

*US Diplomat Visits Azerbaijan  
As Bilateral Tensions Subside*

On December 6 a top US diplomat made a visit to Azerbaijan against a backdrop of deteriorating relations between the two countries.

The visit was received positively by Azerbaijani officials and media, but there is no sign that the hunt for “U.S. spies” in the country is about to let up.

Elsewhere on the same day, President Ilham Aliyev issued a warning to France and India against arming Armenia, saying that doing so increases the chance of more war.

Aliyev’s reception of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O’Brien was the first high-level meeting between the two countries since the sides mutually canceled such visits last month over disagreements on Azerbaijan’s military offensive in Karabakh in September.

The sides stressed the importance of the visit “in terms of discussions on various aspects of bilateral relations and the exchange of ideas on regional issues,” according to the readout on Aliyev’s website.

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*Argentina to Have Closer Ties  
With Armenia, Milei Assures*

BUENOS AIRES (Azatutyun) — Argentina’s new President Javier Milei met with his Armenian counterpart Vahagn Khachaturian and called for closer ties between their countries ahead of his inauguration ceremony held on December 10.

Khachaturian was among a handful of foreign leaders, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who attended the ceremony held in Buenos Aires. According to the Armenian presidential press office, he was the first of those dignitaries to be received by Milei in his new capacity.



Vahagn Khachaturyan and Javier Milei meeting on December 9

“I have been to Armenia and am familiar with Armenia,” the office quoted Milei as saying. “I am confident that we will further deepen our relations.”

The Armenian president, who has largely ceremonial powers, likewise expressed confidence that the two governments “will do everything to raise the Armenian-Argentinian relationship to a higher level.” He thanked Argentina for its “support that has been shown to Armenia in recent years.”

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Pianist Sergei Babayan and conductor Eduard Topchjan with the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra accepting the applause of an enthusiastic audience (photo Jirair Hovsepian)

**Armenian National Philharmonic’s  
Boston Performance a Hit**

BOSTON — The Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra recently concluded its four-city tour of major halls in North America, with Boston’s Symphony Hall as its final stop on November 21, to great acclaim. The Boston concert was the only one sponsored by local Armenian-American community organizations, with proceeds to aid the forcibly displaced people of Artsakh.

This was a rare appearance for this orchestra in Boston, as the last time it played here was in 1989. There was great excitement in the audience who packed the main floor and first balcony of the history Symphony Hall. As reviewer Susan Miron noted in the Boston Musical Intelligencer on November 25, “It was clear, even before the concert began, that the enthusiastic, nattily well-dressed, largely Armenian crowd that gathered Tuesday night at Symphony Hall anticipated an extraordinary evening of music and kinship. I almost felt like I was crashing a huge family reunion. It was the friendliest and most happily expectant crowd I’d seen at a concert in a long time.”

The orchestra, conducted by Eduard Topchjan, observed Aram Khachaturian’s 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of birth by opening with three selections from the composer’s *Spartacus Ballet Suites*, *Variation of Aegnia and Bacchanalia*, *Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia*, and *Dance of Gaditanae – Victory of Spartacus*. Sergei Rachmaninoff’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary was also commemorated through the performance of two works. First, as Miron observed, “The phenomenal Sergei Babayan delivered a sensitive, utterly thrilling performance of Rachmaninoff’s *3rd Piano Concerto (Opus 30)*, making short work of the sprawling concerto’s technical difficulties.”

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**Armenian Genocide Monument:  
Remembrance or Denial?**

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

COLOGNE, Germany — “This pain affects all of us.” So reads the text borne by a monument in the German city of Cologne along the Rhine River. It refers to the genocide perpetrated by the Young Turk regime during World War I against the Armenian population. But the words take on further meaning in light of the fact that, after a long political battle for and against the monument, a decision has been made to remove it.

As reported in the local *Kolner Stadt-Anzeiger* on November 29, the monument currently located on the Hohenzollern Bridge should disappear by the end of this year. After its removal, a new monument will be erected by the city, “commemorating the victims of repression, racism, violence, and human rights violations.”

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**ARMENIA**  
**Knights and Daughters of Vartan  
Provide Further Aid  
To Artsakh Refugees**



**LOS ANGELES**  
**‘Laughter for Life’  
Delights Comedy Lovers In  
Los Angeles, Benefits its  
Bone Marrow Registry**



**Annual Mirror-Spectator Winter Break**

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will not publish the week of December 31 as the paper will close for its annual winter break. The last issue of 2023 will be that of December 23 and the first issue back will be that of January 6, 2023.





ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Armenian Parliament Ratifies Agreement on Cooperation with India

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Armenian National Assembly voted unanimously to ratify the agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Governments of Armenia and India, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Hakob Arshakyan reported on December 11.

“As the leader of the Armenian-Indian parliamentary friendship group, I attach importance to the deepening of relations with India,” Arshakyan said in a Facebook post.

He called it an important step towards the implementation of the “Crossroads of Peace” project.

### US OSCE Co-Chair Bono Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On December 7 Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan received Louis Bono, the Senior Adviser for Caucasus Negotiations and the U.S. Co-Chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group.

The two touched upon topics of regional security and stability.

The recent developments in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the positions of the sides on the draft peace treaty were discussed. The Armenian side responded positively to the offer of the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to organize a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Washington.

### Armenian, French FMs Meet, as France Ups Aid

YEREVAN (Panorama/Panarmenia.net) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan had a meeting with French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna in Brussels on Monday, December 10.

The two discussed issues on regional security and stability as well as touched upon the existing challenges for establishing peace in the South Caucasus. Ararat Mirzoyan briefed Catherine Colonna on the latest developments in the normalization process of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations,” reads the statement.

They also discussed cooperation in international platforms.

Earlier, on December 8, the French government had announced that it will provide emergency aid in the amount of 15 million euros for Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh refugees, according to a decision approved by the country’s parliament in late November.

The additional mobilization will support NGOs, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Armenian Red Cross and United Nations agencies providing social, medical, educational and financial care to particularly vulnerable populations, the Foreign Ministry of France announced.

The newly announced assistance brings France’s contribution for 2023 to 27.5 million euros.

# Former Diplomat Apitonian Analyzes Armenian Foreign Policy and Crises

By Tigran Yeghayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Artak Apitonian is a former diplomat who heads the Future Armenian Development Foundation, created by Ruben Vardanyan and Nubar Afeyan as well as other personalities from the diaspora. In this interview he analyzes current events and shares his historical knowledge to better understand political and diplomatic choices.

Apitonian, born 1971 in the village of Alashkert (province of Armavir), is a former career Armenian diplomat. He served as deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia in 2018-2021, and ambassador of Armenia in Sweden and Finland 2013-2018. He has been executive director of the Future Armenian Development Foundation since February 2022.

**“The first time history repeats itself as a tragedy, the second time as a farce,” said Marx. In the Armenian case, we are surprised by the troubling resemblance between the scenario of the war of autumn 2020 and that of autumn 1920, when Armenia lost its independence after Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia seized their prey. How far does this comparison go?**

I have used this quotation on several occasions to compare the developments of 1920-1921 and of our days, although I prefer Hegel’s original version to Marx’s anti-establishment interpretation. And indeed, it might have been farcical, if it was not so tragic. For the last century and a half our homeland, our Armenian habitat, has continually shrunk. The developments of the previous three decades were reassuring us that we might have managed to stop or reverse this process, but alas! And you know what is the most tragic? During the twentieth century we managed to re-establish our independence twice, but we have never succeeded in resettling previously inhabited Armenian towns and villages once they were cleansed of their Armenian population.

Coming to the comparison between the two wars and two strings of events separated by a century, at first glance, the differences are significant: a slightly different set of actors, particularly the central role of Azerbaijan, the somewhat less direct involvement of Turkey and more capacity and opportunity for resistance in Armenia. But the similarities are also obvious. In the first instance, we speak about the division of territories between the two regional powers (with some internal conditionalities of distribution). In the second case, we have division of spheres of influences by the same two regional powers (with some territorial restitutions back to the former century-old arrangements). Another striking similarity is the issue of legality of Moscow and Kars treaties as well as the tripartite agreement of 2020 from the international law perspective.

**Apart from the legal dimension, what similarities can be drawn between the Moscow and Kars treaties of 1921 and the tripartite agreement of 2020?**

I won’t go into historiographical analyses but would like to stress two points. First, on the Moscow and Kars treaties, I would like to draw a parallel with another agreement, very similar in nature, signed 18 years later — the famous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The former was the division of the South Caucasus, the latter, the division of Central and Eastern Europe. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact has been denounced by almost all

Eastern European nations. I don’t remember any Armenian official during the period of independence articulating condemnation or even regret for the 1921 agreements.

Second, it is astounding to see the soft and easy treatment towards the Armenian signatories by the Armenian people. The signatory of the Kars treaty, Askanaz Mravyan, still has many streets and schools named after him all over Armenia. Alexander Miasnikyan, the Soviet Armenian leader under whose control the Kars treaty was signed and Nagorno Karabakh was handed over to Azerbaijan, is almost revered as a national hero.

This leaves us a lot to think about concerning the moral side of the national assessment of our history.

**How can we describe the evolution of Armenian foreign policy since November 2020? Can we speak of a pivot towards the West?**

Frankly, I don’t see any coherent and systemic foreign policy, clearly articulated and implemented by the current administration. Two differing positions on relations with Russia and the West stated by the prime minister a week apart — one in his interview to Armenian Public Television and the other in the European Parliament — are evidence of that.

Yes, you might get an impression of a pivot towards the West if you follow some contacts and statements of the Armenian government. But how much of this turn is calculated? Are there behind-the-scenes understandings with the Western colleagues or is this wishful thinking? Are there enough guarantees received to fill the gap and to confront the challenges arising from possible Russian action or inaction? Is the government sincere in its dealing or is this another form of leverage to get more favorable attention from the Russians?

This said, I would like to stress my belief that the geopolitical shifts initiated by small countries are extremely rare, and usually have painful consequences, even if successful. What usually remains hidden from the public eyes are the backstage deals or understandings between the higher-level players.

**More generally, is there any diplomacy in Armenia? Why or why not?**

If you mean the diplomatic capacities of the nation, undoubtedly there are good diplomats, both in the Foreign Ministry and out of it. But good diplomacy requires coherent foreign policy, strategic goal setting and communication and promotion of these policies.

It has become customary, within the national lamenting tradition, to blame Armenian diplomacy for not achieving a peaceful settlement of the conflict, disregarding that Azerbaijan was never interested in compromise solutions. People opt to forget that Azerbaijan was the one who withdrew from the two closest-to-signing deals: in Key West and in Kazan (the role of various global players in these withdrawals is also overlooked). Even the so-called Lavrov plan has not been approved by Azerbaijan.

During the two decades we have managed to minimize the international pressure on us. When was the last time any global leadership country criticized Armenia for obstructing the faithful negotiations? During the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Athens Ministerial [meeting], we even had the international community, including Azerbaijan and Turkey, approve the conflict resolution package in whole. What was it, if not good diplomacy? Of course, all that I have mentioned was before the 2020 war and its

outcome.

And at the end of the day, diplomacy is only one of the tools of the foreign policy, in addition to security, defense, economic ones. With the blunders in other dimensions, it would be very difficult to correct or sometimes even minimize them by purely diplomatic means. Nevertheless, I am sure that Armenia could have avoided and still may avoid many mistakes and problems if diplomatic muscle is applied thoughtfully. Unfortunately, I don’t see this now.

**Proposed question, if you agree: So, you claim there have been no major diplomatic mistakes?**

Far from that. I could name many tactical ones, but they were corrigible, and some have been corrected in time. But it will take us very far from our subject. As for the strategic one, I would name the failure to assess the depth of the Russian-Turkish rapprochement adequately, and the failure to correct our diplomatic, military, security policies accordingly.

**Do you think that Israel’s current situation is an exportable model for Armenia?**

Considering the ongoing developments in Gaza and in the larger region, this question might sound tricky. The security concerns of Israel and the gross violations of fundamental human rights both before and during the recent eruption in Palestine as well as in Israel, leave little room for looking for a role model in that conflict.

But I am certain that Israeli model of state-building still may be exportable in many aspects: effective governance and military build-up, ideological motivation within the society, relations with the diaspora. Of course, one must avoid the excesses.

**Armenia is walking on a tightrope; every time it takes a false step, its entire existence is at stake. Yet this struggle for survival has not been accompanied by a search for credible alternatives to its security architecture. Why do you think this is so?**

You know, I don’t think the independence of Armenia is at stake. Russia does not aim at swallowing up Armenia, nor is Azerbaijan or Turkey pursuing the goal of total elimination of its statehood. This narrative of independence is excessively used by the Armenian government supporters to justify failures in security or diplomatic areas.

What is at stake is the quality of that sovereignty. Would it be able to exercise control of all of its sovereign territory? Would it be able to exercise sovereign foreign or military policy? Of course, there is no such thing as full sovereignty, and small and even middle range countries are bound to adjust their positions with the international political poles. But to align those positions with your adversaries or enemies, call them whatever you like, is barely normal for a sovereign state!

**How do you see the role of diaspora political forces in the face of ethnic cleansing in Artsakh?**

The current situation dictates the reformatting and regeneration of all political actors and organizations in the diaspora. The inability to somehow create significant deterrence against the Azerbaijani aggression and to halt ethnic cleansing in Artsakh was shocking. What was even more appalling was that the decades-long campaign for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide hasn’t led to any significant restraint on Turkey to refrain from such blatant and

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## ARMENIA

# Knights and Daughters of Vartan Provide Further Aid to Artsakh Refugees

By Gohar Palyan

YEREVAN — Since October, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan have subsidized 122 Artsakh families with a total of \$65,800, disbursed to address their pressing needs, ranging from rent to appliances and household essentials. The organization also helped to transport 700 tons of humanitarian provisions which were delivered directly to the Armenians living in Artsakh earlier this year.

The Knights and Daughters of Vartan have been dedicated to advocating for the well-being and security of Armenians in Artsakh and Armenia and supporting them for over a century. Since 2022, the organization has focused on advocating for the rights of the citizens of Artsakh, including their self-determination, liberty, security, and the right to live on their own land. In the fall of 2022, the Knights and Daughters established an Action Committee and successfully raised over \$196K from members and non-members to address the needs of Artsakh Armenians.

In October 2023, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan created a road map for immediate humanitarian and long-term economic development projects specifically for Artsakh Armenian families. This Humanitarian project included supporting families the organization aided in 2022 while in Artsakh, vulnerable families with burned victims, small children, large families, or those who lost family members. In this endeavor, the organization partnered with other institutions, such as Aparan Municipality, the Knights of Vartan School #106, Paros Foundation, Martuni Vocational School named after V. Khachatryan, and Sahman NGO.

While the focus has been on the immediate and urgent needs, it has also emphasized the dire need to find people from Artsakh jobs to earn an income. In some cases the families preferred to obtain tools vs. purchasing household items, so they can work and later buy the household items with their income.

For example, Svetlana, a mother, with 12 children,

preferred financial aid to purchase chickens and piglets to raise for winter and have a little farm similar to the one she had in Artsakh.

Another individual, Ira Kocharyan Gevorgyan, had to leave her hometown of Martuni in September along with her daughter, Narine, like many other displaced Artsakh people. She is a skilled professional in both sewing and teaching, and formerly was employed at the V. Khachatryan Martuni Vocational School.

Despite the challenges, both women were determined to build a new life as a hardworking and independent family. With the necessity of paying rent for their house, they knew they had to combine their efforts to generate income. Recently, Narine secured a job, marking the beginning of her family's journey to financial stability. Their rented home, situated in a peaceful corner of Yerevan's suburbs offers a serene environment.



Svetlana Movsisyan and family



Ira Gevorgyan at her new home

As a longstanding partner, the Knights of Vartan extended support to Ira, suggesting assistance with essential appliances, household items, and early rent payments. However, Ira made a conscious decision to forgo some immediate comforts at home. Instead, she opted to invest in a professional sewing machine, a crucial tool she had in

Artsakh but one that was too large to transport by car. Despite the expense, the store empathized with her situation, offering a generous discount upon learning of her Artsakh origins. Now fully equipped, Ira is actively seeking sewing orders, ready to leverage her skills and determination to secure a stable income for her family.

Vilen Avanesov, another Artsakh Armenian supported by the Knights of Vartan expressed his grati-

tude saying, "Two of my brothers were affected by the Stepanakert explosion, and one is currently in a critical condition in the hospital. We take turns providing full-time care for him until he recovers. Unfortunately, we had to find a temporary, run-down dwelling two hours away from Yerevan, where the hospital is located, which resulted in its own set of challenges. Amidst these difficulties, it is the children who have suffered the most from the impact of these changes. The Knights and Daughters of Vartan support has empowered us to secure a better home at a preferable location, reducing the commute and allowing us to focus on providing stability for our children. This will enable them to attend school and secure a more conducive environment for their education and well-being. Hopefully, my brothers will recover and we can start our lives here by setting up greenhouses similar to the ones we had in Artsakh."

