession from Azerbaijani rule and a subsequent re-unification with Armenia. This started a chain of events that saw the massacres of the Armenians in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku. The Azerbaijani insurgence resulted in massacres and thousands of Armenians fleeing Sumgait, Azerbaijan.

Later, in January 1990, a seven-day pogrom broke out against Armenian civilians in Baku, during which Armenians were beaten, murdered and expelled from the city. Seven hundred people were killed or disappeared, historical Armenian settlements were devastated and plundered, rendering the 300,000-strong Armenian population to flee the country. On top of this, more than 25,000 souls had perished from the earthquake in Armenia.

A couple of days later, we were again in the midst of a massive crowd, this time at

the foot of the Mother Armenia statue in Yerevan, listening to the concerns of the displaced people of Getashen and Martunashen, who had just lost their homes and lands, forcefully evicted by the Azeris in the winter of that year.

The concerns of the Shahumyan Armenians were validated. As we returned home, to Australia, a few months later in the spring/summer of 1991, we heard about Operation Ring started by the USSR.

Mikhail Gorbachev ordered Operation Ring in which the Soviet Red Army and Azerbaijani Omon forces surrounded Armenian villages in Shahumyan. The operation involved ground troops, military, armored vehicles and artillery. 17,000 Armenians living in Shahumyan’s 23 villages fled the region not to fall into the same fate as the Armenians of Baku and Sumgait. The town of Shahumyan was totally evacuated, the church was desecrated. Armenian homes taken over by Azerbaijanis.

All this was the pre-cursor of a ground offensive that Azerbaijan raised against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian autonomous region within Azerbaijan. A full-fledged war that begun in 1992 and ended with the Armenians liberating their long awaited homeland, Artsakh in 1994.

However, after 30 years of negotiations with the mediation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, neither the status of Artsakh nor a border demarcation came to fruition. The international community failed to take into consideration the thousands of years of documented historical ev-

idence of Armenian presence and rule over that territory. Moreover, not even the legal agreement made by the Declaration of June 12, 1921 by the National Council of Azerbaijan SSR, “proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh an integral part of the Armenian SSR” was taken to account, an agreement that was quickly revoked by the Russian SSR and handed over to Azerbaijan.

Consequently Artsakh faced another war of attrition, the now infamous 44 days War in 2020.

This time, the enemy used every conceivable means, including horrendous banned weapons, foreign mercenaries, drones with poisonous phosphorus, and massive atrocities that constitute war crimes to achieve its goal.

It was not long before Azerbaijan imposed a total blockade on the citizens of Artsakh.

The pleas of the Armenian communities around the world went unheeded by the international players.

Thus on September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan unleashed a massive attack and relentlessly bombarded the territory for 24 hours straight.

The Armenian government of the independent state of Artsakh had no choice but to unconditionally surrender.

The Artsakhtsis, having suffered nine months of starvation and oppression due to the blockade, knew very well that if they remained, they would suffer the same fate as their compatriots in Baku, Sumgait, Shahumyan, Getashen, Martunashen. There was no way they could trust the Azeri occupiers.

see JUSTICE, page 20

And the Oscar Goes to....

To the Editor:

My prediction? “Amerikatsi” will win a couple of Oscar and Golden Globe nominations and may even get an Oscar for a beautifully unfolding storyline. It’s a story that needed to be told, of pain and suffering that has a universal resonance to it, for Jews and Arabs alike, Koreans to Latin Americans, for the millions of people displaced by wars and threats of genocide.

A superb cinematographic production, in the same league as another epic movie of the same vein, the “Reds.” And with an excellent cast and acting, starting with a tour de force performance by Michael Goorjian, my favorite Narine Grigoryan, of course Hovik Keuckerman, and “Dmitry” Mikhail Turkin, his acting probably one of the best “evil” guys in recent memory.

The release of “Amerikatsi,” also in a remarkable good fortune, is amazingly timely. It so happens that the political winds are in the right direction, I believe the correct term would be “Conjuncture,” for this movie to be embraced by Hollywood and the Golden Globe jurists. Consider that the Russians are again the bad guys, Cold War is colder than ever with no warming in sight, Armenia has gained the moral high ground in its wars with Azerbaijan, and there appears to be some guilt with the West for again letting Armenians down, not too much guilt by the way, just enough that, if there was a close call between several competing movies, “Amerikatsi” would be favored.

