

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXIX, NO. 23, Issue 4813

DECEMBER 23, 2023

\$2.00

## ANALYSIS:

### Artsakh's Water and Baku's Thirst

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In the lead up to and then after the remarkable acts of aggression by Azerbaijan which led to the forced expulsion of Armenians from Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), analyses by various experts, politicians and scholars have focused on the ethnic, religious and geopolitical causes. A long history of conflict documents all three aspects, and during the 2020 war, the racist character of Baku's military campaign was blatant. In their "victory day" celebration in Baku in December 2020, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan left no doubt that they viewed the campaign to de-Armenianize the region as a continuation of what began in 1915. When Artsakh Armenians were expelled in 2023, international voices raised accusations of genocide.

Yet, this may not be the only factor fueling the continuing anti-Armenian crusade in this region. Writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on December 5, free-lance German journalist Ira Peter examined the issue of water resources as a *casus belli*. Peter, who was born in Kazakhstan and knows the Caucasus region well, reported from Lemut, a village in Armenia's Shirak region. She spoke with local residents, as well as representatives of organizations like Caritas and Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE), which are dealing with the negative impact of deteriorating water resources. Her findings indicate that water resources constitute an "underestimated war aim," and the argument makes sense.

The article presents the facts and figures depicting a severe water crisis. Water resources in the Shirak region have deteriorated and shrunk in the last 30 years, since the Soviet-era irrigation system of canals fell out of use with the dissolution of large agricultural concerns. Unused water pipes and other hardware deteriorated materially, something Caritas has been working to restore. Climate change has further aggravated the

see WATER, page 4



Children ready to board the school bus (Photo AGA)

## Artsakh Refugees Find New Home at Camp

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — Humanitarian aid continues to flow from generous German organizations into Armenia, to help alleviate the suffering of those among the 100,000 people forced to flee their homes in Artsakh. Among them is the Berlin-based human rights organization, Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), which raised \$28,000 to support a vital initiative launched by the church.

The Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Vayots Dzor has opened a camp for Armenian refugees coming from Artsakh. The Siranoush Camp was originally a summer camp for youth. At the end of September of this year, on the heels of the Azerbaijan aggression which forced the expulsion of Artsakh Armenians, it was transformed into a facility to provide them, both young and old, with housing. As project director Harutyun Harutyunyan reported in an interview

see CAMP, page 6

## Armenia Boycotts Another CSTO Meeting After Putin Issues Thinly-Veiled Threats

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia will skip a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) on December 19, one month after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan boycotted a summit of the leaders of ex-Soviet states making up the Russian-led military alliance.

Parliament speaker Alen Simonyan confirmed his decision not to attend it when he spoke to reporters on Friday, December 15.

"Armenia's sovereign territory was invaded by the armed forces of a third country, and the CSTO did not even give a political assessment of that. Why should we go there?" said Simonyan.

see BOYCOTT, page 3



## Paris to Name Part of Champs-Élysées Gardens after Charles Aznavour

PARIS (Public Radio of Armenia) — In honor of Charles Aznavour's centennial in 2024, the city of Paris will pay tribute to the French-Armenian artist and humanitarian by renaming a part of Ledoyen Square in the Champs-Élysées gardens to Charles Aznavour Garden.

This particular area will be temporarily closed for renovation and improvement, with the intention of reopening to the public in the spring of 2024.

## GENEVA

Archbishop  
Aykazian Leads  
Forum on Global  
Refugee Crisis

Page 5



## YEREVAN

ATP's 8 Millionth Tree  
Planting Marks the  
Beginning of the 30th  
Anniversary Celebrations

Page 9



## BOSTON

Violinist Diana  
Adamyan Shines  
In Boston Recital  
Debut

Page 14





ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### EU Strengthens Observation Capacity in Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The EU Foreign Affairs Council on December 18 announced that it has agreed to strengthen the observation capacity of the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) within the Mission's existing Area of Operations on the Armenian side of the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border, by increasing its presence on the ground from 138 staff to 209.