The Knights and Daughters of Vartan members are

certain that their humanitarian project is needed and appreciated and will continue as long as there is an urgent need.

The group's next objective is the Economic Recovery Project which will facilitate economic development for impoverished families, guiding them toward establishing new homes in Armenia. This endeavor begins with the creation of income-generating resources. The Knights of Vartan are committed to sustaining this support for the people of Artsakh, ensuring a resilient and prosperous future for Armenians in Armenia.

To sustain its humanitarian and economic development efforts, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan are continuing to raise funds. Visit [kofv.org](http://kofv.org) for more information.

For more information about the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, visit <http://kofv.org>.

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unashamed participation in the military campaign of Azerbaijan, let alone from leading and directing it, as several sources point out.

Thus comes the need to reformat those organizations, to reformulate their missions and define/redefine their goals, among which the first should be pursuing the right of the people of Artsakh to return to their homes with international guarantees of their security, safety and rights. And that's even more significant in the face of inability or unwillingness of the Armenian government to pursue a "Return to Artsakh" project in the international arena.

**You've been coordinating The Future Armenian project for several years. What are your conclusions on the political participation of the diaspora in the affairs of the Armenian state? Is it a failure? Why or why not?**

We explored this subject thoroughly, particularly in preparation for and during our first Citizens' Assembly — the Convention of the Future Armenian which took place this spring. I would refrain from making

a black-and-white assessment of the situation. We have very positive examples of government office holders from the diaspora, and very miserable ones, and many, many in-between.

The issue is complex, and it's impossible to find a single recommendation to address it, even more to solve it. One thing goes without saying: there are many legal obstacles that should be removed. Our compatriots should get a chance to fully participate in the social life and administration of their homeland. But, in my opinion, there should be also a requirement for those who want to enter the security and defense areas, and, in general, positions which require high-level secrecy access. They should be able to do so only after acquiring Armenian citizenship and, in many instances, after revoking their other citizenships as well.

**Do you consider realistic the scenario of Azerbaijani military aggression to seize the Syunik corridor and other territories, and the establishment of a "pax Russica" upon the fall of the Pashinyan government?**

I would have divided your question into

two parts. On Azerbaijani plans and a subsequent "pax Russica," the chances are really high, and those who convince themselves otherwise, prefer to stay in comfortable numbness. As long as Azerbaijan senses weakness on the Armenian side and a favorable international setting, the chances are high that it will happen sooner or later. We should have a military and infrastructure buildup in Syunik, because mere diplomatic means might not always be sufficient to prevent this scenario from happening.

But I won't tie it to the fall of the Pashinyan government. Vice-versa, the presence of the Pashinyan government allowed this scenario to happen in Artsakh. Why it should not be the case in Syunik?

In general, Azerbaijan follows international developments more adequately than the Armenian administration. Now it's a time of big reshuffles, some even call it the new world war, and during such periods, accumulation of assets is one of the best things to do, regardless of legal limitations and in preparation to later big trade-offs, global or regional. Our government, still stuck in the liberal ideology of the 1990s,

fails to grasp this notion.

**The strategic vision you are trying to put in place has been turned upside down by the annihilation of Artsakh and the appalling news of the captivity of your organization's leader, Ruben Vardanyan. But isn't this the starting point for the regeneration of the Armenian nation in the face of all these setbacks?**

Yes, some of the things we undertook remind us of the Sisyphean curse. But there is no other option, we need to stand up and face our problems ourselves. Had we more time, I would say we need to change our education, not in the sense of learning, but the upbringing of a model citizen, which would lead also to a change in social culture, where a lot of things are still obstacles for the development of effective state. But I am afraid we must hurry. Able forces of the nation must cooperate to overcome the tremendous challenges we face. Otherwise, we will be remembered as a cursed generation in history.

(A French-language version of this article has been published in the print version of *France-Arménie*.)





## ARMENIA

# Over 150 Global Leaders Demand Freedom For ‘Armenian Prisoners’ in Azerbaijan

Nobel Prize laureates, business leaders, former heads of state, and humanitarians are among the more than 150 global figures who have signed a letter calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the “Armenian Prisoners” in Azerbaijan, which includes eight Armenian political prisoners, who are former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh’s government illegally detained following Azerbaijan’s invasion and seizure of the region in September.

More than a dozen other prisoners of war arrested during the conflict also remain in custody.

The collective plea echoes growing concerns over conditions and treatment of these imprisoned individuals, including prominent Armenian businessman and humanitarian, Ruben Vardanyan. Their arrest follows a campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Azerbaijani forces.

While the December 7 release of 32 Armenian prisoners of war is a welcome first step, all of the others must be released. The failure of Baku to release the remaining 8 political prisoners raises deep concerns over the motives by the Aliyev regime of their continued detention.

“The human rights abuses witnessed in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demand urgent attention and action,” said Noubar Afeyan, a signatory as well as the co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. “President Aliyev chooses political retribution over justice. We believe in the inherent dignity and rights of every individual and call on the international community to join us in condemning this injustice.”

Afeyan has long collaborated on global and regional economic development and humanitarian projects with Vardanyan, who has become a symbol of the broader struggle for political freedom and human dignity in the region. His unjust imprisonment has galvanized some of the world’s most respected voices to champion his cause and that of others unjustly detained.



Rouben Vardanyan with Aurora Laureate Marguerite Barankitse

“We call on President Aliyev to fulfill his obligations to international rules and law, ensuring those unjustly imprisoned can return safely to their families,” said Paul Polman, Vice Chair of the United Nations Global Compact and former CEO of Unilever. “All individuals in Nagorno-Karabakh have a right to experience a life of peace and security, including the freedom to move without hindrance or the looming specter of inhuman treatment. Given Azerbaijan’s bid to host COP 29 in 2024, I sincerely hope the United Nations will only agree if Baku releases all these prisoners.”

Polman is one of the letter’s signatories, alongside former heads of state, such as Ernesto Zedillo, former President of Mexico; Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland; Oscar Arias, former President of

Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and Elisha Wiesel, Chairman of the Board of the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity and Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, and son of the late Elie Wiesel, former Co-Chair of Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity. Other prominent signatories represent a wide range of sectors, including Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin, Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce; Ariana Huffington, founder of Thrive and The Huffington Post; and Serj Tankian, renowned musician and lead vocalist of System of a Down.

“The unjust detention of Ruben Vardanyan and so many others being held in Baku violates their basic human rights,” said Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner of Human Rights. “For the government of Azerbaijan to be respected

in the global community, it is critical they respect the rule of law, especially in light of the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh. They must release these detainees immediately.

Their unified plea serves as a powerful reminder that global political leaders are closely monitoring developments in Azerbaijan and calling for the release of the detainees. As asserted in the letter issued today, the detention of Armenian prisoners is a clear violation of international norms, including the Third Geneva Convention.

In recent weeks, members of the European Parliament and European Council have pursued a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the release of all illegally held detainees arising from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In October, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on Azerbaijan to release and commit to a broad amnesty for all the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh who have been arrested since September 19, including former officials from the region. The European Parliament has also called for sanctions against the individuals in the Azerbaijani Government responsible for multiple ceasefire violations and violations of human rights in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as investigations into the abuses committed by Azerbaijani forces that could constitute war crimes.

Similarly, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) introduced a resolution calling on Azerbaijan to immediately release all prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians currently detained in the years-long attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh. The resolution also calls on President Biden to impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act on Azerbaijani Government officials responsible for the illegal detention, torture, and extrajudicial killing of Armenian prisoners of war, civilian detainees, hostages, political prisoners, and others detained persons.

## European Court Rules Against Ousted Armenian Judges

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has dismissed an appeal filed more than three years ago by the former chairman and three other members of Armenia’s Constitutional Court against their dismissal engineered by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

The judges came under strong government pressure to resign in 2019, with Pashinyan accusing them of maintaining close ties to Armenia’s former government and impeding his “judicial reforms.” They did not bow to the pressure, leading Pashinyan’s administration to enact controversial constitutional amendments a year later.

The amendments extended a 12-year term limit to all nine members of the Constitutional Court, thereby mandating the immediate dismissal of three court justices who had taken the bench in the 1990s. They also required Hrayr Tovmasyan to quit as court chairman while allowing him to remain a judge.

Tovmasyan and the three ousted judges — Alvina Gyulumyan, Felix Tokhyan and Hrant Nazarian — said the amendments are null and void because they were not sent to

the Constitutional Court for examination prior to their passage. The Armenian opposition also accused Pashinyan’s political team of violating this legal requirement.

Tovmasyan, Gyulumyan, Tokhyan and Nazarian went on to appeal to the ECHR, saying that they were forced out in violation of several articles of the European Convention on Human Rights. One of those articles guarantees their “access to court.”

In its long-awaited ruling made public on December 7, the Strasbourg-based court refused to invalidate or challenge in any way their ouster, saying that it resulted from the constitutional changes “not directed against them specifically.” It claimed to have found no “evidence of the authorities singling out any of the applicants with negative remarks about their professional performance, personality or moral values.”

Pashinyan and his political allies never made a secret of the fact that the amendments are designed to help them get rid of Constitutional Court members installed during former Presidents Serzh Sargsyan’s and Robert Kocharyan’s rule. The prime minister stated in 2019 that they must resign because they do not “represent the people.”

The ECHR ruling also cited statements

on the issue made by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in 2020. While largely backing the constitutional amendments, the commission criticized the Pashinyan administration’s refusal to introduce a transitional period that would “allow for a gradual change in the composition of the court in order to avoid any abrupt and immediate change endangering the independence of this institution.”

Tovmasyan and his sacked colleagues did not immediately react to the ruling. Siranush Sahakyan, a lawyer representing them, told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service that she is now examining the text and will comment later.

As a result of the 2020 amendments, two more Constitutional Court members resigned in the following years. The vast majority of the court’s current judges have been handpicked by Armenia’s current political leadership and confirmed by the parliament loyal to it.

The Pashinyan government has also installed virtually all members of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), a powerful body overseeing Armenian courts. The judicial watchdog is now headed by Karen Andreasyan, Pashinyan’s former justice

minister who was affiliated with the ruling Civil Contract party until September 2022.

Over the past year, the SJC has fired a number of respected judges and launched disciplinary proceedings against others, stoking opposition allegations that Pashinyan is seeking to further curb judicial independence in Armenia under the guise of Western-backed “judicial reforms.” Opposition leaders have accused the West of turning a blind eye to this for geopolitical reasons.

### Macron Commends Armenia for Joining Rome Statute

BRUSSELS (Public Radio of Armenia) — French President Emmanuel Macron commended Armenia’s decision to join the Rome Statute on December 10.

Speaking on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Macron mentioned the “courage” of Armenia.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Baku to the Future: After Stalemate, UN Climate Talks Will Be in Azerbaijan in 2024

By Seth Borenstein

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — For years, climate change has been a factor — not the only one — in wars and conflicts. Now for the first time, it's part of a peace deal.

A long-time stand-off that had turned the choice for next year's United Nations climate talks into a melodrama and mystery resolved as part of a prisoner swap settlement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. It set the stage for the COP29 climate talks in 2024 to be in a city where one of the world's first oil fields developed 1,200 years ago: Baku, Azerbaijan.

It also means that for back-to-back years an oil powerhouse nation will be hosting climate talks — where the focus is often on eliminating fossil fuels. And it will become three straight years that the U.N. puts its showcase conference, where protests and civil engagement often take center stage, in a nation with restrictions on free speech.

In 2021, the COP was in Glasgow, where the modern steam engine was built and the industrial revolution started.

"It's very ironic," said longtime COP analyst Alden Meyer of the European think-tank E3G.

Climate talks historian Jonna Depledge of Cambridge University said, "there's nothing inherently wrong with that. On the contrary, this is where the change needs to needs to happen."

"The fact they want to step up and be a climate leader is a positive thing," said Ani Dasgupta, head of the World Resources Institute and a former Baku resident. "How will they do it? We don't know yet."

It's also about peace. In its announcement about a prisoner exchange, the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan wrote: "As a sign of good gesture, the Republic of Armenia supports the bid of the Republic of Azerbaijan to host the 29th Session of the Conference of Parties ... by withdrawing its own candidacy."

Climate change often causes drought, crop failures and other extreme weather that is a factor in wars from sub-Saharan Africa to Syria, Dasgupta said. So it's nice for climate change to be part of peace for the first time, he said.

This month's talks in Dubai were planned more than two years in advance, while the Baku decision is coming just 11 months before the negotiations are supposed to start.

The United Nations moves the talks' location around the world with different regions taking turns. Next year is Eastern Europe's turn and the decision on where the talks will be held has to be unanimous in the area. Russia vetoed European Union members and initially Azerbaijan and Armenia vetoed each other.

But the peace decision cleared the way for Baku, and all that's left is the formality of the conference in Dubai to formally accept the choice for 2024, United Nations officials said.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Armenia to Get 50M Euro Loan from OPEC

YEREVAN (news.am) — Armenia will receive a loan of 50 million euros from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), it was announced on December 12.

Armenia's draft law on ratifying the Green, Resilient and Inclusive Development Policy Program loan agreement — for 50 million euros — with the OPEC Fund for International Development is being debated on at Tuesday's special session of the National Assembly of Armenia.

The objective of this program is to assist green, resilient, and inclusive development in Armenia. It is aimed at mitigating the consequences of climate change, as well as improving the environmental management system and energy efficiency in the country.

According to the Deputy Finance Minister of Armenia, Eduard Hakobyan, at first it was assumed that these funds will be allocated to closing the state budget deficit of Armenia. But since the budget was in surplus, a decision was made to earmark these loan funds to capital investments, such as the construction of schools, etc.

## Aliyev Calls for Snap Elections in February

BAKU (Al Jazeera) — Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev has called an early presidential election for February 7, 2024.

The president on December 7 ordered officials to hold a "snap election" earlier than planned, according to a decree by the presidency. The vote was originally going to be held in 2025.

Aliyev's popularity in Azerbaijan has recently increased after the government took full control of the Karabakh region following a lightning rout of ethnic Armenian forces. The vote is expected to extend the decades-long rule of his family.

Aliyev, 61, was last re-elected in 2018 for a seven-year term, with a declared 86 percent of the vote, in a poll boycotted by major opposition parties.

With political dissent largely suppressed, he is almost certain to win a new term.

In September, Aliyev ordered a lightning offensive, after a nine-month blockade, to take full control of [Nagorno-Karabakh](#) from the ethnic Armenians who had run it for more than three decades.

According to an Azerbaijani-run pollster, about 75 percent of the population agrees with how Aliyev handled the situation.

Aliyev has run the country since 2003 after succeeding his father, the previous ruler, Heydar Aliyev.

The two-term limit for presidents in the country was removed in 2009 and in 2016, the presidential terms were extended from five to seven years and Aliyev appointed his wife, Mehriban Aliyeva, as the first vice president.

Rights activists have recently decried the arrest of several high-profile [journalists](#) known for investigations into corruption among the political elite.

## Argentina's President Seeks Closer Ties With Armenia

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Khachaturyan held a separate meeting with the South American country's outgoing President Alberto Fernandez and gave him an Armenian state medal, the Order of Honor. Fernandez has repeatedly denounced Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor that preceded its September military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia has long maintained warm relations with Argentina as well as neighboring Brazil and Uruguay cemented by the existence of influential Armenian communities in the three nations. There are an estimated 120,000 ethnic Armenians living in Argentina. Most of them are descendants of survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey.

The most prominent Argentinian of Armenian descent is Eduardo Eurnekian, Argentina's fourth-richest person whose Corporacion America group runs 53 airports in and outside the country and also has a wide range of other business assets.

Milei, who is known for his libertarian and far-right views, worked for the conglomerate from 2008-2021, eventually becoming its chief economist. Eurnekian reportedly backed his former employee's presidential bid. An Argentinian lawmaker quoted by the *Financial Times* in September described the 90-year-old billionaire as Milei's "intellectual father."

"I think Milei would be a very good president," Eurnekian told the London-based paper at the time.

Corporacion America's holdings also include Yerevan's Zvartnots international airport. Eurnekian also invested in other sectors of the Armenian economy in the early 2000s. In particular, he purchased an Armenian commercial bank and set up what is now one of the South Caucasus country's largest wine companies.

In 2017, then Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan bestowed the highest state award, the title of National Hero, on Eurnekian.

# Armenian Genocide Monument: Remembrance or Denial?

MONUMENT, from page 1

According to reports, the new monument that the City Council is discussing would take two years to come into being. A "dialogue process" is scheduled to begin sometime "by the end of this year," at the same time the existing memorial will be taken away. The projected cost of the initial phase of the project, to be handled by an agency, is \$120,000. Fifteen artists are to present their designs in a competition. Once the best design has been selected, work on the monument should begin, at an estimated cost of \$350,000. All told, that should add up to a hefty half million dollars, according to reports carried by the same newspaper.