If a movie like “Banshees of Inisherin,” a mediocre movie at best, can get nine Oscar nominations by a jury clearly sympathetic to Ireland, with a swipe at the “colonizer” British who don’t get nominated for anything, “Amerikatsi,” with a jury also not too happy with the “invader” Russians has a good chance of collecting a few too. On a side note, the Irish, a great people and rulers of the literary world, are certainly ca-

pable of making great movies as well, and by their own admission, “Inisherin” wasn’t one of them.

Getting back to the “Amerikatsi” and its cast of characters, some personal observations: While the cruel, duplicitous Russian husband will certainly play well with the Western audience, the contrast between the villainous husband and the virtuous purity of his wife, Sona, appeared to me overplayed. Such black and white contrast of good versus evil appears to be too simplistic for such a complicated period in Soviet Armenian history. Moreover, The Russian Party Officer ordering Tigran, the painter turned guard, to beat Charlie mercilessly also appeared to elicit audiences hatred of Russians, where as he could easily have been a fellow Armenian. Finally, the eternal optimism of Charlie, an American caught up in such harrowing conditions.... none of that brooding Dostoyevskian defeated man cursing his fate, no Solzhenitsyn lamenting the irredeemable treachery of his people, in the end, an overall feel good movie, which is probably what we Armenians need right now.

And on a final note, I Googled the 1940s postwar condition of Soviet Armenia to find out what else was going on other than the repatriation saga. Here are a few things: the Armenian Academy of Sciences was established in 1943, Victor Hampartzhumyan had started building the Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory, Aram Khachatryan had already composed the score to the ballet “Gayane” in 1943, while Anastas Mikoyan was one of the most powerful rulers of the entire Soviet Union, and his brother, Ardem, was designing the legendary MIG jets....

Remarkable, isn’t it? Can’t think of an equivalent period anywhere or anytime in the recent history of the Armenians.

Garos Gumusyan
New York



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

After Scrutinizing NYC Mayor's Campaign, FBI is Delving into his Links to Turkey

The FBI has now expanded its investigation of the alleged illegal fundraising links between New York City Mayor Eric Adams' campaign and Turkish officials and

individuals.

I reported last week that the FBI had raided the home of the mayor's campaign fundraiser, seizing three iPhones, two computers and various files. Boyd Johnson, an attorney retained by Adams, said that after the raid, "it was discovered that an individual had recently acted improperly."

Since then, the FBI unexpectedly stopped the Mayor in the street and took his two cellphones and iPad, after obtaining a search warrant from the court. The FBI copied the contents of his electronic devices and returned them to the mayor. Adams cancelled a planned trip to Puerto Rico to attend an important political conference.

There are three significant aspects to this latest development:

1) The Federal government is getting closer to investigating the personal links between the mayor and Turkish officials and individuals who may have made illegal contributions to his political campaign.

2) In order to obtain a search warrant from the court, the FBI had to present to the judge credible evidence of possible wrongdoing by the Mayor or his campaign. A similar warrant was obtained from court before searching the home of the mayor's fundraiser last week.

3) The reason the mayor was unexpectedly stopped in the street to take his electronic devices was to prevent him from having the opportunity to delete or alter information on his devices.

The *New York Times* reported on November 12, 2023, that the FBI is "examining whether Adams cleared Red Tape for the Turkish government." According to the news report, "after winning the 2021 Democratic Mayoral primary, Eric Adams successfully pressed [New York] city officials to allow the opening of a Manhattan high-rise building housing the Turkish Consulate."

The *New York Times* revealed that "the Federal authorities are investigating whether Mayor Eric Adams weeks before his election two years ago, pressured New York Fire Department officials to sign off on the Turkish government's new high-rise consulate in Manhattan despite safety concerns with the building, three people with knowledge of the matter said."

The *New York Times* added: "After winning the Democratic mayoral primary in July, Adams contacted then-Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro in late summer 2021 and urged him to allow the Turkish government to occupy the

building at least on a temporary basis. The building had yet to open because fire officials had cited safety issues and declined to sign off on its occupancy, the people said.... The building is still operating under a temporary certificate of occupancy, records show."