The EUMA was deployed on 20 February 2023 with a two-year mandate. The EUMA will remain a fully civilian and unarmed EU Mission operating as an impartial actor.

“The increase in mission personnel underlines the EU's commitment to peace and security in the region. The Mission will now be able to conduct more patrols on the ground. As a result, it will be better placed to observe and report on the security situation on the Armenian side of the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border, as well as to contribute to human security in conflict-affected areas”, Head of EUMA Markus Ritter said, according to a message shared by the bloc on Monday, December 18.

The Mission is tasked with observing and reporting on the situation on the ground; contributing to human security in conflict-affected areas and based on the above, contributing to EU high-level efforts aimed at building confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan and their normalization efforts.

The Mission conducts patrols from six Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) located in the cities of Kapan, Goris, Jermuk, Yeghegnadzor, Martuni, and Ijevan. This extensive coverage spans the entire international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

### New German Ambassador Meets with Foreign Ministry Official

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On December 18, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Paruyr Hovhannisyan received the newly appointed Ambassador of Japan to Armenia, Yutaka Aoki, on the occasion of handing over a copy of his credentials, the foreign ministry said.

According to the source, Hovhannisyan, congratulating Aoki upon assuming his mission, noted that Armenia attaches great importance to the development of partnership relations with Japan. He expressed confidence that the Ambassador will contribute to further strengthening and deepening of relations between Armenia and Japan.

Both parties emphasized the significant unfulfilled potential of bilateral cooperation and expressed willingness to spare no efforts, particularly in the direction of developing partnership in trade, economy and business ties, tourism, education and science, cultural exchanges, etc. Mutual high-level visits, as well as the intensification of inter-parliamentary relations were also emphasized.



The handover took place on the Gazakh section of Azerbaijan's border with Armenia (AzTV screengrab)

# No Clear Path Forward for Peace Talks After Prisoner Swap

SWAP, from page 1

from the Shirak region, were taken captive from the Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh about a month after the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in late 2020. Some of them had been released earlier through Russian and Western mediation at different times.

The joint statement between the countries was the first of its kind not to bear the signature of any mediators, though there was speculation about behind-the-scenes mediation, possibly by a top US diplomat who visited Baku the day before the statement was issued.

Until now, all statements and agreements reached had been mediated by Russia, the EU, or the US, and, in one case, Georgia.

Russia and the West have praised the bilateral deal, with the US calling it an “important confidence-building measure” as the “sides work to finalize a peace agreement and normalize relations.” EU Council president Charles Michel called it a “major breakthrough in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations,” and the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the agreement was in line with Russia-mediated agreements since 2020 to “further” the relations between the two countries.

Amid the excitement in the international community, the chairman of the Armenian parliament committee on foreign relations, Sargis Khandanyan, urged caution. The statement's importance should not be “overestimated,” as no understanding has been reached on the future of the bilateral format beyond the one-off prisoner swap deal.

According to Armenian human rights defenders, there are still 23 Armenians in Azerbaijani captivity, including high-ranking military officers and politicians from Karabakh.

The issue of the Armenian prisoners has been a heated one in the peace talks between the two countries that followed the 2020 war, with Azerbaijan refusing to acknowledge some of its detentions.

The issue gained importance with Azerbaijan's capture of eight former high-ranking officials of the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The detainees include the NKR's last three presidents and the region's former state minister, Russian-Armenian billionaire Ruben Vardanyan. They face charges including terrorism. None of their trials has begun yet.

Yerevan has for the most part not been using public channels to call for their release.

The talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan have largely been at a standstill in the past months, particularly after Azerbaijan's military conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in the displacement of the region's Armenian population and the dissolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Yerevan and Baku have failed to meet on several occasions since September, with Yerevan pulling out of Moscow-led talks and Baku refusing to participate in the EU

and U.S.-mediated meetings.

While the first bilateral statement was a milestone, the future of the peace talks - either with or without mediators - remains unclear. Both countries had previously expressed hopes of signing the deal by the end of this year. Armenian PM Pashinyan said that the peace deal's “main principles” had been agreed upon while Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said he needs firmer guarantees that Armenia won't embark on “revanchism.”