### Denial Is the Issue

The memorial has a brief, but checkered history. "Remember Genocide" is the name of the civil society group behind the monument. Designed to honor the victims of the 1915 genocide against the Armenians, the 1.9 meter high stele was placed in a prominent city location on the commemoration day April 24, under a special permission granted by the city. That permit was, however, limited to a month, a restriction that the initiators challenged, and it went to the administrative court. In the end, the court accepted the city's plan to remove it, but then Lord Mayor Henriette Reker intervened in defense of the commemoration. "I can understand very well that there is such a great desire for a visible monument," she was quoted as saying in June. Referencing the Armenian genocide recognition resolution passed by the Bundestag (Parliament) in 2016, she said Germany's historical responsibility to remember is "beyond question," and added that Cologne is home to the largest Armenian diaspora community in the country. Reker therefore announced she was issuing directives to undertake necessary procedures "to make a monument possible in Cologne." To this end she proposed a "dialogue process."

The real issue is genocide recognition or denial. Ilias Uyar, a leading figure in the "Remember Genocide" group, had made the point when the proposal for a new structure had first been aired. Taking the

monument away would be adding "grist to the mill of the genocide deniers," he put it succinctly. And he demanded that the proposed dialogue process place genocide at the center of debate about a monument.

In autumn, the two sides faced off. For the centenary of the founding of the Turkish Republic on October 29, a coalition of Turkish organizations scheduled a demonstration against the monument. The same day, the Turkish-German Cultural Forum (KulturForum T, rkei-Deutschland), which was also celebrating its 30th anniversary, held an event with prominent guests, Federal Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir, journalist Can Dundar, activist Gunter Wallraff, author Asli Erdogan and many others. The large gathering convened in the afternoon at the genocide memorial. Ozdemir and State Legislator Berivan Aymaz, also of the Green Party, were laying flowers at the memorial, they said, "to safeguard memory of the victims of the genocide and to protect the memorial from genocide deniers." As part of that protective action, they had brought charges against the Turkish agitators, accusing them of incitement.

Confronting them at the memorial site were members of the Turkish nationalist group, "Turk-initiative," who had arrived on the scene at noon, to register their protest and denial. This coalition comprises several local Turkish organizations, including the Ditib Mosque Union, and rightwing extremist outfits like the Grey Wolves. The same group announced that it would hold a historical conference this year in Cologne, according to press reports, on "the suffering, migrations, and massacres that occurred before the First World War and during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in a vast geographical area, to deal with the subject comprehensively and fairly, and to include all points of view." In reporting these words, the *Kolner Stadt-Anzeiger* pointed out that there was no mention of genocide in the program, and added, "Recently representatives of the initiative, whose speaker in charge of inter-religious dialogue is a Ditib official, had a meeting in the Turkish consulate — the representative of the Turkish state."





INTERNATIONAL

# Doctor Embarks on 600 KM Charity Ultramarathon To Help Artsakh Refugees

BUENOS AIRES — From December 3 through 16, Infectious Disease Specialist and Medical Director of FIDEC Armenia, Pablo Elmassian, is embarking on a remarkable 600-kilometer ultramarathon, running an average of a marathon each day to connect the cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. This endeavor aims to raise funds to support healthcare programs benefiting vulnerable rural communities in Shirak and refugees who have fled from Artsakh.

The ultramarathon, titled “Moving Forward to Improve Healthcare in Armenia,” is institutionally supported by the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Argentina, the Armenian Center of the Republic of Argentina, Armenian Institutions of the Republic of Argentina (IARA), and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (UGAB). Pablo Elmassian’s journey holds significant symbolic value as it represents a personal connection between Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Born in Uruguay and currently residing in Argentina, Elmassian’s 14-day consecutive run reflects his deep appreciation for both countries’ unwavering commitment to Armenia.

“Years ago, I decided to combine my passion and experience in long-distance running with charitable purposes. This time, I will do so in support of the actions we are currently undertaking at FIDEC Armenia, particularly for the healthcare program in Shirak and our assistance to Artsakh refugees,” says Elmassian, an infectious disease specialist, and Medical Director at FIDEC Armenia.

In celebration of the 15th anniversary of FIDEC Armenia in 2023, the charity run aims to support the program launched in 2022 for vulnerable rural communities in the province of Shirak. This initiative provides assessment, comprehensive medical care, and treatment for their most significant health

issues, offering a unique opportunity for residents to access vital healthcare services.

The recent devastating events in Artsakh have intensified the need for support and solidarity. People of Artsakh, having lost everything, seek refuge in Armenia, heightening the urgency of addressing this pressing humanitarian crisis.

Thanks to contributions from the Armenian community and other supporters, FIDEC Armenia has successfully built a bridge to enhance healthcare access and improve the quality of life in Armenia. As FIDEC Armenia marks 15 years of service, the organization extends a warm invitation to others to join in creating new projects, enabling the continuation of the legacy passed down by parents and ancestors.

“There is a phrase very close to our feelings: ‘They attempted to bury us, unaware that we were seeds destined to grow.’ That’s the way it is, and that’s why the race also represents the joy and pride of passing on the flame of commitment to younger generations, enabling our efforts to persist in our two homelands, Argentina and Armenia, and ensuring our perpetual growth,” says Daniel Stambouljan, M.D., President of FIDEC Armenia.

FIDEC is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving healthcare access and quality of life. We are celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2023, of our non-profit FIDEC Armenia, which continues to undertake impactful initiatives to address the healthcare needs of vulnerable communities.

Dr. Pablo Elmassian is an Infectious Disease Specialist and the Medical Director of FIDEC Armenia. With a passion for long-distance running, he combines his love for the sport with charitable endeavors to support healthcare programs in Armenia.

To find out more, visit <https://runningforarmenia.com/>



Dr. Pablo Elmassian

## US Diplomat Visits Azerbaijan As Bilateral Tensions Subside

TENSIONS, from page 1

“Emphasizing that Azerbaijan supported the regional peace agenda, President Ilham Aliyev said that after the end of the conflict [with Armenia] and full restoration of Azerbaijan’s sovereignty [over Karabakh], historic opportunities had arisen for the establishment of peace, noting that the United States could contribute to the process by considering the new realities,” the statement read.

The readout didn’t mention the recent U.S.-Azerbaijani tensions, instead noting that the sides “described the resumption of reciprocal visits as a positive step for ad-

vancing bilateral relations.”

The State Department said Aliyev and O’Brien “discussed our countries’ deep historical ties and the importance of the bilateral relationship.”

On the same day, O’Brien met Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov.

O’Brien described his meetings as “positive and constructive” in a post on X. He wrote that the U.S. welcomes visits of Azerbaijani Central Bank governor and energy minister, and that U.S. State Secretary Anthony Blinken “looks forward to hosting” Bayramov and his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan in Washington “soon

for peace negotiations.”

Previously, in mid-November, Azerbaijan refused to send Bayramov to Washington for peace talks in protest against remarks by O’Brien at a congressional hearing. In that hearing, O’Brien said that the U.S. State Department “has made it clear to Azerbaijan that there cannot be business as usual in our bilateral relationship. The United States has condemned Azerbaijani actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, canceled high-level bilateral meetings and engagements with Azerbaijan, and suspended plans for future events.”

At around the same time, the U.S. Senate passed a bill titled the Armenian Protection Act that would suspend military assistance to Azerbaijan. The bill has not been taken up by the House of Representatives.

“Looks like Azerbaijan-US relations are back to normal, which is very good as these relations are built over many important areas during the three decades,” wrote Farid Shafiyev, chair of a Baku-based state-run think tank, on X. “Or it might face another challenge or spoiler in the US Congress.”

While relations might be on a positive trajectory, the spat has resulted in lasting damage to Azerbaijan’s small and already beleaguered independent media.

A campaign in Azerbaijani state-run and pro-government media against American “spies” has been followed by arrests of journalists alleged to be taking U.S. money to do Washington’s bidding in Azerbaijan.

So far, six journalists and one rights activist have been arrested in the country on different charges.

Abzas Media, a prominent independent investigative outlet, has been the biggest target. Its whole management team was arrested and placed in pretrial detention on smuggling charges after police said they discovered 40,000 euros in cash in a raid of Abzas’s Baku office.

“If we wanted, we would have done it”

A few hours before receiving O’Brien in Baku, Aliyev spoke at a forum in Baku. Responding to a participant’s question, he touched on O’Brien’s “no business as usual” remark. “Either, they should say that business as usual continues, and I hope to hear it today and we will restore the Washington process, or there’ll be only Brussels and Moscow,” Aliyev said in English, referring to three of the mediators overseeing the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process.

He also addressed widespread fears in Armenia and the international community that Baku might invade its neighbor and rival. “If we wanted, we would have done it. I can say this absolutely openly. From all points of view, it is not a big problem. In one day, they laid down their weapons in Karabakh, our flag was raised in Khankendi,” he said.

At the same time, he touched on recent arms supplies to Armenia by France and India and warned that they could trigger another war in the region.

“This is provocative. The countries, who supply Armenia with weapons like France and India, now pour oil on the fire and create unrealistic illusions in Armenia that using these weapons they can take back Karabakh,” he said.

“My message to them is don’t create a situation here - in the region, when we will be sure that you are planning to damage us. We are not sure yet. That’s why we do not react, we observe what France is supplying to Armenia those armored vehicles which nobody wants to buy. They do not pose any danger to us. But if we see that there is some serious installation, which can be harmful, we will have to react. And I informed everybody about that. So, there’ll be no complaints.”

(This story originally appeared on the website [eurasiatnet.org](http://eurasiatnet.org) on December 8.)

## Baku Court Sentences Abducted Armenian Army Reservist to 18 Years

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — A court in Baku convicted Armenian reservist Voskanyan, detained in Karvachar, and sentenced him to 18 years of prison, on December 7.

On August 16, Voskanyan, according to preliminary data, voluntarily left the combat position. Search operations were conducted to find him.

Later, the Azerbaijani side announced that they had arrested an Armenian soldier. The Azerbaijani side spread disinformation, claiming that there had been a subversive infiltration attempt.

The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia presented a video showing how a group of soldiers of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces approached Voskanyan, spoke to him then arrested and transported him to an unknown destination by car.

Baku accuses him of a number of crimes, from illegal border crossing to terrorism.



Gagik Voskanyan in Baku





# Community News

## Zoryan Institute Commemorates 75th Anniversary Of Human Rights Declaration and Genocide Convention

TORONTO — December 10 marks the 75th Anniversary of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. For the past 75 years, these United Nations principles have provided the international community with a set of standards and legal mechanisms designed to protect the rights and dignity of individuals, and to condemn, punish, and prevent acts of genocidal violence against groups of people based on their nationality, ethnicity, race, and/or religion.

Tragically, this year has been marked by great atrocity, pain, and suffering world-wide. We have witnessed the continuation of the war in Ukraine, the blockade of the Lachin Corridor and the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, the escalation of conflict in Darfur and Myanmar, and the renewal of extreme violence between Israelis and Palestinians, just to name a few. The standards of the Human Rights Declaration and the Genocide Convention are being directly challenged. Much of this is due to the lack of accountability and the failure of the international community to effectively condemn, prevent, and intervene in such crimes.

Dr. Henry Theriault, co-editor of the Zoryan Institute's academic journal, *Genocide Studies International*, states: "This year we have seen a further acceleration of mass violence as more and more powerful leaders ignore basic human rights norms and law and some even mock it. While certain cases have received significant media and policy attention, these are just the tip of the iceberg. The dream of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN Genocide Convention has become a nightmare of rape, torture, killing, and brutal expulsion..."

For the past 41 years, the Zoryan Institute has served as a global human rights leader. As we look forward and reflect on the meaning and impact of these events, it is clear that the importance of our work is more urgent and relevant than ever before. We believe that the Zoryan Institute functions both as a mirror and as a lamp in striving to educate audiences by making visible the traumatic realities of genocide and mass atrocity through scholarship and outreach that illuminates the path towards peace and justice. The Institute will continue to serve as a sought-after hub where scholars, international students, researchers, and activists seek quality research, informed scholarship, and academic programming to better understand and make sense of the atrocities happening around us we work to build a more human rights-respecting global order.

Theriault concludes by stating: "...There is no time to waste: every see ZORYAN, page 8



Sarah Stites and a furry friend in Armenia

## Forum in New Britain Focuses on Artsakh

NEW BRITAIN, Conn. — The greater New Britain community had a special opportunity to learn more about the crisis in Artsakh on November 29 at a forum hosted by South Church.

A large group of both the Armenian and non-Armenian communities attended an evening which included a light dinner and refreshments and a revealing presentation.

Pastor Jane Rowe of South Church introduced the evening and the program. She expressed great pleasure in the large turnout and noted that a number of different faiths were represented at the affair. She introduced Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian, pastor of the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection in New Britain who also expressed gratitude for the large turnout and further thanked Rowe for organizing the event.

Sabounjian introduced the main speaker, Sarah Stites, who spoke about the history of the conflict between Armenian and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, known to the Armenian people as Artsakh, and the current humanitarian crisis that has unfolded as a result.



From left, Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian, Sarah Stites and Pastor Jane Rowe

Stites is affiliated with the Fund for Armenian Relief's subsidiary youth-run organization called "AYO!" and lives full-time in Armenia, working daily to support the 100,000 refugees who have been displaced from Artsakh to Armenia as a result of this crisis.

A gifted speaker, Sarah described the cherished Armenian centuries-old roots in Artsakh, her personal experiences from her almost six years living in Armenia and presented poignant first hand stories of individuals who have been displaced from their ancestral homeland.

While describing the disheartening stories of the battles and the suffering of the 100,000 thousand displaced residents of Artsakh, Sarah's presentation was uplifting and one of hope for the unsolved problem still before us.

"In the years I've lived in Gyumri, I've witnessed the pandemic, the 2020 war, the Russia-Ukraine war, the blockade and most recently the heart-wrenching loss of Artsakh. At the same time, I have seen magnificent developments — construction projects, fast-paced growth in the IT sector, change in stereotypes, female empowerment and a lot of other reasons for hope in our small motherland. Ayo!, at its core, is about saying 'yes!' It's about optimism and hope. We invite the diaspora to be a help in the midst of heartache, to see the good, and be a part of the change."

The audience was fascinated with her presentation and she provided opportunities for individual questions and comments to her.

Established in 2013 as a fundraising platform for Fund for Armenian Relief, Ayo! aims to unite Armenian people, and youth in particular, to create positive development in their society. Ayo! empowers them to initiate change by providing a vehicle with which they can raise money for local development projects. In the

ARTSAKH, page 8

## Giving and Receiving Love as a Couple: The Heart and Soul Of a Marriage

By Lalig Musserian

WATERTOWN — More than 110 people gathered at the St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church's hall to hear Rev. Dr. John Mokokosian, a licensed pastoral psychotherapist, discuss how to strengthen marriages and relationships and how to show appreciation and support to enrich a couple's life and keep them together.

Using humor as a backdrop, Mokokosian shared stories of couples' struggles and some common stress areas that cause relationship troubles. His points resonated so strongly with the attendees and there were a lot of laughs, nods and a few sighs too.

The key message was that marriage is a work in process, and just like anything valuable worth nurturing, your partner also needs to feel loved and cherished. In our busy lives, it is easy to feel taken for granted and sometimes neglected. Over



Members of the clergy and their spouses

time, these feelings will create a divide between spouses, then can grow into a bigger and bigger separation of emotions and lives unless we are paying close attention to each other emotionally and verbally.

Following the event, the organizing committee conducted a survey to gauge whether future events like this would be valuable. Overwhelmingly, the attendees encouraged more events like this at a greater frequency. While this was the third time this event was held, the organizing committee will consider increasing the frequency based on the feedback.

The Couples Ministry, led by New England Armenian clergy for parish families, organized this event. The goal of this program is helping our community and parish family couples to pause and reflect on their relationship, address the challenges of their relationship, give them hope, and motivate them to invest in their relationship to prevent it from withering.



Guitarist John Baboian performs.





## OBITUARY

## Haigouhi Ajemian Patapoutian

### Teacher, School Principal

MISSION HILLS, Calif. — Teacher and school principal Haigouhi Ajemian Patapoutian passed away on December 1.

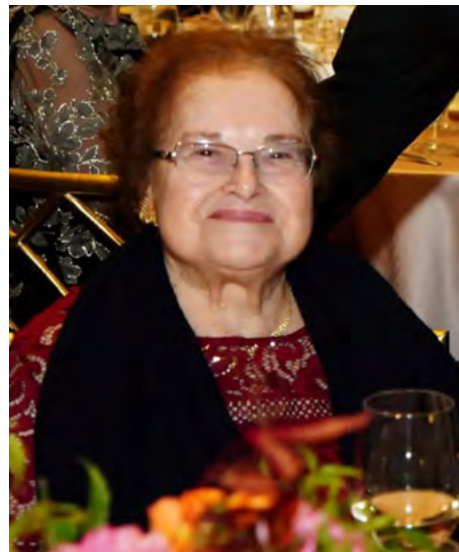
She was born in Beirut, in 1932, and had two sisters, Lucy and Sossi. Her grandfather, Nazaret Ajemian, was the village head of Ajemlik, near Gars Bazar (Adana province), and the responsible person of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) branch in the village. Her father, Hagop Ajemian, graduate of the AGBU Kelekian Orphanage in Beirut, specialized in sports in Copenhagen, Denmark. He taught in Armenian schools in both Nicosia and Beirut. He was well known for organizing sports fairs. He was also the founder of AGBU Armenian Youth Association (AYA)

Antranig in Beirut.