The Mayor's intervention made it possible for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan "to preside over the grand opening of the \$300 million, 35-story tower on his September 2021 visit to New York for the U.N. General Assembly, despite numerous flaws in its fire safety system, according to the people familiar with the matter and city records," according to the *New York Times*.

"The federal criminal inquiry has focused at least in part on whether Adams' 2021 campaign conspired with the Turkish government, including its consulate general in New York, to illegally funnel foreign money into its coffers, according to a search warrant obtained by the *New York Times* for an F.B.I. search this month of the home of the mayor's chief fund-raiser.... Adams' ties to the Turkish government and community stretch back years. As Brooklyn borough president, he actively wooed wealthy members of the Turkish community in south Brooklyn. In August 2015, the Turkish consulate in New York paid for Adams' airfare, hotel and ground transportation for a trip to Turkey, according to financial disclosure records. There, Adams signed a sister-city agreement with Istanbul's Uskudar municipality, one of several he executed with foreign cities he traveled to as borough president. He also visited Bahcesehir University, founded by the same Turkish philanthropist who founded Bay Atlantic University in Washington, D.C.," the *New York Times* reported.

Furthermore, the FBI is investigating "the role of KSK Construction, a Brooklyn building company owned by Turkish immigrants that organized a fund-raising event for Adams on May 7, 2021. On that day, 48 donors, including the company's owners, employees and their families, along with others in the construction and real estate industries, donated \$43,600, Adams' campaign reports show. Those contributions enabled him to obtain another \$48,000 in public matching funds for a total of nearly \$92,000," according to the *New York Times*.

Three American members of the board of the Turken Foundation, which was founded by Bilal Erdogan, the son of President Erdogan, donated \$6,000 to Adams' campaign between 2018 and 2021, according to The City website. The foundation is registered as a foreign agent with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Oddly, Eric Adams, then-Brooklyn borough president, played himself in a 2017 Turkish romantic comedy film, "Fairytale of New York," where two Turkish men ask him for political favors but he says he can't understand them. Adams tells the Turks in the film: "Brooklyn loves Turkey. Brooklyn is the Istanbul of America. We love your food, we love your music, but I don't understand Turkish, we can take a selfie though."

Gaza – A War Turkey Will Never Fight

By Dhanuka Dickwella

"What was Gaza, Palestine in 1947? What is it today? Israel, how did you get here? How did you enter? You are an occupier, you are an organization;"

I reiterate that Hamas is not a terrorist organization. Israel was very offended by this. Israel is an occupier, Erdogan speaks clearly because Turkey does not owe you anything;"

"From now on, we will continue on our path with the motto that we may suddenly knock on your door one night," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

At a massive pro-Palestinian rally held in Istanbul, those were some of the words uttered by the Turkish president. As you can imagine, the pro-Palestinian crowd was jubilant and made a hero out of him as a warrior fighting for the rights of the oppressed. The Israelis and the West condemned the actions. Erdogan upped the ante so much that some observers started to suggest an imminent Turkish military intervention. There was chatter in the information space that Pakistan would cover Turkey with its nukes in such a scenario. Assessment into the strength of the Turkish military, and how such an intervention would play out were made. Those claims were based on high-pitch rhetoric made by Erdogan along with other Turkish politicians and the way the world interpreted each such rant. But this speculation lacks depth, clarity, and reason. You just need to understand what Turkey stands for, to realize why it would never

fight a war with Israel.

Turks have fought in a couple of conflicts recently. They fought Kurds in Syria and Iraq. They supported, and fought alongside the Azeris against Armenia. Despite all that, they have not fought Israel even when the Jewish state killed 10 Turkish political activists in the Mavi Marmara incident where a Turkey-led Gaza-bound flotilla was boarded in international waters by Israeli commandos. If Turkish blood did not matter for Erdogan at the time, how would Palestinian lives matter for him now? Pretending to be standing on the right side of history, projecting the image of a warrior who stood up for the safety of fellow Muslims strengthens his home front. By firing fiery speeches he targets the domestic audience that will finally flock around the AKP political party which he represents.