The sides still have to agree on the details of the demarcation of common borders and the opening of transport links, particularly the “Zangezur corridor” sought by Azerbaijan. Baku would like to see a corridor overseen by Russian troops running through Armenia connecting mainland Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan exclave while Armenia envisages a simple road link with the usual customs and border checks.

## Pashinyan's Office Releases Names of Released POWs

YEREVAN — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, on his Facebook page, released the names of the 32 Armenian prisoners of war who were just released by Azerbaijan.

They are:

Hrach Avakyan of Shirak; Serob Avakyan of Shirak; Tigran Avakyan of Shirak; Karen Avetisyan of Shirak; Karen Aramyan of Shirak; Vahagn Bahrikyan of Shirak; Arthur Baghdasaryan of Shirak; Robert Gevorgyan of Shirak; Arman Dilanyan of Shirak; Sasun Yeghiazaryan of Shirak; Hrayr Tadevosyan of Shirak; Levon Tosunyan of Shirak; Aren Isanyan of Stepanakert; Eduard Kirakosyan of Shirak; Narek Kostanyan of Shirak; Volodya Hakobyan of Shirak; Varazdat Harutyunyan of Shirak; Hrayr Herabyan of Shirak; Karen Ghazaryan of Tavush; Hrayr Herabyan of Shirak; Harutyun Hovagimyan of Syunik; Haykaz Hovhannisyan of Shirak; Karen Ghazaryan of Tavush; Manuk Martoyan of Shirak; Gevorg Martirosyan of Shirak; Andranik Mikayelyan of Shirak; Gagik Voskanyan of Yerevan; Vladimir Rafayelyan of Armavir; Grigor Saghatelyan of Shirak; Ishkhan Sarkissyan of Yerevan; Gegham Serobyan of Shirak; Andranik Suniasyan of Shirak; David Stepanyan of Shirak and Arsen Vardanyan of Shirak.



## ARMENIA

# Moscow Warns Yerevan Against Scrapping Russian-Brokered Deals

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Russia's visiting Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk on Friday, December 15, one day after Moscow accused Yerevan of not complying with a Russian-brokered agreement to open the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to travel and commerce.

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Thursday also warned Pashinyan's administration against walking away from this and other agreements that were brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin during and after the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"In the absence of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, we consider attempts to revoke these important documents extremely dangerous," the ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said in a statement. "Such a step would inevitably result in serious risks, primarily for Armenia itself."

Yerevan cannot manage those risks "with the help of Western pseudo-intermediaries," Zakharova warned. She went on to deplore "a whole series of actions by Yerevan due to which it was not possible to fully implement the trilateral agreements."

"In particular, for many months the Armenian side has been blocking the start of work to restore railway communication between Azerbaijan and Armenia, refusing to comply with the provisions of paragraph 9 of the high-level statement of November 9, 2020," she said.

The paragraph stipulates that Russian border guards stationed in Armenia will "control" the movement of people, vehicles and goods between Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenian territory. A senior Armenian official said earlier this year that this only allows them to "monitor" the commercial traffic, rather than escort it, let alone be involved in border controls.

The Azerbaijani government is understood to have demanded that the special transport link for Nakhichevan be exempt from Armenian border controls. Armenia has repeatedly ruled out that.

The issue was high on the agenda of Pashinyan's meeting with Overchuk, who is also a co-chair of a Russian-Armenian-Azerbaijani task force dealing with planned

transport links. The Armenian premier was quoted by his press office as telling Overchuk that Yerevan remains committed to "unblocking regional transport infrastructure based on the principles of sovereignty, jurisdiction, equality and reciprocity."

A statement by the office gave no other details of their talks. Mher Grigoryan, an Armenian deputy premier and another co-chair of the trilateral commission, was also in attendance.

The Sputnik news agency quoted Overchuk as saying later on Friday that the commission has worked out a "document" on the Armenian-Azerbaijani rail link which is "in a high degree of readiness" for signing. He did not say what exactly keeps the parties from signing it and whether that could happen anytime soon. Nor did he criticize Yerevan in that regard.