Her mother, Sirarpi, born in Akshehir, near Constantinople, was, like her father, a graduate of the AGBU Kelekian orphanage in Beirut.

Haigouhi attended the Nareg and Melkonian Schools in Nicosia, Cyprus. After her family returned to Beirut, she attended the Beirut Evangelical School for Girls, then got her BA in biology from the American University of Beirut in 1955.

In 1956 she married Sarkis Patapoutian (pen name Sarkis Vahaken), who is the author of many short stories, novels, plays, translations, articles, and an autobiography. She taught science in the AGBU Taruhi Hagopian Secondary School and worked in the



laboratory of American University Hospital as a biologist for five years.

In 1964-1986 she worked as a teacher and then as principal in the AGBU Yervant Demirjian School of Beirut.

In 1986 the Patapoutians immigrated to Los Angeles and Haigouhi taught at the Te-

keyan Cultural Association (TCA) Arshag Dikranian School in Los Angeles for 10 years until her retirement.

The couple have 3 children. Houry, with an MS in architecture, worked as a teacher, and is married to Dr. Yeghig Jerejian, who was a member of Lebanese Parliament and is the author of many historic books.

Ara, with a PhD in computer sciences, is the author of many inventions, patents, and publications. He is married to Betsy Lu, and they have two daughters, Talia and Tessa.

Ardem, with a PhD in biology, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2021. Married to Nancy Hong, he has a son, Luca.

Haigouhi was a member of the AGBU, and the Shoushanig Chapter of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party in Beirut. She was also a member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

She had intellectual and literary inclinations, gave social lectures about educating the young, women's rights, and human rights. She was greatly loved and respected by her students.

## George Gazmararian

### College Professor Dedicated to Family

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Kevork "George" Gazmararian passed away peacefully on Thursday, November 30, at Provision Living in East Lansing at the age of 93. He lived a long and healthy life, with many "bonus days" as he put it.

He was an adored husband, father,



grandfather and great-grandfather, and a cherished college professor who mentored hundreds of students and treasured his relationships with his colleagues.

George was born on October 28, 1930, and grew up in Jerusalem. He came to the United States in 1951 to pursue his college education and completed his undergraduate studies at Warren Wilson College and University of Detroit, MBA degree at the University of Detroit, and doctoral studies at Michigan State University. He taught at Michigan State University and Elmhurst College before moving to Alma, Mich., where he taught at Alma College from

1966 to 1996. While at Alma College, he was chairman of the Business Administration Department and director of the International Business Administration program. He developed and led study abroad programs in Europe and Australia and was the recipient of many outstanding teacher awards. Upon retirement, his former students established an endowed chair in his honor. He was also active in the local Alma community.

George had a kind soul and generous heart for everyone he met. He loved animals and nature, with a particular affection for penguins, and enjoyed watching the deer and ducks at his home in East Lansing.

He was an avid collector of stamps and coins as well as DVDs (even after they became obsolete). For a 20-year period, he published an annual "Christmas list" (Gaz's list) of securities of future growth companies that he shared with his students, family and friends. He was proud of the 19.8-percent average return of his list and considered it a gift he could share with others.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; his son Michael and wife Julie; his daughter Julie and husband Paul; his four grandchildren Allie, Anna, Alexander and Isaac; three great-grandchildren Hayden, Luke and Ezra; and brother Ohan and wife Hannah.

The funeral service was private. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to St. John Armenian Church in Southfield, Michigan, or to CorsoCare Hospice, in memory of George Gazmararian.

## Program in New Britain Focuses on Artsakh

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past decade, Ayo! donors have funded 80 low-budget, high-impact projects all across Armenia.

Donations are channeled to humanitarian and development projects, which cover a wide range of sectors, including education, healthcare, child protection, and business and economic development.

While Ayo! focuses on sustainable development, it also responds to urgent needs in times of crisis. Currently it is mobilizing all its resources for Artsakh natives who have been forcibly displaced from their homeland. Ayo! donors have already raised more than \$100,000 to buy bedding kits (pillows, sheets and blankets,) space heaters and warm coats for displaced families, as well as urgently needed medicines for kids with chronic illness. Currently, the campaign is shifting to align with the holiday season.

Donors have the opportunity to sponsor a Christmas wish for a displaced child.

Stites described a number of fundraising opportunities for individuals and organizations. Just one was "Donate your Birthday" wherein a prospective donor can create a special fundraising page with a monetary goal and ask friends and family to make donations in lieu of a birthday gift. Details can be found on the Ayo! website listed below.

Those wishing to learn more about Ayo! or to donate can do so at [www.weareayo.org](http://www.weareayo.org).

As an additional bonus, Sabounjian delighted the audience by revealing that Stites would return to New Britain at the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection, fittingly, on Armenian Christmas (January 6, 2024), when she will share more about how and why she said Ayo! to Armenia so many years ago.

## Zoryan Institute Commemorates 75th Anniversary of Human Rights Declaration and Genocide Convention

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person committed to human rights and the survival of marginalized groups around the globe must join together to reverse this global trend and create a world in which people can live with dignity and security. Zoryan's public commitment is a model for what is needed."

In light of events since October 7th and other atrocities of 2023 and on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Human Rights Declaration and the Genocide Convention, the Zoryan Institute, its Board of Directors, the editors of its journals, and its staff affirm their commitment to producing impactful research, publications and educational programming, such as the Institute's peer-reviewed journal, Genocide Studies International, hosting the annual graduate-level Genocide and Human

Rights University Program at the University of Toronto, co-sponsoring films based on its oral history archives, and delivering its high school-level Promoting, Equity, Tolerance, Reconciliation and Awareness Through Genocide Education Program.

The Zoryan Institute is a non-profit organization that serves the cause of scholarship and public awareness relating to issues of universal human rights, genocide, and diaspora-homeland relations. This is done through the systematic continued efforts of scholars and specialists using a comparative and multidisciplinary approach and in accordance with the highest academic standards.

To these ends the Institute undertakes and supports multi-disciplinary research, documentation, lectures, seminars, colloquia, and publications.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# 2023 ASA Scholarship Recipients and Silver Medal Winners Announced

This year the Armenian Students' Association (ASA) awarded \$155,000 in scholarships to 32 deserving students of Armenian descent enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States of America.

The Board of Trustees would like to thank the many benefactors who have made it possible for the ASA to assist our young men and women in their educational pursuits. During the past decade, the Association through its Scholarship Committee has been able to award over \$1,000,000 in outright scholarship grants.

The Scholarship Grant Program is the hallmark of the Association's mission. Gifts will have an immediate impact and give a lifetime of returns. Checks should be made payable to: Armenian Students' Association of America, Inc.

ASA Scholarship Applications for 2024-2025 academic year are available on our website: [www.asainc.org](http://www.asainc.org) or by emailing [headasa@asainc.org](mailto:headasa@asainc.org). Completed application with all documentation must be submitted to the ASA, 588 Boston Post Road Suite 364, Weston, MA 02493 by March 15, 2024.

## SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS 2023

Vartan Avedoumian, Drake University, Data Analytics  
 Davit Azizyan, University of Minnesota, Political Science  
 Sona Bardakjian, Boston College, Communications  
 Karo Boyadzhyan, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, Religious Studies  
 Ashkhen Chamasanyan, California State University at Fresno, Masters in Counseling  
 Kristin Dermenjian, UPenn Wharton School of Business, Strategic Management  
 Ava Gallagher, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Masters in Mechanical Engineering

Lori Ganjian, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Biology/Biotechnology  
 Hannah Gantz, Wake Forest University, Medical Doctor  
 Garen Hamamjian, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, Religious Studies  
 Hayk Hovhannisyan, Western Governors University, Cyber Security / Information Assurance  
 Alec Kellzi, University of Southern California, Law  
 Hayk Kocharyan, Harvard University, Masters in Learning, Design, Innovation and Technology  
 Nikolas Kojoian, Northeastern University, Industrial Engineering  
 Ava Kooloian, Tulane University, Communications

Armen Manuk-Khaloyan, Georgetown University, PhD History  
 Hayk Mardanyan, University of Minnesota, Masters in Public Policy  
 Zareh Mirzayan, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, Masters of Divinity  
 Hovhannes Mnatsakanyan, University of California – Davis, PhD Resource Economics  
 Alec Ohanian, UC San Francisco School of Medicine, Medical Doctor/Masters in Public Health  
 Katerina Ohanyan, LIM College, Fashion Merchandising  
 Angineh Parsadanians, Virginia Tech, PhD Crop, Soil and Environmental Science  
 Arin Parsanian, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, Religious Studies  
 Armine Poghosyan, Virginia Tech, PhD Econometric/Quantitative Economics  
 Edgar Sahakian, University of California Los Angeles, Psychology  
 Radik Sarukhanyan, Fordham University, Law  
 Arin Shahbazian, Virginia Tech, PhD Economics  
 Arman Shirikyan, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, Religious Studies  
 Nora Suren, University of Massachusetts Amherst Communications  
 Gary Taraian Nova Southwestern University, Computer Science  
 Boghos Taslakjian, University of Chicago, Masters in Molecular Engineering

Ofelia Yeghiyan, Michigan State University, Political Science

ASA Scholarship Applications for 2024-2025 academic year are available on our website: [www.asainc.org](http://www.asainc.org) or by emailing [headasa@asainc.org](mailto:headasa@asainc.org). Completed application with all documentation must be submitted to the ASA, 588 Boston Post Road Suite 364, Weston, MA 02493 by March 15, 2024.

## ASA Silver Medal Awards

The Armenian Students' Association (ASA) Silver Medal Award Committee selected three (3) seniors to receive the Silver Medal Award.

The following students were selected to receive this award: John Levon Kurkjian, Weston, MA, Weston High School, he will be attending the University of Rhode Island; Vardui Izabell Tenekedzhyan, Watertown, MA, Watertown High School, she will be attending Bentley University; John Aram Varin, Cranston, RI, Cranston High School East, he will be attending Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

The Silver Medal Awards are given annually to high school seniors who have demonstrated outstanding scholastic ability. Applications for the Silver Medal Awards can be obtained at: [www.asainc.org](http://www.asainc.org). Deadline for submitting applications and documentation is May 1, 2024.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# St. Nersess Seminary Graduates Honored

ARMONK, N.Y. — On November 4, more than 200 guests from near and far filled the grand ballroom of Macaluso’s in New Jersey to honor 12 men and women who graduated from the seminary to serve the Armenian Church as ordained clergy and lay ministers.

Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese and President of the St. Nersess Board of Directors, officiated, having just arrived a few hours prior from Armenia.



Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

Love and joy emanated from the room as clergy, honored guests, alumni, faculty, board members, seminarians, summer conference alumni, donors and guests congratulated the honorees and their families, after enjoying an abundant cocktail hour.

Fr. Mardiros Chevian, dean, served as the emcee for the evening. He began by welcoming all the guests and first introduced Archbishop Avak Asadourian, retired primate of the Armenian Diocese of Iraq, to share a reflection of his time at the seminary and to give the invocation. Asadourian shared how he started his ministry in the Armenian Church in Elberon, NJ, before heading to Iraq to serve the Armenian people there. “We endured three wars and an embargo, and now 46 years later as

a clergyman I continue to be grateful for my education at St. Nersess Seminary,” he stated. “Current seminarians, please take advantage of your education, new wisdom and Christian joy.”

Fr. Mardiros invited Karnig Durgarian, chairman of the seminary board of directors to offer the celebratory champagne toast to the engaged crowd, followed by Richard Papalian, treasurer of the board, who made a surprise announcement that St. Nersess was recently awarded a grant by the Lilly Endowment from its Compelling Preaching Initiative. This new initiative will help Armenian clergy to strengthen their preaching so they can better inspire, encourage, and guide people to live their faith more fully.

Each honoree rose to enthusiastic applause as Chevian announced his or her name, in order of ordination or graduation date. The 2023 Honorees include: Archbishop Avak Asadourian (1977); Fr. Krikor Sabounjian (1998); Fr. Sarkis Petoyan (1998); Fr. Abraham Ohanesian (1999); Fr. Mikael Devejian (2000); Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan (2004); Fr. Aren Jebejian (2004); Fr. Bedros Kadehjian (2005); Yn. Valerie Goekjian Zahirsky (1974); Yn. Sirarpi Feredjian Aivazian (1978); Nancy Basmajian (1979); Shaké Ajamian Derderian (1989).

Each honoree was gifted a framed illustration, hand drawn in Armenia by artist Hovhannes Yedigaryan.

Chevian read a letter from Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese and Vice-President of the St. Nersess Board of Directors, which called us all to live out our faith. “My spirit is with you and our 12 exceptional individual honorees.”

Anthony Barsamian, co-chairperson of the board of trustees of the Armenian Assembly of America, who had also just arrived back from Armenia just hours before, was invited to share an impromptu message regarding the serious situation of the forced displacement of Armenians from Artsakh into Armenia. He pleaded that we all need to support our brothers and sisters there. Guests were encouraged to donate to the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) by

placing a donation in the envelopes provided on the tables.

Next, Chevian introduced two honorees — Fr. Aren Jebejian and Nancy Basmajian — who each shared short anecdotes on their respective ministries over the years. “I was blessed to grow up in a family of clergy, and blessed to celebrate Divine Liturgy with my father, who learned from Tiran Srpazan (the founder of St. Nersess Seminary) of blessed memory,” reminisced Fr. Aren Jebejian.

Basmajian then spoke about the 30 years she worked at the Eastern Diocese and how her seminary training allowed her to follow this path. “Faith is not informational... we need to translate our faith to help others connect,” she shared.

Chevian recognized the banquet donors, including Vicken and Rosette Arslanian who had underwritten the cocktail hour and dinner for all the guests. Additional expenses were covered by Edward and Janet Mardigian who funded the commemorative video; Sarkis and Ruth Bedevian who provided the travel and lodging expenses for the honorees; an anonymous donor who underwrote the floral centerpieces; and Deacon Diran Jebejian of Jebejian Images who photographed the event.

Also recognized was the Very Rev. Dr. Chad Hatfield, president of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and Dr. Ionut-Alexandru Tudorie, its academic dean, and their wives, for their attendance. St. Nersess shares a 50+ year relationship with St. Vladimir’s. The seminary faculty, staff, and students also were acknowledged.

After dinner, Dottie Bengoian, an educator, motivational speaker and humorist, entertained the room with a presentation on Laughter, A Faith Lift, interweaving Armenian humor with English. From the moment she took to the microphone, the guests erupted in laughter and never stopped. Audiences elsewhere have described Dottie as an “ambassador of joy” and the “Armenian queen of comedy”, and she lived up to those titles! Dottie also works as our Administrative Assistant at St. Nersess.

A hard act to follow, two more honorees were called to the podium – Fr. Krikor Sab-

ounjian and Fr. Sarkis Petoyan – to share reflections on their ministries. “If you believe in our mission and honor us, please help us find additional seminary students in your parishes to attend St. Nersess in the coming years,” pleaded Der Krikor. Fr. Sarkis followed with, “I don’t seek glory for being a priest... I allow the Holy Spirit to direct me. He chose me for this work.”

An incredible dessert buffet opened for all the guests to meander and select what looked most tempting before returning to their seats to view the highly anticipated video, “12 Vocations: Sacred Friendships”, premiering for the first time and viewed on multiple screens around the room. It detailed the honorees and their calling and service to the Armenian Church and how St. Nersess has impacted their lives. Links to the inspiring video will be posted soon.

The guests cheered as the event co-chairs were recognized — Margaret Kachigian Ajamian and Lynn Pinajian Beylerian — who shared their love for the seminary over last 10 months as they planned a successful fundraiser with seminary staff.

To conclude the evening, Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan gave the final message and benediction. “We have unknown saints amongst us, ordinary people with extraordinary love. We are blessed this evening with our honorees,” shared Mesrop Srpazan. He shared that without St. Nersess our long-term future for our Church would be very bleak, and how the seminary provides four things that are necessary for success: teachers willing to teach, students who have a love for the school, a school that is peaceful and the location that is quiet. He also took a few moments to describe what he saw on his most recent trip to Armenia. “When I saw our displaced brothers and sisters from Artsakh, I saw in their eyes their pain...”