Erdogan is a brutal pragmatist and a cunning opportunist who plays everyone to his advantage. He has managed to achieve his long strategic and tactical victories on almost all occasions. For instance, while being a NATO member, purchasing Russian air defenses, while being the closest American ally in the Levant to bomb the American-trained Kurdish forces; while enjoying a plethora of special benefits from the EU to closely coordinate with the BRICS and Shanghai cooperation organization; while selling Bayraktar to Ukraine, buying Russian gas. These are only a few examples.

But there was one exceptional moment where he got outfoxed in a showdown with President Donald Trump. When Erdogan decided not heed the calls for the release of the imprisoned American pastor Andrew Brunson to force the hands of Trump, he lost the gamble. Trump being Trump went on a scorched earth policy against Turkey using the most sensitive underbelly of the republic, namely the economy. Trump's decision to escalate the ante resulted in plummeting the Turkish lira to the lowest level recorded. Eventually, Erdogan folded and released the pastor as if nothing ever happened. Except for this humiliating diplomatic defeat, Erdogan has managed to keep the cake while eating it with every American administration. When so much can easily be achieved without firing a single bullet why would a rational leader lead his nation to a destructive war? But then why go to such an extent of making the world believe that a Turkish

military move is on the horizon?

Erdogan's rhetoric is based on shrewd geoeconomics and geopolitical calculations. He is counting the days after Hamas. In June this year, it was said that after a series of complicated negotiations between Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority (PA), the gas fields known as the Gaza Marine project were to be developed based on a profit-sharing agreement. Hamas was supposed to get a cut with a promise of not using the revenues to build its military arsenal targeting Israel. They had no choice but to allow PA to be their partner instead of Hamas since PA is the legal entity that represents the people of Palestine. The ongoing hostilities will make sure that Hamas will have no such benefit. But its political wing which is roaming around Arab capitals and Ankara would still fight for its share with a proxy. No better partner than Erdogan wouldn't think twice about making a deal even with the devil, if it benefits him. So it is fair to say that Marine One and Two gas fields of Gaza's seas are clearly in his sight.

Then there is the East Med gas pipeline which is on ice for the moment but could become a reality only with the approval of Turks. Let me quote three interesting dialogues.

"Any agreement of this kind must be made with Turkey; we cannot think that Israel, Cyprus, and Greece can find an agreement [on the pipeline] without the participation of Turkey," said Claudio Descalzi, the newly-reconfirmed CEO of Eni, Italy's State-controlled energy major.

"We hope that Israel will be able to continue the dialogue with Turkey," said Paolo Formentini, vice president of the Foreign Affairs Committee," while President Erdogan told TRT World "the best option for such a project to work out is to bring Israeli gas to Turkiye, which can consume part of it domestically and ship some of it to Europe."

Erdogan would make a deal with Tel Aviv for the gas deposits that belong to the Palestinians as well as ask for flesh and blood type of stakes in the East Med pipeline. He would gladly bundle the two projects and sweeten the deal with a promise of no bullets flying from Gaza toward Israel under their supervision. This is why he

see GAZA, page 20



Georgia Recommended for EU Membership Candidate Status

By Giorgi Lomsadze

After much suspense and speculation, Europe's doors opened slightly wider for Georgia on November 8 when the European Union laid out its plan for making itself a bigger place in the future.

Georgia was recommended for membership candidate status — a move that many hope will help sharpen the nation's blurred focus on EU integration and democracy-building.

"First of all, this is a truly remarkable day for Georgia," said Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission on November 8, said as she fielded questions after presenting a broad outline for the bloc's potential enlargement.

"This is a really huge step for Georgia, and it also emphasizes the impressive and

the ruling party, the opposition and civil society — all claimed the credit for the accomplishment, indicating that this historic day is not going to fix the nation's fierce domestic divisions, which Brussels in fact sees as an obstacle on Georgia's path toward European integration.

For all the celebrations, Georgia still remains behind Ukraine and Moldova in the European waiting room. In its recommendation for enlargement, the European Commission proposed opening accession talks with the two fellow ex-Soviet nations, while Georgia was recommended for the membership status — a signpost Ukraine and Moldova passed last year.