Overchuk spoke after co-chairing with Grigoryan a regular session of a separate Russian-Armenian intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation.

The main purpose of the 2020 agreement

cited by Zakharova was to stop fighting in Karabakh and prevent new hostilities. The deal also called for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh and gave them control over the Lachin corridor connecting the region to Armenia.

The peacekeepers did not push back when Baku disrupted commercial and humanitarian traffic through the corridor in December 2022 and set up a checkpoint there in April in breach of the ceasefire. Nor did they intervene when the Azerbaijani army went on the offensive in Karabakh on September 19, forcing its practically entire population to flee to Armenia.

Unlike the European Union and the United States, Russia did not even denounce the offensive. Pashinyan and other Armenian leaders have said that Moscow's stance constituted an even more serious violation of the truce accord.

Zakharova's statement essentially blamed Armenia for the assault, backing Azerbaijani allegations that it supplied weapons to Karabakh through Lachin and did not with-

draw all Armenian troops from the disputed territory. Yerevan has strongly denied the allegations that were never publicly echoed by the Russian peacekeepers.

Zakharova also repeated Russian claims that Pashinyan sealed the fate of the Karabakh Armenians by recognizing Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh during talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev organized by the EU in October 2022 and May 2022. Putin likewise said on Thursday Karabakh was "abandoned" by Armenia, not Russia.

Moscow's latest warning to Yerevan came amid unprecedented tensions between the two long-time allies and ongoing Western efforts to broker an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. In particular, the U.S. is now trying to agree a new date for a meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers which was due to take place in Washington on November 20. Baku canceled the meeting, citing what it called pro-Armenian statements made by a senior U.S. official.



## Ambassador Kvien Meets with Karabakh Youth

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — US ambassador to Armenia Kristina Kvien on December 15 met with a group of young people from Nagorno-Karabakh to discuss the challenges they have faced and the opportunities they see in Armenia for greater inclusion through civic engagement, informs the US embassy in Armenia, the U.S. Embassy said.

"On Human Rights Day, recognized this week, and every day, the rights of those displaced must be acknowledged and defended," the embassy added.

## Armenia Boycotts Another CSTO Meeting After Putin Issues Thinly-Veiled Threats

BOYCOTT, from page 1

The Armenian parliament's press office said on December 18 that other lawmakers will also not fly to Moscow for the session.

Armenia officially requested military aid from its CSTO allies after Azerbaijan's offensive military operations launched along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in September 2022. It has since repeatedly accused them of ignoring the request in breach of the CSTO's statutes and declared mission.

Armenia's boycott of high-level CSTO meetings held in recent months raised growing questions about its continued membership in the alliance. Simonyan did not rule out the possibility of its exit.

The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly is due to discuss, among other things, the creation of a new joint air-defense system approved during the bloc's November 22 summit in Minsk. Yerevan has not yet clarified whether it will sign up to that agreement.

Pro-government members of the Armenian parliament committee on defense and security on Monday refused to comment on the issue. Another lawmaker from the ruling Civil Contract party, Vagharshak Hakobyan, said Armenia should look into the new CSTO arrangement in a "very sober" manner.

"We are now in the process of very vigorously working on a peace treaty [with Azerbaijan,] but security guarantees are extremely important to us," said Hakobyan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on December 14 suggested that Armenia is not planning to quit the CSTO and attributed Yerevan's boycott of the organization to internal "processes" taking place in the country. By contrast, the Russian Foreign Ministry earlier accused Pashinyan of systematically "destroying" Russian-Armenian relations.

Putin again blamed Pashinyan's government for the recent Azerbaijani takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh and the exodus of its

ethnic Armenian population.

"I don't think that it is in Armenia's interests to end its membership in the [Commonwealth of Independent States,] the [Eurasian Economic Union,] and the [Collective Security Treaty Organization,]" he told a year-end news conference in Moscow. "Ultimately, this is still the choice of the state."