Plans for the next seminary gala in the Fall of 2025 are in the works and will include the next 12 honorees who have already been identified - those who pursued a variety of academic programs, but who all went into ministry in the service of the Church. The “12 Vocations” series will continue to recognize and offer thanks to those who have answered the call to serve the Lord through the Armenian Church.



Archbishop Avak Asadourian  
(priestly ordination in 1977, episcopal consecration in 1982)



Fr. Krikor Sabounjian  
(ordained 1998)



Fr. Sarkis Petoyan  
(ordained 1998)



Fr. Bedros Kadehjian  
(ordained 2005)



Yn. Sirarpi Feredjian Aivazian  
(graduated 1978)



Nancy Basmajian  
(graduated 1979)



Fr. Mikael Devejian  
(ordained 2000)



Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan  
(ordained 2004)



Fr. Aren Jebejian  
(ordained 2004)



Shake Ajemian Derderian  
(graduated 1989)



Fr. Abraham Ohanesian  
(ordained 1999) - not present



Yn. Valerie Goekjian Zahirsky  
(graduated 1974) - not present





COMMUNITY NEWS



# Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

To Our Readers

We thank all who supported our recent sold-out gala and journalists’ panel celebrating more than 90 years of serving the community. The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is the first English-language Armenian weekly published in the US. Readers can learn of the most important developments in Armenia, as well as international politics, art and culture throughout the world in a convenient and concise format.

The *Mirror-Spectator* has covered the violence and political uncertainty affecting Armenia and Artsakh, supported efforts at humanitarian fundraising, and secured new young correspondents in Armenia, Artsakh and the US as well as two prominent political columnists from Armenia. We continue to provide periodic video reports online. Send us your email if you wish to regularly receive links to articles and videos.

We continue with our annual tradition of publishing your Christmas and New Year’s wishes, and greetings to relatives and friends in the final issue of the year. In case you wish to give gift subscriptions of the *Mirror-Spectator* for Christmas, for your convenience, we are placing a gift subscription form in the newspaper as well as one below.

Sincerely,

Alin K. Gregorian  
Editor

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# Arts & Culture

## From the Big Stage Of Entertainment To the Frontline of Humanitarian Aid: Lyoka’s Unwavering Journey

By Victoria Pisarenko  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN — Lyoka, also known as Valeri Ghazaryan, shifted from performing in the largest Armenian stadium to a different kind of stage — a new frontline. There, he witnessed over 50,000 of his compatriots, compelled to leave their homes against their will.

Despite the never-ending war in the region, Yerevan was set to host several famous artists over the past few months. However, each time, as the date approached, a significant event would be canceled, allegedly due to the “upcoming escalation” in a formerly disputed region of Artsakh.

Snoop Dogg’s concert was different — on a larger scale, with more preparations in the city, including murals, ads spread throughout, and, most importantly, an exciting lineup crafted for the opening ceremony. Among the well-known performers in the heart of Armenia was a relatively new name in the big city music scene — Lyoka.

Ghazaryan, better known as Lyoka, emerged as a beacon of resilience. Hailing from the Mardakert region of Artsakh, his musical prominence soared after the 44-day war, a period when people yearned to return home — echoing the sentiment in the lyrics of his song “Տուն Տարեմ” [Toun Tarek – Take me home]. He was slowly gaining well-deserved fame over the past three years.

The singer easily transitions from a wide smile to a more pensive face while introducing himself. Lyoka is a rap singer who chose this genre, describing it as “a means to contest something,” which, in his life, were numerous challenges. Regarding the genre of his music, Lyoka self-proclaimed that it is “rap devoted to motherland.” Judging based on his actions, including military service, it truly encapsulates the essence of his music.

A significant breakthrough in his career was supposed to be the Snoop Dogg concert in September, 2023. Lyoka was thrilled about the idea of simply sharing the dressing room with the “legendary man” himself. The Hrazdan Stadium, meant for 50,000+ spectators, was a colossal stage for Lyoka’s debut. Reflecting on the concert, he shares, “I would not only represent my story but also my family, friends, and compatriots. People with different faiths, my friends who are not present anymore. I needed to represent everyone.”

Amidst uncertainties about the concert due to the war, Lyoka swiftly pivoted from entertainment to a frontline role in the war effort. On September 20, he drove towards the new border of his soon-to-cease-to-exist home — Artsakh. Recounting the sleepless nights in his car,

see LYOKA, page 13



Comedian and longtime ABMDR supporter Maz Jobrani

## ‘Laughter for Life’ Delights Hundreds of Comedy Lovers In Los Angeles, Benefits Bone Marrow Registry

LOS ANGELES — A capacity audience of nearly 300 supporters attended the 19th annual “Laughter for Life,” the comedy night of the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR). One of the pan-Armenian organization’s most popular benefit events, “Laughter for Life” was held on December 3, at the landmark Comedy Store on the Sunset Strip, in West Hollywood.

Long a showcase for cutting-edge stand-up comedy, “Laughter for Life” featured a lineup of acclaimed comedians, including Maz Jobrani, Sam Tripoli, Amir K, Dustin Ybarra, Nicky Paris, Anthony Amorello, and Orny Adams. Sam Tripoli also organized and hosted the event, as he has done ever since co-founding “Laughter for Life” with Lara Yeretsian, Esq., in 2002.

In her remarks, Yeretsian thanked the audience and the event’s sponsors for their support, and shared some stories about ABMDR’s latest activities. Yeretsian said, “We have a stem cell donor from Artsakh, a young woman, who, despite being impacted by the horrific events that have befallen the people of her homeland recently, said ‘yes’ to our request for donating her stem cells, for a chance to save the life of a patient in Germany. And right now, as we’re gathered here, the stem cells of another ABMDR donor are being harvested in Yerevan, to be used for a transplant that can save the life of a patient in Belarus.”

see COMEDY, page 13



The ABMDR Comedy Night Committee.

## Honoring Aram Khachaturian in Burbank

*A Triumph of Culture And Resilience*

By Sevan Boghos-Derbedrossian

BURBANK, Calif. — St. Leon Cathedral in Burbank was the site of an homage to a musical genius on December 3. The occasion marked the 120th anniversary of the birth of composer Aram Khachaturian, celebrated through a concert organized by the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church’s Zvartnots Cultural Committee.

Dr. Simon Simonian, chair of the Zvartnots Cultural Committee, commenced the evening with an impassioned address. He articulated the resilience of the Armenian people in the face of historical challenges, emphasizing the vital role of the Armenian Church in safeguarding the rich tapestry of Armenian culture and heritage. His words echoed a profound truth: that amidst adversity, culture stands as a beacon, guiding and preserving the essence of a people.

Under the baton of conductor Raffi Mikaelian, the program unfolded, weaving together beloved selections from Khachaturian’s iconic ballets “Gayane” and “Spartacus.” The ethereal performances by the Voce Dell Orchestra and the enchanting harmonies of the Shnorhali Choir under the guidance of Deacon Arthur Vartanian breathed life into Khachaturian’s timeless compositions. Applause reverberated through the hallowed halls, a testament to the sheer delight and admiration felt by all present.

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, extended heartfelt gratitude to Raffi Mikaelian, the orchestra, and the choir for their breathtaking renditions.

In honoring Khachaturian, the concert became a testament to the endurance of culture, an affirmation that through the darkest of times, the light of artistry and heritage continues to shine brightly, illuminated by the brilliance of the past.



Dr. Simon Simonian



Conductor Raffi Mikaelian



ARTS & CULTURE

From the Big Stage to the Frontline of Humanitarian Aid: Lyoka’s Unwavering Journey

LYOKA, from page 12

awaiting the arrival of family and friends, he describes the arduous journeys endured by his sister’s and brother’s families, 30+ hours on the road without sustenance, and the uncertainty at the border crossing.

The memories of September’s horrors linger, leaving some in slow recovery, others in nostalgic reflection, and some grappling with the harsh reality. For Lyoka, the abrupt transition from a promising breakthrough to the loss of his homeland is palpable. Yet, he embraces a philosophy rooted in the present: “Tears, cries won’t help the situation. How much looking back will help us? It is better to accept the reality and jump into work right away.”

Throughout our nearly two-hour conversation, it became apparent that the singer’s roots lie in a large Armenian family, where the ethos of thinking for everyone, rather than being selfish, is ingrained. His dialogue was interspersed with phrases like “not just me, but also my compatriots.” He demonstrated an admirable inability to differentiate one Armenian from another, a commendable quality in a small nation and a challenging feat in practical terms.

Due to anger or rage stemming from his self-made success, some individuals sent death threats to Lyoka before the upcoming Snoop Dogg concert, questioning his political involvement with the ruling forces. However, it is hard to comprehend how an unknown ghost user can harbor hatred toward a person whose art is wholly devoted to his motherland. Lyoka’s music videos are entirely produced in Armenia, showcasing the country and incorporating old Armenian singing traditions. This type of art appears to have uplifted and given hope, seemingly harming no one.

At 34, Valeri bears the weight of ex-

periences aging his face prematurely. Instability near his home border has left visible marks over five years. His once broad smile transformed into a serious expression, evident in YouTube music videos. You can trace this journey through the music video series on his page, from searching for his childhood home to discovering and renovating it.

Lyoka was born into a family residing in the Mardakert region. Growing up in impoverished conditions, his father was drafted, and his mother grappled with providing for five children. When discussing his upbringing, Valeri appears reflective, wearing a subtle smile on his face as he recounts a small yet significant episode from his life: “Back at school, kids would call me a refugee since I lost my home early on. To me, my classmates seemed to be from wealthy families. Perhaps it was my perspective because I had to collect plastic bottles to earn 300 drams in case we celebrated someone’s birthday at school.”

Valeri has already witnessed six wars, some of them silent. “There was always war, diversion attacks, shootings, etc. It has been a part of my life. Even when entering a building, I first try to identify exit routes in case of war or shooting,” Ghazaryan remarked with a touch of humor. He jokingly added that over the years, he has been injured multiple times, and his body is predominantly composed of metal constructions. In his opinion, the only thing missing is a socket for charging right next to the heart.

It is challenging to fathom what it takes to break someone who is almost constructed of metal. When asked about the recent loss, Valeri states, almost emotionlessly, that he left his newly built home af-

ter living there for only two months. The blockade began, and Valeri desperately wanted to break through. He speaks in a serious tone, gesturing as if a map were in front of him, explaining that there were ways to reach his family, and he genu-

inely tried but did not succeed. The immediate thought of things we would get that crossed his mind was a small wooden house from his soon-to- cease-to-exist home, bearing the inscription “տոնն է մենք ենք” [tounn e menk enk – We are the home]. It was a small gift received before filming a music video for his song, later serving as inspiration for the video.

Currently, Lyoka is gearing up to release multiple singles that have been in the making for an extended period. The “կյանք” [kyank – word play between life and existence in Armenian] series focuses

on navigating the current situation where Armenians from Artsakh feel like guests in their own homeland. In Lyoka’s words, “We can’t access the schools we attended, we haven’t connected with our lifelong neighbors, and the new ones seem to show

their faces only when reminding us that this place is not intended for parking. It is not life, it is existence.”

Lyoka now resides at ImpactHub, where he has been granted a co-working space to dedicate himself to his music and personal merch brand. Situated right next to the central station, this subtly hints at the fast-paced life of the singer. While posing for pictures in a pristine white outfit beside the boldly written “Yerevan,” it appears to signify a new beginning, a new chapter in the already seemingly lengthy life of Valeri Ghazaryan.



Lyoka in front of the Yerevan Train Station

‘Laughter for Life’ Delights Comedy Lovers in Los Angeles, Benefits Bone Marrow Registry

COMEDY, from page 12

“Just today, we had one more pleasant surprise,” Yeretsian continued. “There was a festive event at the Western Diocese, in Burbank, where Alex, one of our young patients, and his family were collecting toys for Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. The event included a raffle drawing, and Alex’s family decided to donate all proceeds from the lottery to ABMDR. So Alex’s parents, who are the proprietors of Rama Drugs, not only donated nearly \$8,000 to ABMDR, but are also among the sponsors of tonight’s ‘Laughter for Life.’”

Afterwards, ABMDR President Dr. Frieda Jordan said, “I think ‘Laughter for



ABMDR Comedy Night Committee Chairperson Lara Yeretsian, far right, with stand-up comedians and supporters.



Comedian and “Laughter for Life” co-founder Sam Tripoli.

Life’ continues to be a hit with audiences because it not only serves up outstanding comedic talent, but also celebrates a beautiful sense of community, with hundreds coming together to support our organization’s life-saving mission.”

Dr. Jordan added, “I would like to thank the great Sam Tripoli, the event’s organizer; our dedicated Comedy Night Committee, chaired by the phenomenal Lara

Yeretsian; as well as our generous supporters, sponsors, and volunteers, for making it all possible!”

Major sponsors of “Laughter for Life” included the Comedy Store (the Shore family), The Naughty Show, Sasoun Bakery, Sarkis Pastry, California Gourmet Nuts, Naturewell Vegan Juice and Smoothies and Zartonn Media. Sponsors also included Feral Cosmetics, MK Loan

Consulting, Vatican Banquet Hall, Paulette Malekian (of Engel & Völkers), Yeretsian Law, Mammoth Associates, Daglian Law Group, the Law Offices of Meline Mkrtichian, Arminak Law, Aram and Marine Papazian, Tazah, the Honorable Zaven Sinanian (of Signature Resolution), Taltch Construction, Dilanchian Chiropractic, and Rama Drugs.

For more information, visit [abmdr.am](http://abmdr.am).





ARTS & CULTURE

# COAF’s 20th Holiday Gala Sets New Record of Over \$10M Raised

NEW YORK — The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) reached a historic milestone on December 9, raising over \$10 million during its 20th Annual Holiday Gala, “Two Decades of Unwavering Commitment.” All proceeds from the benefit will be invested in advancing COAF’s comprehensive initiatives in rural Armenia encompassing crucial education, healthcare, psychosocial support, and economic development programs. Furthermore, funds will bolster COAF’s ongoing Project H.O.P.E. rapid response addressing the immediate and long-term needs of forcibly displaced families from Artsakh.

The Gala was co-hosted by Araksya Karapetyan of “Good Day L.A.” on FOX 11 Los Angeles, COAF Head of Development Haig Boyadjian, and renowned auctioneer Gabriel Butu. The evening featured captivating musical performances by New York-based jazz singer Astghik Martirosyan, as well as musical talents from Armenia — 10-year-old Menua Melik-Haykazyan

on piano and 13-year-old Davit Babayan on violin. A distinguished lineup of celebrities made special appearances, including award-winning actress and longtime COAF ambassador Andrea Martin. Also in attendance were celebrated artists Michael Aram and Tigran Tsitoghdzian.

This landmark event honored acclaimed actor Joe Manganiello with the prestigious Humanitarian Award for his support for the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh and for using his platform to share the story of his family’s history, roots and Armenian culture. Philanthropists and dedicated COAF supporters Tamar and John Akhoian of Los Angeles were recognized with the Save a Generation Award for their critical impact on advancing the organization’s work in rural communities.

Major Gala sponsors and donors include the Youredjian Family Charitable Foundation, COAF Founder and Chairman Garo Armen, the Afeyan Family Foundation, JHM Charitable Foundation,



Celebrating raising \$10 million



Andrea Martin and Garo Armen



Anna and Noubar Afeyan

Victor Zarougian and Judith Saryan, the Ajemian Foundation, as well as several anonymous donors.

Over the last two decades, COAF has achieved incredible progress by prioritizing initiatives that promote economic and social stability, provide educational opportunities, and facilitate resources for career and economic advancement in overlooked rural regions. Touching the lives of over 100,000 people across 82 communities in Armenia and Artsakh, COAF’s success proves that building a stronger nation, starting with its villages, is not only an achievable goal but also well within reach.

The significance of the organization’s 20th-anniversary Gala goes beyond cel-

ebrating these contributions to village communities; it signifies a continued commitment to the holistic development of Armenia’s rural families and children as well as a historic opportunity to unlock the potential for a better future. Given the current challenges facing Armenia, this year’s fundraiser will additionally support COAF’s Project H.O.P.E. rapid response efforts. This initiative is designed to assist families displaced from Artsakh through Housing, Opportunities in Education, Psychosocial and Health Support, and Empowerment through Capacity Building.

To learn more about COAF visit [coaf.org](https://coaf.org) and consider supporting their mission to advance the children of Armenia.

# AGBU Fundraises for Artsakh With Annual Multi-City Armenian in Films Event

NEW YORK — Cinema enthusiasts gathered at independent and large-stage theaters alike across Sydney, Melbourne, London and New York for AGBU Arts’ eighth annual Armenians in Film event showcasing short films in a wide range of genres from up-and-coming Armenian creatives around the globe. Proceeds from this year’s event were geared towards supporting displaced Artsakh Armenians through AGBU’s Global Relief Fund, an ongoing support system tackling urgent needs and longer-term assistance as part of the response and recovery process.

Although this year’s event had the homeland top of mind, this series typically aims to highlight diverse Armenian filmmakers and allow up-and-coming talent to screen their work at prestigious global venues to increase exposure to Armenian creatives.