Georgia was declined the status then, even though the three nations were previously bundled together as prospective members. The Georgian government's

compatible with EU norms and practices. All of this spurred accusations of Georgian Dream deliberately sabotaging the country's bid for EU membership and driving the nation into Moscow's embrace.

The domestic situation in Georgia made the decision a difficult needle for the EU to thread: granting candidate status could be seen as rewarding Georgian Dream for its slide into illiberalism while denying it could demoralize Georgian society and perhaps sour it on the whole Euro-integration project.

EU member Hungary, which itself has been drifting away from democracy for a decade or so, might have been lobbying for Georgia's bid within the union, according to RFE/RL's Richard Jozwiak.

"Budapest may try to bargain, only approving Kyiv's bid if other countries sign off on Georgia — which has developed strong ties with Hungary — getting candidate status," Jozwiak wrote on November 6.

The Hungarian and Georgian governments have indeed buddied up to each other over their shared vision of Europe that foregrounds not liberalism and democracy but Christianity and "traditional values."

In any case, today Georgian Dream felt vindicated, saying that it has worked hard to meet EU-set requirements to qualify for the candidate status. Georgian Dream detractors say that credit for the success belongs to the Georgian people, as large crowds came out into the streets of Tbilisi when Georgian society felt that its European future and democratic freedoms were under threat.

The European Commission today used diplomatic language, underscoring the role of the Georgian people, but also commending the Georgian government for recent progress toward meeting some of the democratization goals set by the EU. The remaining problematic areas include the rule of law, fair elections and independence of the judiciary.

EU ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, emphasized that the candidate status comes with conditions. "Addressing these steps will be crucial to move to the next stage," Herczynski said. "This is the nature of the enlargement process: constant reform so the country can be ready to take its place as a full member of the European Union."

Some critics of the Georgian government are worried that Georgian Dream can still botch the progress toward mem-

bership if it decides that the EU-prescribed reforms — better elections and a more inclusive political process — amount to a threat to the party's hold on power or if Moscow steps up pressure on Georgia. But, overall, optimism and celebratory mood is prevailing today, and worries are left for tomorrow.

Late in the evening, President Salome Zourabichvili hosted in front of her residence a large gathering attended by foreign diplomats and dignitaries. Congratulating the crowd, she said, "this is our response to Russia and to Russian occupation."

(Giorgi Lomsadze is a journalist based in Tbilisi, and author of *Tamada Tales*. This report originally appeared on the website *eurasianet.org* on November 8.)

GEORGIA'S RIVALING POLITICAL FIGURES AND GROUPS — THE PRIME MINISTER, PRESIDENT, THE RULING PARTY, THE OPPOSITION AND CIVIL SOCIETY — ALL CLAIMED THE CREDIT FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT, INDICATING THAT THIS HISTORIC DAY IS NOT GOING TO FIX THE NATION'S FIERCE DOMESTIC DIVISIONS, WHICH BRUSSELS IN FACT SEES AS AN OBSTACLE ON GEORGIA'S PATH TOWARD EUROPEAN INTEGRATION.

very unequivocal position of the majority of the population of Georgia to become members of the EU," said the head of the EU's executive arm.

Although Georgia was a bit of a side-show at the announcement where Ukraine was the primary focus, the Commission's recommendation is indeed of huge consequence for a country where EU membership is seen as a solution to many economic, democratic and security woes.

EU member states are yet to sign off on the recommendation — that decision will come in December — but the mood is already celebratory in Georgia. "It's a great honor for me to congratulate you all on this historic decision," said Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. "This is, of course, a historic day for Georgia."

Georgia's rivaling political figures and groups — the prime minister, president,

decision to take a cautious stance toward Russia and even allow economic rapprochement with Moscow in the middle of Russia's war on Ukraine were widely blamed for the flop.

In its recommendation, the European Commission noted that Georgia is at odds with the European Union's common policy of economic isolation of Russia over Ukraine. The European Commission specifically said that Georgia needs to align itself with the trajectory of the EU's external relations to make progress toward membership.