"As for the absence of the prime minister of Armenia [Nikol Pashinyan] from common events, we know that this is due to some processes in Armenia and is not related to a desire or unwillingness to continue working in these integration associations. We'll see how the situation develops,"

Those processes are "connected with Karabakh," Putin said, referring to Azerbaijan's September 19-20 military offensive in the region launched despite the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces there.

"But it's not we who abandoned Karabakh," he went on. "It's Armenia that recognized Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan.

They did so purposefully and did not quite inform us that they are about to make such a decision."

Putin already claimed earlier that the Russian peacekeepers could not have thwarted the Azerbaijani assault because Pashinyan had downgraded their mandate by recognizing Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh during Western-mediated negotiations.

Armenian leaders have blamed the Russians for their failure to prevent, stop or even condemn the Azerbaijani military operation despite the 2020 ceasefire brokered by Putin.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly accused Pashinyan of systematically "destroying" Russian-Armenian relations. Last week, it rebuked Yerevan for ignoring its recent offers to organize more Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks and warned that Pashinyan's current preference of Western mediation may spell more trouble for the Armenian people.



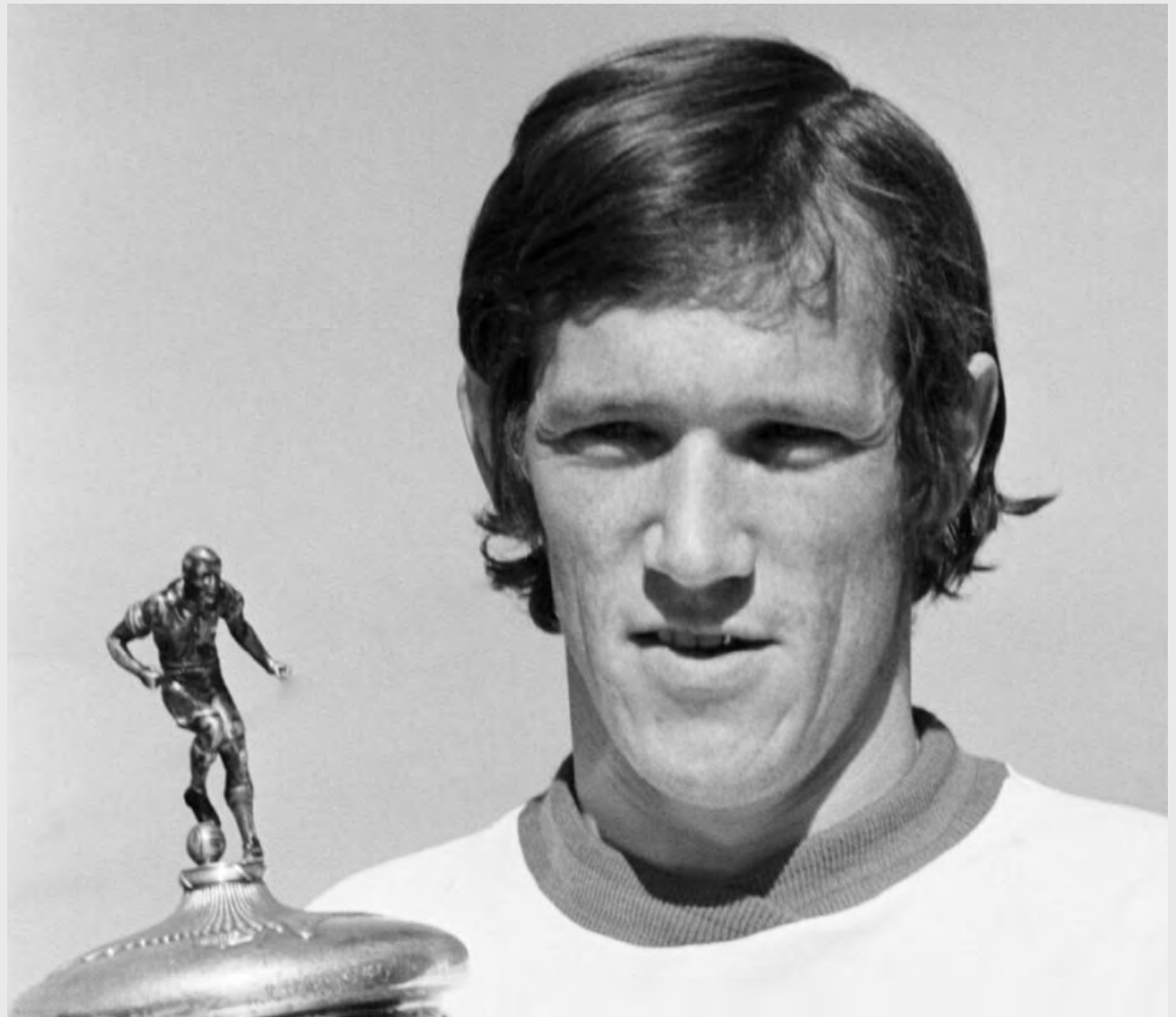
## Artsakh's Water And Baku's Thirst

WATER, from page 1 situation. Citing Emma Anakhasian of the AWHWE, Peter reports that between 1929 and 2016, temperatures in Armenia increased by 1.23 degrees while from 1935 to 2012, annual rainfall dropped by 10 per cent. Agriculture suffered, as less ground water was available, rivers and mineral water sources dried up, and salt invaded the soil. A good 40 percent of farmland was affected. Mining activities have caused further ecological damage to water sources, like the Arpa and Vorotan rivers. This has also affected Lake Sevan, whose water has relevance also for Georgia and Azerbaijan.

It is in this connection that water acquires strategic significance, it is the juncture where water and war meet. Unlike Armenia, writes Peter, Azerbaijan "has almost no water resources." Other international agencies estimate that the country is 70-90 percent dependent on external sources for water. In Anakhasian's view, "The Nagorno Karabakh wars were not about ethnic conflict; Azerbaijan wanted to have our water resources." She