The first event in this series took place in Melbourne at the Frankston Arts Centre with over 140 attendees present, kicking off the Armenians in Film series with a musical flair thanks to a special performance by international opera singer Natalie Aroyan, piano performance by Hayk Arsenyan, and a dazzling display of traditional Armenian dance by the Tamzara Group choreographed by Tina Natarian.

In Sydney, the event was held at the Concourse Concert Hall the following day to a full house of 400 guests. Both screenings featured the same six short films in addition to the cultural performance, including identity-based cinematic dramas like Alik Tamar



The AGBU Armenians in Film event in New York (Photo by Glyn Szasz)

Barsoumian’s “Antouni,” Lévon Minasian’s “The Piano” and Michael Aloyan’s “This Land.” In addition, uplifting, comical shorts like Anahid Yahjian and Emily Mkrtichian’s “Levon” as well as avant-garde shots like Garen Barsegian’s “Worn” were featured. The films paid homage to Armenia’s rich history with biographical recreations, including Garo Berberian’s “Taniel.”

On October 29, more than 150 movie buffs attended the London event at the Curzon Bloomsbury Cinema at the Brunswick Centre. Multiple genres were presented, including animations like Kristine Khanamiryan’s “Sunset,” experimental films like Charlotte Mungomery’s “The Road,” and

Tatiana Boudakian’s “Dehatsi — I Was Another Place.” Comedic tales like Vahan Grigoryan’s “The Mud” and impactful documentaries like Arman Ayyvazyan’s “Stones” were also screened. Arsenyan moderated an enlightening post-screening panel discussion with filmmakers Victoria Aleksanyan (“Crossing the Blue”) and other directors joining remotely.

The final screening of the year took place in New York’s renowned Lincoln Center, with over 130 people present. The lineup of films matched the London event, with a Q&A session moderated by Theodore Bogosian in conversation with Vahan Grigorian (“The Mud”) and Manuel Baghjaji-

an (on behalf of “Stones” director Arman Ayyvazyan) present to discuss their work.

“Now more than ever, we know how important it is to focus on Artsakh,” said AGBU Arts Director Hayk Arsenyan at the New York screening in Lincoln Center. “I think it’s supremely important at this point in Armenian history for young people to be able to relate Armenian stories to the world,” added Emmy-winning filmmaker and television producer Theodore Bogosian, moderator at the New York screening. “It warms my heart because when I first started, there were very few of us making films like this. For the Armenian message to get out this way is very important.” The much-anticipated event is expected to take place in São Paulo, Montreal, and Pasadena in the new year.

AGBU Arts offers financial, mentorship, and exposure opportunities for rising artists, providing a number of scholarships to talented young Armenians who might otherwise not have the opportunity to study at top institutions. In addition, AGBU Arts offers mini-grants and the Creative Armenia-AGBU Fellowship to support young talent with professional mentorship and funds to bring ideas to life and build credentials as they pursue a given field.

For more information on AGBU Arts, visit <https://agbu.org/arts>.

To learn more about AGBU’s Global Relief Fund, please visit <https://agbu.org/global-relief>.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Books

## Danny Bedrosian Publishes P-Funk Reference Book

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Armenian-American musician Daniel “Danny” Peter Bedrosian, member of George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic collective, finally has completed a project which took several decades of work: *The Authorized P-Funk Song Reference: Official Canon of Parliament-Funkadelic, 1956-2023* (Rowan and Littlefield Publishers). This is an encyclopedic 504-page catalog of all the albums, projects, songs, and collaborations of all musical groups founded and produced by Clinton from 1956 to 2023.

Bedrosian said, “The Parliament-Funkadelic canon is the largest single discography of any music collective in the history of music of the world essentially. It is the longest running popular music band in world history as well with a 68-year unbroken tenure of time of work. It is also personnel-wise the largest band of all time, with somewhere around 200 full-time touring members. With that in mind, this [publication] was a daunting task, to say the least.”

The discography encapsulates somewhere around 850 releases, the vast majority of which are albums, so that means somewhere over 10,000 songs.

The newly published book contains full details of who played and sang on all songs of the groups connected with Clinton, along with rare photos. The precocious Bedrosian said that he began compiling information in notebooks on Clinton’s work back when he was in middle school. Later, “when I got into the band,” he said, “I started asking all of my bandmates many tedious questions about the minutiae

the countryside in Florida where he lives now, and started running every day and exercising, as well as perfecting classical music pieces, like some of his favorite Khachaturian segments, that he had never had the time to devote to previously.

The third thing he did was to make the Clinton reference book a reality. He said he knew he had to work fast: “The music industry was hit especially hard during the pandemic because of the way we travel and the hardships and conditions of traveling. I decided time is passing and we are losing a lot of people.”

He conducted some 130 primary source interviews with about 66 members of the band, including, he said, somewhere around 18 to 30 hours of interviews with Clinton himself, who lives down the street from Bedrosian. What he did, he said, was “a really tedious interview process, going song by song, person by person, [asking] who played on this? Who is this bass player? Who is this trumpet player?”

He felt particularly motivated to do this because, he said, “I didn’t want three or four generations to pass where nobody who was associated with this thing is alive or around anymore to actually tell what is truth and what is fiction. So, with something so concentrated and convoluted as these personnel listings, I knew that somebody who was attached to this had to be the one to make it happen.” Bedrosian wanted to set the record straight.

A tertiary reason for preparing the book was to set arguments between fans to rest. Bedrosian said, “fans had been arguing – fighting – over this content, over who played what, who sang on what, for as long as this music has been made. There are whole groups dedicated to this on Facebook where they argue, was it this person or that person, heated debates between the super dedicated fan base.”

He dedicated 5 to 9 hours in his afternoons and evenings every day to conducting interviews and typing the book. “Within a few years, I had the makings of a completed reference book and with that had to search for publishers – which was actually one of the most daunting tasks of all.”

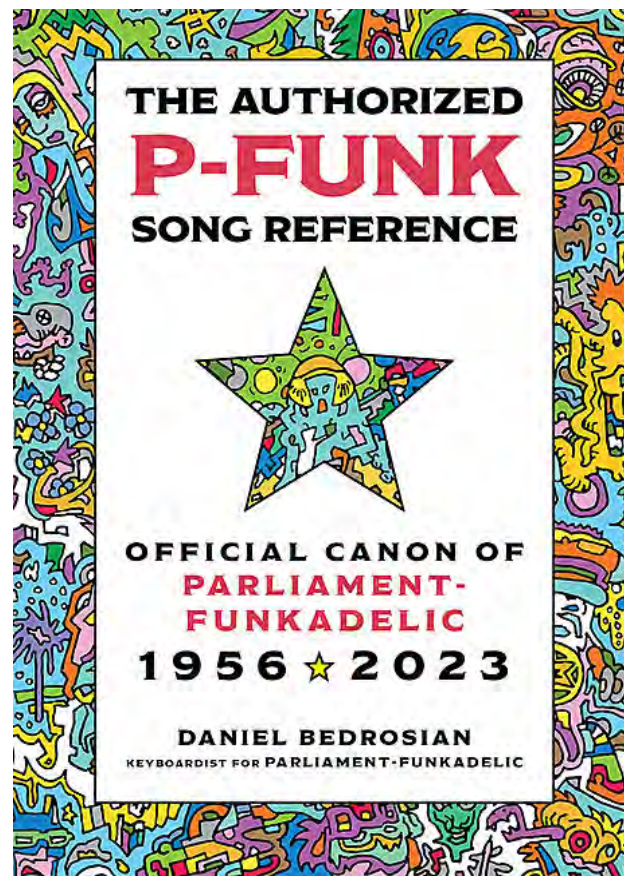
During the process of preparing the book, Bedrosian encountered surprises galore. “You name it! Miscrediting, uncrediting, undercrediting, wrongly crediting,” he said. He recalled, “the information had been erroneous for so long, so most albums had incomplete information or the information would be subject to the whole album and not song by song. There are hundreds of cases where an individual is listed as on an album but they were not actually on the album, or vice versa – they aren’t listed but they should be.

There are several albums that were released in compilation form 20, 30 years later, and the entire liner notes are wrong. There are some cases where liner notes were written wrong on purpose, either due to infighting or due to legalist procedures. There are pseudonymic situations where names are left off.”

Despite this complexity, at a certain point, after many edits, Bedrosian told himself he was done, but even now after publication, he said, “I am still looking at the book and saying, oops, I left this out or forgot that, so a second edition will be around the corner in a couple of years, I guess.”

### Armenian Cultural Connections

Bedrosian started a series of comics which present stories connected with Armenian mythology. He named the



series *Sons of the Sun*, or *Arevorti*. The first issue came out in 2019 as a limited run. After three issues were released, he published a 106-page trade paperback containing the first three issues, dealing with Hayk the hero and his battle against Bel and the birth and travails of Vahagn the Dragon-reaper, including his fights against Ninots of Assyria and Barsam.

Bedrosian said, “This one has been really successful. I would say that probably 75 percent of the audience buying it are non-Armenians. My general audience [for his music] is somewhere between 15 and maybe 40 percent Armenian on average, depending on the project.”

The fourth standalone issue, on the gods Asdghig, Aramazd, Mihr and Nane, will appear soon, and once the series reaches number six or seven, Bedrosian said that another trade paperback will be issued.

In general, Bedrosian said, it is similar to the comic books on Thor and Norse mythology which have become so popular through the movies in recent years with a general, non-Scandinavian audience. Aside from the entertainment value, Bedrosian said, his comic books “teach Armenian mythology and Armenian history – dates and places that people would otherwise not know anything about...They educate people who would otherwise not know anything about us.”

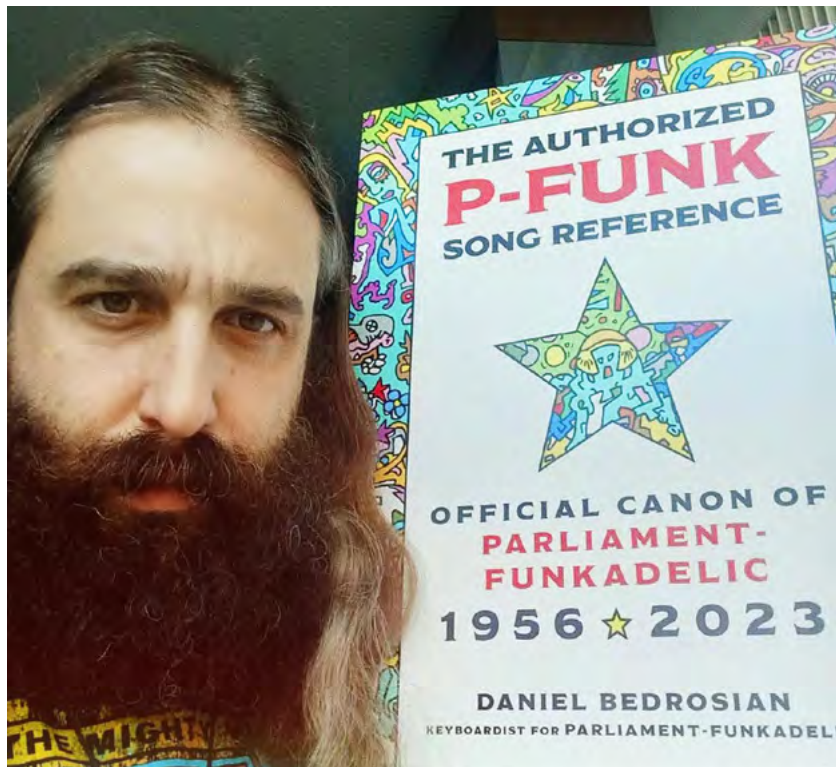
Bedrosian, in addition to performing with George Clinton, as well as with his own band, Secret Army, occasionally has concerts of Armenian music. On November 11, he presented an all-Armenian set of music at the Blue Tavern in Tallahassee, Fla. He said it was a sold-out crowd and the concert was videotaped and digitized, so it will be available as part of his Patreon site ([www.patreon.com/dannybedrosian](http://www.patreon.com/dannybedrosian)). The concert included several selections from Sayat Nova, Gusan Sharam, Gomidas and Oudi Hrant. Bedrosian said he also included Armenian folk tunes from Erzerum, Kharper, Govdun, Gavur, Bingöl and a few other places, and some slightly more modern Armenian music from Iran and from America.

After some time passes, perhaps in less than a year, it will also be turned into a free episode of his video podcast, Danny on Everything (<http://dannyyoneverything.com/>).

Bedrosian pointed out that with the advent of digital downloads, royalties at first came to artists but as streaming became more popular, “they basically stripped us of all of our earnings. We used to get at least a dollar for every song listen, and 10-20 dollars for every album listen. Now it is a fraction of a penny for every song listen and maybe 10 cents for every album listen. It is a huge difference....Patreon pages are the best way for artists to make money digitally from their music nowadays and it is a good way for people to get my new music.”

Of course, he said, shows and sessions are still his major bread and butter because that is where he does the largest quantity of work. He concluded, “In this day and age, we just have to be multifaceted. Musicians have to be in publishing, production, education, studio, live – all that stuff – to be a successful working musician.”

For more information about Bedrosian and his involvement in Armenian music and culture, see this author’s article from 2021 in the *Mirror-Spectator* (<https://mirror-spectator.com/2021/08/09/danny-bedrosian-keeps-the-funk-going-boosts-habousi-and-the-armenians/>).



Danny Bedrosian with the cover of his new book

of personnel and obtained those from the primary sources themselves over an 18-year period.” Many of those individuals are no longer alive.

The Covid pandemic provided Bedrosian the opportunity to set aside the time necessary to bring the book to fruition. Previously, he said that he was on the road as a keyboardist with Clinton for 280 to 320 days a year, along with his classical music residency which had him working the rest of his free time.

First, however, he had to take care of health issues. He had a little health scare right before Covid, which led him to lose 85 pounds and get into what he called the best shape of his life. Nonetheless, he said, “Alpha Covid was really, really bad on me. I was hospitalized three times. I almost didn’t make it.” After recovering he moved into





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## Winter Salad with Bulgur, Radicchio, And Toasted Almonds

“In her best cookbook yet, certified clinical nutritionist, recipe developer, and food blogger-turned-author Gena Hamshaw shares appetizing vegan meals that won’t leave you hungry. Substantial recipes such as apple ginger muesli, Vietnamese rice noodle salad with seared tofu, and herbed cauliflower steaks with lemon caper lentils offer a delightful balance of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. Delicious main dishes are the stars here — there are no desserts, appetizers, snacks, or beverages. In particular, the meal-sized salads could be welcome weekday lunches or potluck contributions. Hamshaw touches lightly on nutritional guidance, meal planning, and make-ahead techniques (e.g., batch cooking grains and legumes over the weekend), but her advice never feels prescriptive or preachy. Hamshaw brings style and substance to healthful vegan cooking.”

“I earned my Master’s of Science in Nutrition from Teachers College, Columbia University. I went on to complete my dietetic internship with Teachers College. My internship training included rotations at Brookdale University Hospital Medical Center, the John Theurer Cancer Center, East River Gastroenterology, and the Institute for Family Health. I hold a premedical, post-baccalaureate degree from Georgetown University. I spent two years as a nutrition counselor in the office of gastroenterologist Robynne Chutkan, MD, specializing in dietary management of digestive disorders,” she adds.

Hamshaw’s recipes and articles have been featured in the Huffington Post, *Whole Living*, *O* magazine, *VegNews*, *Thrive* magazine, *Well and Good*, *Mind Body Green*, *Glamour* and the *Chalkboard*, among other publications. She has written two cookbooks, *Food52 Vegan* and *Choosing Raw*, and is the author of the blog *The Full Helping*. “This vegan cookbook—with seasonal meal-plan charts that incorporate leftovers and ideas for batch cooking and freezing—is a very useful guide for home cooks, vegan or not,” says *Publisher’s Weekly*.

INGREDIENTS:

Salad:

3/4 cup dry bulgur wheat (which should then be cooked as directed in the instructions below)

- 1/3 cup sliced or slivered almonds
- 1 head radicchio (about 8 oz.), torn into bite-size pieces
- 1 1/2 cups cooked chickpeas, or 1 (15-oz.) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1/3 cup golden raisins, more to taste
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley, more to taste

Vinaigrette:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons walnut oil, hazelnut oil, or additional olive oil
- 1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice, plus more as needed
- 1 tablespoon sherry or red wine vinegar (more as needed)
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup
- 1 small clove garlic, minced or finely grated
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Pinch of freshly ground black pepper

PREPARATION:

To make the salad, cook the bulgur per the instructions below. Meanwhile, put the almonds in a small skillet and toast over medium heat, shaking or stirring frequently, until just golden; they’ll keep cooking after you remove them from the heat, so it’s better to stop too soon rather than too late. Put the bulgur in a large bowl and let cool briefly. Add the almonds, radicchio, chickpeas, raisins, and parsley.