Apart from the issues with foreign policy, the ruling Georgian Dream party has also been engaged in Euroskeptic rhetoric, spreading conspiracy theories involving the EU and U.S. and earlier this year it tried to pass a highly controversial law which European diplomats said was in-

Gaza — A War Turkey Will Never Fight

GAZA, from page 19

becomes one leader who would be wishing for a meaningful defeat of Hamas. The day after Hamas, global powers and regional powers will rush to interpret the status quo of Gaza. Before the Saudis move in, Ankara would try to become the caretaker power of the strip. As the former imperial custodian and as a man who had a vociferous support for the Palestinian cause, the Gazans wouldn't mind such a move.

He has no special love for the dying children of Gaza nor does he care about the civilian casualties and the destruction of the infrastructure. He only sees opportunity in all that carnage. Gaza will have to be rebuilt from the ashes, not just roads and buildings but an entire ecosystem. There will be massive international funds amounting to billions to rebuild what's destroyed. With cheap slogans against Israel and crocodile tears on behalf of the Gazans, it will surely be Ankara, not Riyadh, that will get that lu-

crative construction opportunity to support its mega construction industry. The brutal truth is this.

He will gain so much political capital in the Muslim world and would use that to elbow out Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Muslim world. This undeclared cold war for the leadership is no secret, irrespective of the recent warming of ties between the two rivals. As a peacekeeper or a security guarantor, Turkey could evoke an oversized leverage on Americans, Israelis, and every stakeholder of the decades-old conflict.

Erdogan barks so loud that the world shakes. Arab streets go mad, cheering pours out from social media platforms, resulting in the Palestinians divinely respecting him. But make no mistake: he will only bark, he will not bite. This chest pumping is for the gallery and media. Unfortunately, it works like magic. It is quite ironic that the man who lambasts Israel for the Gaza blockade, himself supported the same type of heinous

blockade against the civilians in Nagorno Karabakh with his bedmate the Azerbaijani dictator.

"We will tell the whole world that Israel is a war criminal. We are making preparations for this. We will declare Israel a war criminal," Erdogan chants, while his ships unload energy and other cargo in Israel and while Turkish products are sold all over Israel. The simple truth is that Turkey goes on with business as usual with Israel. Erdogan loves Turkey and Turkey alone. He doesn't have to justify why he stands on two opposing sides simultaneously. He doesn't have to care so much about ethics, norms, and political correctness. The only thing that drives his loyalty is sheer opportunity. So for those who dream of seeing Turkish soldiers fighting in Gaza against the Israelis because of Erdogan's words, I have a bridge in Brooklyn to sell to you.

(This column originally appeared in the *Asian Review* on November 11.)

Where Is Justice For Karabakh?

JUSTICE, from page 18

The entire population of Artsakh 120,000 souls were forced to evacuate so as not to live under the murderous regime of Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh, Artsakh as we know it, suddenly ceased to exist. The Artsakhtsis lost their rights to live on their ancient homeland.

How was the land emptied from its inhabitants! A thriving community gone in a single day! Now only the heart-wrenching sight of abandoned dogs, cats and horses are roaming the desolate streets of the capital Stepanakert.

There is no more washing hanging out the windows of the humble apartments. You can no longer hear the chatter of little children playing in the school yards, nor the sound of church bells ringing anywhere.

The little market that was full of vendors proudly displaying their fresh produce, delicious local honey, colorful dried fruits are not there anymore, nor can one smell the enticing aroma of the freshly cooked *Jingelov hatz* in the air.

The streets are deserted and quiet. The store windows still full of their wear stand empty and void. The faint echoes of Armenian music that played in the stores have been silenced forever.

I remind myself the Shahumyan representative's words 30 years ago: "Armenians cannot live side by side with the Azeris."

It is hard to fathom the international community's sense of justice. It seems they cannot perceive history beyond 100 years. They cannot or choose not to understand the value humanity places on homeland, culture and history. A people whose footprint go back millennia in the region. And if the existence of documented history, ancient monuments, churches, castles, graveyards, villages, cities do not constitute habitat, then what does!

The world is turning a blind eye to the truth and praising the business of the corrupt expansionist dictators more than the Human Rights and the dignity of humankind.

If true, Justice is blind, because it should see only truth, today it is blind to power, dominance and greed. Justice is blind to injustice!

Sylvia Iskenderian
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