substantiates this view with reference to studies done by the independent Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS). According to their 2020 report, Azerbaijan suffered a severe water shortage in summer that year, as water from the Kura river, which flows through Turkey and Georgia, had sunk 2½ meters, and seawater from the Caspian had begun flowing in. The water level gauge of Azerbaijan's biggest dam also dropped 16 meters. The obvious result was a critical shortage for drinking water and agriculture. The CEOBS report concludes that Azerbaijan therefore sought militarily to take control of water rich Nagorno Karabakh. Anakhasian is quoted saying she thinks Baku has further ambitions, namely, to gain access to Lake Sevan, which is very close to the border, as well as Jermuk, which was targeted in 2022.

This analysis, appearing a prominent national German daily, is well worth considering, particularly when one reflects on similar discussions pertaining to the causes of enduring regional conflicts; in the Middle East, for example, control over waters from the Litani and Jordan rivers, in Southern Lebanon and Jordan, respectively, as well as Lake Tiberias in the Golan heights, has played a central role. The same applies to the Horn of Africa, where conflict over use of the Nile waters has a long history.

(The article referenced is "Das unterschätzte Kriegsziel," Ira Peter, Lemut, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 5, 2023, p. 11.)



## Soccer Legend Nikolay Ghazaryan Dies

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian football (soccer) legend Nikolay Ghazaryan died at age 76, the Football Federation of Armenia announced on December 19.

□ In October 10, 2013, he was awarded the 1st degree medal "For Services to the Motherland" for his significant contribution to the development of Armenian football and brilliant achievements □ In 1973, he became the champion and cup winner of the USSR as part of Yerevan "Ararat" team and in 1971 and 1976 he became a silver medalist with the club.

He played 295 games for Ararat, scoring 67 goals. He was part of youth and Olympic teams of the USSR. From 1992, he was a founding member of the newly created Football Federation of the Republic of Armenia, the first president of the federation until 1994.

## Pashinyan Emphasizes Policy towards Artsakh Refugees

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at the reception organized at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of New Year and Christmas on December 18 that the year 2023 has been one of great challenges, especially the ethnic cleansing that took place in Nagorno-Karabakh and its depopulation.