To make the vinaigrette, combine all the ingredients in a small bowl or measuring cup and whisk until evenly combined. Pour the vinaigrette over the salad and toss well. Taste and adjust the seasonings if desired. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Cooking Bulgur Wheat:

Bring 3 cups of water to a boil, then stir in 1 cup of bulgur. Lower the heat, cover, and simmer for 7 to 10 minutes, until the bulgur is tender. Drain off any excess water, then fluff the bulgur with a fork. Cover and let sit for 10 minutes before using. 1 cup of dry bulgur wheat yields about 3 1/2 cups cooked.

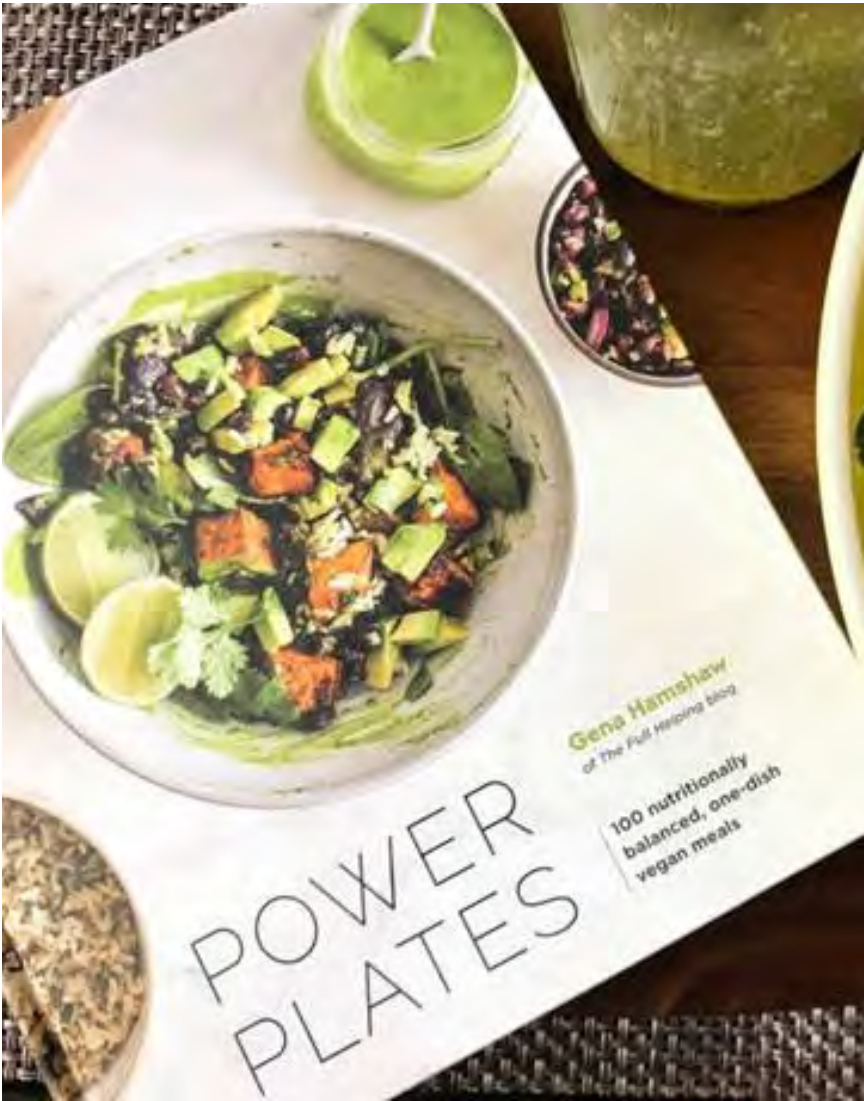
Yield: Makes 4 servings of salad, and about 1/2 cup of vinaigrette

For this recipe, go to:  
<https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2018/02/14/winter-salad-with-bulgur-radicchio-and-toasted-almonds>

### Power Plates: 100 Nutritionally Balanced, One-Dish Vegan Meals [A Cookbook] by Gena Hamshaw

Reprinted with permission from *Power Plates*, copyright © 2018 by Gena Hamshaw. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. Photographs copyright © 2018 by Ashley McLaughlin. Focused on the art of crafting complete, balanced meals that deliver sustained energy and nourishment, this book features 100 compelling and delicious recipes that just happen to be vegan. Every recipe contains the key macronutrients of healthy fats, complex carbohydrates, and proteins, which together make for a complete meal—things like Smoky Red Lentil Stew with Chard, and Falafel Bowls with Freekah and Cauliflower. Photographs accompany each recipe, showing how Gena’s simple techniques and fresh ingredients yield delicious meals. Additional tips and tricks for taking food on the go, and for cooking ahead on the weekend for quick week-day lunches and dinners, round out the collection.

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## COMMENTARY



Pianist Sergei Babayan and conductor Eduard Topchjan with the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra accepting the applause of an enthusiastic audience (photo Jirair Hovsepien)

## Armenian National Philharmonic's Boston Performance a Hit

PHILHARMONIC, from page 1

This was the New York-based pianist's Boston debut as soloist with an orchestra, and he justified prior accolades bestowed upon him, including an "unstoppably volcanic force" (*International Piano Magazine*) or a "magician of the piano sound." (*Die Rheinpfalz*).

As Miron gushed, "he came in and played magnificently, with perfectly executed dynamics and lyricism, his magisterial technique almost was thrilling as his tender musicality..."

In response to a thunderous ovation, Babayan returned to play as an encore a very different piece composed in a minimalist style by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. El-

gant and terse, "Für Alina," (a dedication to a friend's daughter) is rooted in Gregorian chant and uses simple overtone series of the "bell" sound as its basis. Mr. Babayan's delivery of this hauntingly beautiful work added an almost spiritual dimension to the performance, evoking a sense of reflection and contemplation.

After the intermission, the orchestra performed Rachmaninoff's popular Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Opus 27, and, due to the lengthy applause, despite the late hour, concluded with an encore performance of the boisterous Khachaturian's Waltz from the Masquerade Suite.

Harry Rolnick at ConcertoNet.com, who heard the orchestra at New York's Carnegie Hall prior week, wrote: "The Rachmaninoff Second Symphony is appealing for its soaring melodies, its lush textures and – inevitably – brassy loud finales. Eduard Topchjan caught it all with his fine orchestra. The tempos in the second and fourth movements were suitably exciting, and those fi-

nal moments were blatantly gorgeous." The 16-page program booklet prepared for the Boston concert not only presented basic information about the orchestra and the program, but also informed the audience about the background of the humanitarian crisis created by the recent occupation of Artsakh by Azerbaijani forces. This did not go unnoticed. Miron, for example, mentioned the 120,000 refugees from Artsakh in her article, and sympathetically stated: "It takes a huge, committed community to organize and fundraise something as wonderful as this concert. Due to the generosity of the sponsors, all of the revenue from ticket sales supported the humanitarian needs of the people of Artsakh."

I love a community that is there to help its own. This concert provided a perfect example of unity and solidarity." Indeed, the Boston benefit concert was a good example of what may be accomplished when all sectors of the Armenian community in an area come together for a common goal. It was planned under the leadership of the Pan Armenian Council of New England and YerazArt Foundation in

partnership with the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Relief Society, Tekeyan Cultural Association and Friends of Armenian Culture Society, together with a wide spectrum of Armenian community parishes and organizations.

"We believe in the power of unity and the positive impact we can make together," comments Dr. Shant Parseghian, concert chair and founder of the Pan Armenian Council of New England. Not only was this goal achieved, and connections strengthened among various parts of the diverse Boston Armenian community, but thanks to generous donors and sponsoring organizations covering the basic costs of the event, the \$175,000 raised through the sale of tickets will be equally distributed among five trusted organizations which will, in turn, help the Artsakh refugees.

These organizations include the Armenian General Benevolent Union, established in 1906 to preserve and promote

the Armenian identity and heritage, which enhances the Armenian experience and ensure its relevance in today's world and in all of our lives through support of educational, cultural and humanitarian programs; the Armenian American Medical Association of Boston focused on coordinating donations for much needed medical supplies including medications, surgical instruments and wound care items; the Armenian Relief Society, founded in 1910, an independent, non-governmental, non-sectarian, philanthropic organization which serves the humanitarian needs of the Armenian people

and seeks to preserve the cultural identity of the Armenian nation; the Fund for Armenian Relief, dedicated to honoring the past, empowering the present, and ensuring the future for people in Armenia and Artsakh; and the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, which with its Artsakh Refugees Aid Program transparently is providing direct cash assistance to burn victims of the Artsakh fuel depot explosion, displaced teachers and intellectuals from Artsakh and their families, and in general to families in need among those displaced from Artsakh.



Pianist Sergei Babayan (photo Jirair Hovsepien)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**DECEMBER 17 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church presents the Meghedi Children's Vocal Ensemble under the patronage of the Most Reverend Mikael Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the USA and Canada. 4 p.m. 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Join us for an enchanting afternoon, as we celebrate Christmas with songs and ply, unfolding the beautiful message of the nativity. A Christmas bake sale to follow. Free admission. 617-489-2280, email holycrossbostonma@gmail.com.**

**DECEMBER 17 — St. James Annual Name Day Banquet - Celebrating the 92nd Anniversary of the Parish and Welcoming His Grace Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, to St. James. Also Recognizing Service Award Recipient Dn. Apkar Potookian for his many years of service to St. James as Deacon. 10 am Episcopal Divine Liturgy. Banquet to follow. \$50 per person. \$20 for children 12 and under. Advance Reservations Required by Monday, December 11. View full details and reserve online at [www.stjameswatertown.org](http://www.stjameswatertown.org). 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown 617.923.8860 info@stthagop.com.**

**JANUARY 8, 2024 — Monday, Saint James Men's Club Dinner and Fellowship Gathering, with the Knights of Vartan, Guest Speaker, will be George Yacoubian -Founder and Executive Board Chairman of S.O.A.R., Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief. Losh Kebab and Kheyra Dinner, 6:15 Mezza and social, 7 p.m. dinner, \$20 per person. All our welcome. 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown.**

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





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COMMENTARY

# The US Presidential Elections and Armenia

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The United States will hold its 60th presidential election on November 5, 2024, that is, about one year from now. The winner of the 2024 presidential election will be sworn into office on January 20, 2025. Given the specifics of the US elections, the main candidates have already started their campaigns, meeting with voters, mobilizing supporters, as well as attracting financial resources. Moreover, there have already been candidates who have not only managed to announce their participation, but also announced that they decided not to continue the race because their time has not yet come (for example, the 48th Vice President Mike Pence made such a statement).

Currently there are many presidential candidates from the Democratic Party, including the current President Joe Biden who is a front runner. From the GOP, there are 8 candidates fighting in this presidential campaign. Though Trump is the leading candidate of the party, Ron DeSantis follows the lead. Trump's support among Republicans has reached 51% according to Reuters/Ipsos polls of September 8-14 and DeSantis is around 40 percentage points behind the former president in these polls.

Though there are several presidential candidates from both parties it is predicted that the main battle is going to be held between the current president, Joe Biden, and the former President Donald Trump. Even though both of them are considered to be the most popular presidential candidates in the race, we should bear in mind that each of them have apparent weaknesses that may lead to failure. Biden's critics claim that he is too old to run for another presidential term. The president will turn 81 during the election period. He is now the oldest president in American history and, if elected, will be 86 years old by the end of his second term, about 9 years older than Ronald Reagan, by the end of his own term in 1989. Besides, Biden is under the risk of being impeached as formally initiated by the House Republicans because of his son's controversial business dealings as well as other issues.

Trump, who will be 78 during the election period, will finish his term at the age of 82 if elected. In addition, he entered this election campaign with about 100 criminal charges against him in 4 different states, which is naturally a disturbing circumstance. A question arises. Will possible convictions affect Trump's chances of becoming president? In fact, even if found guilty, Trump will be able to continue the fight for the presidency (but probably won't be able to vote in his home state of Florida). The Constitutional requirements to become a president are simple: a person has to be 35 years old, a natural-born citizen of the United States

and a resident of the US for at least 14 years. There is nothing in the Constitution suggesting that a criminal record or imprisonment can be an obstacle to assuming the office of the president. And there have never been any precedents like this case.

As for the battle between the current and former presidents, it is important to mention that a November survey of the *New York Times* put Donald Trump ahead of Biden in five out of six key battleground states. Some days later another swing-state poll found Trump leading in six out of seven races. Stack Data Strategy which made a full state-by-state forecast found that Trump is ahead of Biden in the electoral college, however is narrowly losing the popular vote.

What matters to Armenia in US presidential elections is how the results are going to affect US foreign policy towards the South Caucasus region and Armenia itself. The outcome of the elections concerns the whole world as it is going to shape US foreign policy for the upcoming four years. The change of administration means the change of policy and priorities, consequently leading to impacts on a larger geopolitical scale.

The first important issue that could be affected by the change or continuation of the current administration is the Russian-Ukrainian war. It goes without saying that the increasing tension between the West and Russia is having a direct negative impact on security affairs and economic situation in the world, and definitely in Armenia. Undoubtedly, it would have been much better for Armenia if it weren't in the crossroads of these mutually exclusive interests. In the long run anti-Russian sanctions could further harm Armenia, given its dependence on Russian gas, membership in Eurasian Economic Union and Collective Security Treaty Organization and the intertwined economies of Armenia and Russia.

While Armenia is able to somehow benefit from the financial flows bypassing Russia, it might not be the case in the future as there have already been a number of warnings from Washington.

In case Trump wins the 2024 presidential elections, the Ukrainian factor

may lose its high importance in Washington leading to some decrease of tension in the US-Russian relations. But not significantly. Trump is an advocate of ending the war and sitting at the negotiations table. At the same time, Trump promises to end the war in 24 hours. It seems that the only way to do it is to stop supporting Ukraine financially which will leave no choice for Ukraine but to negotiate with Russians. To achieve this goal the US will have to ease up its policy towards Russia, including elimination of some of the sanctions to bring it to the negotiation table too. In general Trump has always been vocal about the need to cooperate with Russia as well as to stop the war. There is going to be domestic pressure against Trump when he attempts to implement his plans, but it is going to be his last presidential term so we might assume he has nothing to lose and would probably push hard for the accomplishment of his aims. In case he succeeds and the US starts easing sanctions on Russia, other states, especially those who were not enthusiastic about the imposition of sanctions in the first place, will follow. Easing sanctions will in turn positively impact and lessen the tension against Armenia.

Another important issue concerns US policy towards Iran, Armenia's immediate neighbor. Trump is going to pursue a tougher policy than Biden in line with his historic "Israel first in the Middle East" policy. Surely, any actions targeted against Iran, be it military or economic sanctions, is not within Armenia's interests. Were US-Iran relations to be regularized, Armenia would benefit economically and militarily. Unfortunately, such a perspective seems vague.

Hence, Armenia should be able to correctly maneuver through all the international processes, trying to mitigate future challenges by being prepared to them.

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

## IN THE LONG RUN ANTI-RUSSIAN SANCTIONS COULD FURTHER HARM ARMENIA, GIVEN ITS DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIAN GAS, MEMBERSHIP IN EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION AND THE INTERTWINED ECONOMIES OF ARMENIA AND RUSSIA.

## LETTERS

### Condolences on the Passing of Nerses Babayan

We are deeply saddened to learn of the very sad news of the untimely death of a well-known and erudite writer, Nerses Babayan, who was a meritorious and productive member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) in New Jersey. On this sad occasion, we express our deepest condolences to his wife Hermineh and children, his sister Prof. Silva Babayan Karayan, his brother Ara Babayan who is the hardworking and dedicated vice chairman of our chapter of TCA, and Ara's wife Sonia, as well as all the mourners.

May his memory be a true blessing.

Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Los Angeles Chapter





## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenian Government Adds Unnecessary Burdens on already Suffering Artsakhtsis

As if the problems of displaced Artsakh Armenians were not bad enough, given their forced departure from their native land and the subsequent hardships faced by lack of housing, food, medicines and other essential items after their arrival in Armenia, the government is now creating more unnecessary difficulties for them.

Artsakh Armenians, who have been citizens of Armenia for a long time, are suddenly told by the Armenian government that they are not citizens of Armenia, even though they possess passports issued by the Republic of Armenia. Many Artsakh Armenians have used their Armenian passports for years to travel to foreign countries without any problems, which means that the authorities in Armenia and other countries accepted their passports as genuine Armenian passports. How is it possible that Artsakhtsis were citizens of Armenia while living in Artsakh, but not after they arrived in Armenia?

To make matters more confusing, the government of Armenia is now telling Artsakh Armenians that since they are not citizens of Armenia, they may apply for Armenian citizenship in the future. This is complete nonsense. How can a citizen of Armenia apply a second time for citizenship? If I, as a US citizen, apply for US citizenship for the second time, American government officials will treat me as a fool and show me the door.