"In this sense, of course, what happened was a consequence of a situation when the government of the Republic of Armenia repeatedly warned publicly that events were developing in that direction and expected

concrete international actions, but we must also record that we did not see those actions, unfortunately. In fact, the events unfolded in the most pessimistic scenario we could have predicted, which, however, turned out to be a realistic scenario," the premier noted.

"In this regard, I think it is important to emphasize once again our policy regarding forcibly displaced persons from Nagorno Karabakh. Our approach is as follows, if our compatriots do not have a realistic possibility to return to Nagorno Karabakh for some reason, our policy is to do everything

to ensure that they stay in the Republic of Armenia.

"I should also note with satisfaction that the Armenian government was able to accept more than 100,000 refugees in the Republic of Armenia within one week without establishing refugee camps or tent camps. But on the other hand, I also want to thank our international partners who have supported us during this period and expressed their willingness and actually continue to support us, and to emphasize the importance of the continuation of that support," Pashinyan said.

## Engage Armenia 2024 European Forum Promotes Diasporan Engagement

YEREVAN — The Engage Armenia 2024 Europe Tour, set to take place from March 6-13, 2024, invites Armenians from around the globe, regardless of their age or expertise, to come together and play a pivotal role in shaping Armenia's future. This tour will visit eight European cities: London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Alfortville, Geneva, Lyon and Marseille.

Armenia has faced significant challenges in recent times, and the need for engagement has never been more pressing. The Engage Armenia 2024 tour is designed to address this need, offering a platform for Armenians to rethink, revitalize, and put into practice their engagement with Armenia, regardless of their current level of involvement. With a

diverse range of individuals, organizations, and programs, the tour provides valuable insights into practical, active participation in Armenia's development.

Notable speakers at the Engage Armenia 2024 tour include: Vartan Marashlyan (Repat Armenia); Sevan Kabakian (Birthright Armenia/Armenian Volunteer Corps); Nelly Poliakov (H. Hovnanian Family Foundation); Garik Gevorgyan (Move2Armenia); Gevorg Poghosyan (ReArmenia); Nazareth Seferian (Impact Hub); Sisian Boghossian (RA State Tourism Committee) and Hrayr Barsoumian (Optimize Consulting).

The tour format consists of two key components: panel discussions and networking opportunities. During panel discussions,

speakers will share their personal experiences and insights, addressing topics such as volunteering and professional internships, an online platform for supporting projects and expertise sharing higher education opportunities, career opportunities, business startups and investments, as well as repatriation and integration assistance in Armenia. The format will be kept interactive to allow attendees to ask questions and engage directly with the panelists.

By participating in Engage Armenia 2024, individuals take a significant step towards reshaping their connection with Armenia and contributing to the nation's progress. Further details about Engage Armenia 2024 will be released in the coming weeks.



## INTERNATIONAL



Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, fourth from left, at the Geneva event (Peter Williams photo)

# Archbishop Aykazian Leads Forum On Global Refugee Crisis

GENEVA — This week, Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director Archbishop Vicken Aykazian led an international religious gathering on the plight of refugees around the globe. The December 12 gathering of religious leaders in Geneva preceded the Global Refugee Forum (meeting in the same city December 13-15).

As vice-moderator of the World Council of Churches' Central Committee, Archbishop Aykazian opened the event with his remarks. He noted that the WCC "is proud to host this meeting during Advent, preparing to celebrate Christmas. Christians see this as God on the move, coming into the world as a baby born to refugee parents, escaping political violence by crossing the border into Egypt."

He went on that today, "moving with this Holy Family are another 100 million people.... Displacement from and within countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Sudan — to name just a few — stems from longstanding destabilizing forces which the political community fails to halt. My own people, Armenians, once again this year have had to experience the tragedy of displacement."

Over the past three years, Archbishop Aykazian has made a profound mark on the international ecumenical stage as an outspoken advocate for the Armenians of Artsakh, during the tribulations of war, blockade, and exile they have endured. His remarks throughout the forum turned to the current situation of Armenia and Artsakh, including his eye-witness experiences.