I believe that the Armenian government, led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, has a hidden agenda in treating Artsakh Armenians as non-citizens. He wants to make sure that during future elections in Armenia, Artsakh Armenians will be unable to vote, knowing that many of them will not vote for his political party's candidates, since Pashinyan is the one who handed Artsakh to Azerbaijan. We now have the additional evidence that the country's leader is not only incompetent, but also violates the country's laws for political gain. This is confirmed by the Interior Ministry's declaration: "A person with refugee status does not have the right to vote and be elected in national elections."

Last week, the Republic of Armenia's Ministry of Interior issued a statement in the format of "answers to frequently asked questions by forcibly displaced citizens of the Republic of Artsakh." In this first sentence, there is

already an error. Artsakh Armenians are citizens of Armenia, not citizens of Artsakh or Azerbaijan.

The Ministry tried to entice Artsakh Armenians to accept their refugee status, telling them that those who have the status of a refugee have no obligation to serve in the armed forces of Armenia. In other words, Artsakh Armenians, who must serve in Armenia's armed forces as citizens of Armenia, are wrongly exempted from military service, in violation of Armenian law.

The Ministry also stated that as refugees, Artsakh Armenians have no right to own agricultural land. This provision deprives them of the ability to grow food on their own plot of land, since they do not have the necessary funds to purchase food.

The Ministry then stated that refugees cannot travel to a foreign country. This is also false, as Artsakh Armenians with their Armenian passports can travel to any country after obtaining a visa, if one is required. Some countries like Russia do not require a visa from Armenian citizens. Thousands of Artsakh Armenians have already left Armenia simply by showing their Armenian passports which means that both Armenia and other countries have recognized their passports as legitimate documents.

The Ministry then contradicted itself by stating that "should a refugee's passport expire, it can be renewed by presenting two photos and the expired passport." How can Artsakh Armenians renew their passports in Armenia, if they are not Armenian citizens and do not hold Armenian passports?

In a further contradiction, the Ministry stated that those Artsakh Armenians who become Armenian citizens do not lose their ability to benefit from social assistance programs for refugees. The only requirement is that they be classified as 'displaced.' If they do not jeopardize their right to receive assistance after becoming citizens of Armenia, why are they classified as refugees and not recognized as citizens?

Incredibly, after giving away Artsakh and repressing the rights of Artsakh Armenians to pursue any political activity in Armenia on behalf of Artsakh, the Ministry of Interior stated that their losses of property in Artsakh "does not disappear or cease to exist as a result of a change in a person's legal status," meaning acquiring citizenship of Armenia. It remains to be seen if the Armenian government, beyond mere words, will be willing to file lawsuits in international courts to defend the property rights of Artsakh Armenians.

Artsakh Armenians, who are citizens of Armenia, have suffered more than enough. They should not be burdened with such unnecessary bureaucratic nonsense.

## Possible Ways to Further Development Armenian-American Economic Relations

By Paruir Sarkisian

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

Armenian-American trade relations have gone through various stages of natural development. Further development of trade and economic ties between the two countries as well as implementation and expansion of investment programs can be vital for strengthening the security of the Republic of Armenia. Strengthening the economic ties between the two countries will significantly impact the improvement of Armenia's economic situation. In fact, its success will allow Armenia to become one of the freest economies in the region.

The current economic relationship between the United States and Armenia needs expansion and multifaceted development. All the necessary prerequisites for this to happen are in place.

According to the website of Trading Economics, trade between Armenia and the United States in 2022 increased by 124%, reaching \$465 million. This increase resulted from American imports increasing over 300%. During that same period, the export of Armenian products to the United States decreased by 4.4%, totaling only \$77.4 million.

The goods exported to the USA in 2022 included canned goods, jams and fruit preserves – produced by nearly fifteen partner companies, which totaled \$4.55 million. At the same time, exported beverages, including alcoholic spirits, totaled just over \$13 million.

Applying these trends to the consumer potential within the Armenian-American community, we arrive at important discoveries. The above sales figures show that individual purchases by the Armenians within the United States, for canned goods, jams and other packaged goods, averaged \$0.37 per month. The corresponding figure for wines and cognac averaged \$1.08.

It is intriguing that over the years the nature of imported products has remained the same: canned vegetables,

jams, dried fruits, wine, cognac, and certain quantities of aluminum foil, diamonds, and clothing.

These products, of course, play a positive role in the overall export picture. However, given the seasonal nature of most of these products, they cannot be considered the main items which could further develop economic relations between the two countries.

Today, Armenia should take advantage of the favorable opportunities provided by the United States that will help develop enlarged and deep trade and economic relations between the two countries.

The list of goods exported to the US from Armenia is short. During 2022, approximately \$2.34 million worth of copper and \$1.76 million of aluminum products have been imported by the United States. Other products, mostly in small quantities, have also been exported to the US. However, these cannot play a significant role in the development of relations between the two countries.

ACCORDING TO THE WEBSITE OF TRADING ECONOMICS, TRADE BETWEEN ARMENIA AND THE UNITED STATES IN 2022 INCREASED BY 124%, REACHING \$465 MILLION. THIS INCREASE RESULTED FROM AMERICAN IMPORTS INCREASING OVER 300%. DURING THAT SAME PERIOD, THE EXPORT OF ARMENIAN PRODUCTS TO THE UNITED STATES DECREASED BY 4.4%, TOTALING ONLY \$77.4 MILLION.

The production and export of industrial goods to the international market is extremely important for any country. Therefore, this should be a goal of urgency and importance for Armenia.

The United State makes bulk purchases of a wide range of products – industrial goods, semi-finished products, components and various raw materials – from many different countries. Armenia has a long way to go to participate in such activities.

Currently, Armenia has various businesses with strong manufacturing abilities – the result of necessary upgrading and coordination. This potential can supply the US market with diverse ingredients and semi-finished prod-

ucts for the manufacturers of automotive and agricultural machinery as well as for makers of high-quality plastic items and cables, and for the housing and renovation markets.

Expanding large-scale economic cooperation with any country takes years. Such partnerships should be started as a country's economy diversifies and becomes increasingly secure. As economic relations become expanded and more diverse, connections become stronger and create a foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.

In the Armenian-American community, there are many highly-educated professionals with international experience who could advise on economic issues. I think that it would be expedient to form a group of knowledgeable professionals who could organized meetings and create practical programs towards establishing direct links to producers in Armenia.

The range of such an expert consulting group could be vast:

- 1) Establish horizontal business relations, including specific states, and assist with building relationships with state chambers of commerce;
- 2) Exert efforts to create direct working relationship between small- and medium-sized businesses and provide support for Armenian participation in profile exhibitions held in the USA;
- 3) Carry out activities that establish cooperation with US companies while lobbying to facilitate the import of Armenian products;
- 4) Take a more assertive stance toward this culture ... and utilize it as the foundation of a strong Armenian-US economic relationship.

These efforts will undoubtedly contribute to the recognition of Armenian products in the international market and will establish important and urgent business ties.

Dear readers, by writing this article, my intention has been to stimulate discussion on the overall state of economic relations between the US and Armenia and to foster wider collaborations. I would be grateful to receive suggestions and proposed approaches that might contribute to the growth of the Armenian-US economic partnership. Please feel free to send your proposals and offers for further consideration and discussion to my email address, paruir.sarkisian@gmail.com.

(Paruir Sarkisian is Senior Consulate Advisor to the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Chicago and Co-owner of Armenia Group International Company, Chicago)





# Unpacking the ‘Why’ Behind Volunteering in Armenia

By Cal Kevorkian

I’m proud of my unique Armenian culture and my Kevorkian name, but there is still so much I have yet to learn and understand.

My Armenian heritage traces back to Armenia around 1915 when my great-grandfather and great-grandmother both escaped the Genocide. Tragically, they lost their respective families but managed to find their way to New York City, where they worked as hired help in the Upper East Side. It was there that fate brought them together, finding a sense of home and comfort in each other, leading to their marriage. Eventually, they saved enough money to move to Chicago, where they ran a mom-and-pop corner store. It wasn’t until my grandfather Harry decided to go to Cal Berkeley for university that things changed. Visiting the Bay Area with Harry, my great grandfather was immediately reminded of the hillsides of Armenia, prompting the entire family to move west and settle in San Jose. My dad then came along many years later after Harry married an Irish woman named Betty. Fast forward 30-some years, and my older sister and I arrive.

Throughout my life, I’ve grown up eating *basturma* and *boreg*, listening to my father recount the infamous story of our family’s journey, and exploring Armenian Catholic Churches wherever I can find them. I take

## COMMENTARY

pride in my unique Armenian culture and Kevorkian name, but I acknowledge that there is still much for me to learn and understand.

The reasons behind my desire to volunteer in Armenia seem endless, making the question “What are the reasons for wanting to volunteer” initially challenging to answer. The thought of “Where do I start?” kept popping up in my head. However, I’ll begin with this: immersion. That’s what I seek. I choose immersion because it encompasses so much of what I desire from this experience. It’s more than just travel; it’s about fully experiencing a culture and embracing everything it has to offer.

I want to be thrown into the beautiful fire of Armenia and soak in all that I can. I want to embrace and learn firsthand what Armenia is.

This has been a goal of mine for many years, particularly learning the language. Throughout my life, a beautiful painting of the Armenian alphabet has hung in the entry to our home. I would sometimes stop and stare at it, appreciating the differences and similarities to my native alphabet. In my mind, I would trace the letters, as if painting my own masterpiece. I often wondered what day-to-day life would be like, communicating in this language instead of English. Despite these curiosities, I never took the initiative to truly dive into it until now.

I also hope to improve my backgammon game.

I can’t imagine a world where this experience

doesn’t bring me closer or exactly to where I’m supposed to be.

While I have no doubt that the people I’ll meet during this journey will enjoy their fair share of fun, I am confident in my ability to strike a well-balanced “work hard, play hard” lifestyle during the volunteering program.

Moreover, I believe my travels and life experiences have provided me with a unique perspective that I can bring to both the workplace and personal interactions. However, I also recognize that having my own set of unique ideas is not, in itself, unique. Everyone has their story to tell, and I fully expect to be influenced by the perspective of the friends that I meet, just as I hope to influence them. At the end of the day, isn’t that one of the reasons we travel, immerse ourselves, and venture boldly? To challenge ourselves and our perspective of the world? That’s certainly one of the things I hope to receive from Birthright Armenia.

(Birthright Armenia has brought more than 2,500 young adults from 59 countries to Armenia as volunteers. For Diasporan Armenians older than 32, the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) program provides the same opportunities. Cal Kevorkian attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he studied neuroscience. For the past 7 years, he has worked as an outdoor, active travel guide. He is an avid traveler who has visited 6 continents and more than 35 countries.)

# System of a Down’s Serj Tankian, Black Sabbath’s Tony Iommi Team for New Charity Single

By Kory Grow

LOS ANGELES (*Rolling Stone*) — System of a Down frontman Serj Tankian and Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi, who recorded the song *Patterns* together in 2000, have reunited for a new song that will help raise money for imperiled Armenians.

The tune was the brainchild of Cesar Gueikian, CEO of Gibson Brands. Gueikian, an Argentine member of the Armenian diaspora, teamed with Tankian and Iommi on a new song, *Deconstruction*, that’s coming out under the banner of the Gibson Band via Gibson Records as a charity single. The tune is a six-minute descent into psychedelic doom metal that finds Tankian singing about “deconstruction of the human mind” while Gueikian plays meaty riffs and Iommi slices through it all with a wah-wah-inflected, bluesy solo. One hundred percent of the money the song makes will go to Armenia Fund’s Artsakh Refugee Initiative, which provides aid to Armenians displaced following Azerbaijan’s 2020 invasion.

“We asked ourselves how to use this song to bring awareness to Armenia and the Armenian situation and raise funds for Armenia,” Gueikian says via Zoom. “In addition to making music, Serj is an activist in service to Armenia, and Tony has ties to Armenia because many years ago, he was part of a group that funded a music school there. So the three of us have pledged any income the song makes to go to Armenia through the Armenia Fund.”

Gibson has also built a unique Les Paul Special that sports Tankian’s painting, *Our Mountains*, which depicts Armenia’s beloved Mount Ararat and is selling via Julien’s Auctions. Corporación América, owned by Argentine billionaire and Armenian diaspora member Eduardo

Eurnekian, and the Eurnekian family are matching the funds the endeavor raises.

“Because it was Armenia Fund, I thought it appropriate to donate a painting called *Our Mountains*, which refers to the two mountains of Mount Ararat, where Noah’s ark landed,” Tankian tells *Rolling Stone* over Zoom. “It’s one of the symbols of Armenia and our culture and history. ... [Armenia Fund] is one of the recipients of System of a Down’s donations from the two songs we did in 2020 during the war with Azerbaijan. They help with the rehabilitation of veterans.”

Gueikian wrote the song but worried he’d be the only person interested in it. Since he’s close with Tankian, though, he decided to play it for him anyway — and maybe, if Tankian dug it, the System of a Down vocalist would sing on it. He recorded an instrumental with engineer Greg Gordon at La Roca Power Studio in Buenos Aires, where he played guitar with Argentines Cristian Iapolla and Jota Moerlli handled bass and drums, respectively. He sent it to Tankian close to a year ago and anxiously waited for feedback. “I said, ‘If you don’t like the song, please tell me,’” Gueikian recalls. “He listened to the song and immediately came back within minutes and said, ‘I love the song. I want to do the lyrics.’”

“I thought it was really cool,” Tankian says. “It sounded like a very Sabbath-y kind of song, like an old-school, classic-rock vibe. When he said, ‘I want you to sing on this,’ it was like, ‘OK, I’m in.’”

“The funny thing was as I was singing it, I got the Layne Staley vibe, like Alice in Chains — that really deep, dark thing with harmonies like Jerry Cantrell’s,” he continues. “There’s a certain aspect of what I did that reminded me of [Layne], almost like paying him homage, because it’s slow but hard.” He pauses for a second to sing Alice in Chains’ “Rooster.”

“And then the second part was more trippy, almost poetry. But Cesar liked it.”

Tankian borrowed some lyrics from his poetry book, *Cool Gardens*, for ponderous words like “no time to die, nor kill, nor structures of a pyramid.” “I borrow from myself all the time because I can,” he says, laughing.

In the song, he asks himself, “What is life, if today I die?” “It’s like, what am I here for?” he explains. “What am I doing here? It’s kind of like deconstructing your own life and asking the universal question of, ‘Why am I here?’ Not just why we’re here, but, ‘What is my pivotal role in this drama called life?’”

The song also abstractly addresses world ecology. “When I’m referring to flower’s mother, soldier’s father, farmer’s wife — I’m talking about the Earth, I’m talking about land,” he says. “So it’s talking about the planet as well as our pivotal role in it, whatever that might be.”

With Tankian on board, Gueikian approached a man he considers his “adopted godfather, Tony Iommi, who was another quick “Yes.” “In 24 hours, I had the solo from Tony,” Gueikian says, beaming. The lead part flutters, flies, and ultimately soars. You can hear Iommi’s inspiration come out of his guitar.

“It was great to hook up with Serj again and also to do a track with Cesar,” Iommi says via email. “I think that he’s trying to steal my job!! Haha!! The Armenian people are really lovely people, and it’s a great pleasure, a great cause, and I’m very happy to be involved in it.”

Gueikian says that getting two of his favorite artists on his track was a “pinch-me moment,” and he hopes to explore the process again himself and encourage other Gibson staffers to collaborate with the brand’s artists for future Gibson Band releases. He wants the Gibson Band — like Gibson Records, the company’s

book publishing arm (which put out a book about Slash earlier this year), and its video series, all of which supports its affiliated artists — to be an unfettered representation of what people can do creatively.

“[The Gibson Band’s music] may or may not always be a charitable project, depending on the song,” he says. “I think about the Gibson Band as a platform but more importantly as a collective. There’ll be a collective of artists who are going to be writing songs that we can put out through Gibson Records under the banner of Gibson Band. Ultimately, it’s all about the music.”

Tankian is grateful, though, that this track will be benefiting his and Gueikian’s ancestral homeland. Earlier this year, Armenians who lived in an area known as Nagorno-Karabakh, aka Artsakh, were driven from their homes by Azeri invaders following a 2020 incursion in the region. “It’s ethnic cleansing and genocide when you’re forced to leave your indigenous home of thousands of years because of someone attacking,” he says. “And this was after nine months of starvation, which Azerbaijan enacted on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.” Tankian hopes that Armenians can take the injustice, which goes back to the Soviet era, to an international court.

“But right now, there’s a lot of humanitarian aid necessary for these 120,000 displaced Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh,” he says, “so these funds will help with that particular refugee crisis that Armenia Fund already attends to.”

Tankian is also pleased to play a part in a cool song. When he heard the fully mixed version of the song with his vocals and Iommi’s guitar, he says, “It sounded kicking.” “I was really happy to be a part of it,” he says. “It’s something different, and it’s good that it’s for a good cause.”