Among the other figures addressing the forum was Greek Orthodox hierarch Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who delivered a keynote address on the ecological and refugee crises facing the world.

## Message of Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Vice-Moderator of the WCC Central Committee

At "Religious Leaders Unite for Climate Peace in Solidarity with Refugees" The Ecumenical Center, Geneva, Switzerland / December 12, 2023.

It is a great privilege for me to open this town hall meeting of Faith leaders in solidarity with refugees. The 2nd Global Refugee Forum, which this event precedes, will once again highlight the needs and dignity of refugees, expose the forces which are driving people to leave their homes and lay bare the hostile attitudes that often meet them.

Our various work and witness as people of faith to protect vulnerable people on the

move represents divine light and love in a world overshadowed by violence, hatred and war.

The World Council of Churches is proud to host this meeting while we are moving through Advent, preparing to celebrate Christmas. Christians see this as God on the move, coming into the world in a baby born to refugee parents, escaping political violence by crossing the border into Egypt.

Moving with this holy Family are another 100 million people. This number continues to grow. Displacement from and within countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Sudan — to name just a few — stems from long standing destabilizing forces which the political community fails to halt. My own people, Armenians, once again this year have had to experience the tragedy of displacement.

We see the right to asylum and protection more and more under attack — in the countries of the Global North but also elsewhere. People are taking dangerous journeys, often becoming the victims of profiteering traffickers. Many die before reaching their destination.

We also see politicians and media stirring up hostility, demeaning and dehumanizing people who, like all of us, would prefer to live, work and nurture their families and communities in safety and prosperity at home. We are facing a tide and plague, not of migrants, but of xenophobia. In public debates, religion is often mentioned as a motive for not giving access and protection to people of other faiths.

This is deeply troubling for us as people and leaders of faiths. All faiths in their founding narratives closely relate to migration and displacement. Our own communities have experienced persecution and violence many times in the past and still today. And it is despite and because of this that in local communities and along borders our communities are organizing to offer welcome and hospitality. This is why the different faiths continue to play an essential role in receiving and welcoming those seeking protection. We understand why migration is natural to human community, especially when people are fleeing for their lives and has been fundamental to the history of human civilizations.

We are also there to ask when the political and social processes will deliver peace? The nation states need to ensure security. But there are global forces which mean many nations cannot provide peace and prosperity for their peoples. They lie in political and economic interests that for gen-

erations have driven insecurity and inequity. In this situation the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the 1967 protocol remain essential, relevant and most important. Yet it is difficult to explain to a person fleeing desperate hunger, which will result in her death, that she is not covered by any international protection, but a person threatened with a gun is. And of course we know that climate-induced migration will become more and more of an issue — an issue not foreseen in the current protection system. Current events also raise the question why specific groups like Palestinians are not covered by UNHCR or how so-called mixed migration situations can be best addressed.

I would therefore invite all of us to re-endorse the "Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders", adopted exactly 11 years ago at the High Commissioner Dialogue with the focus on "Faith and protection." I also hope that we can commit ourselves to the following pledges:

To continue to welcome refugees and asylum seeking persons as part of welcoming the stranger, irrespective of religious or other backgrounds

To continue to advocate for the individual right to asylum

To argue for safe passages and humanitarian corridors for refugees

We are tempted to talk about migrants as them out there. But our religious communities are made up of those who are uprooted by war, climate change, poverty and oppression, and of those who are called to welcome our brothers and sisters as they come to us seeking safety and security.

Where we are people called to welcome, we, as Christians, remember these words in the New Testament: Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

And for those on the move, these words of the Prophet Isaiah: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

We have each crossed borders to gather here, and it is to show solidarity and hope. As we gather like this, we bless those who are on the move. Their coming in pain and distress will nevertheless also be a blessing to those communities to whom they come. Our respective divine teachings have taught us that turning to our neighbors on the move with love can and does change the world. Let us pray we can capture this change in our meeting today.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Azerbaijan to Open Polling Stations in Karabakh

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Polling stations will be opened in Nagorno-Karabakh as part of snap presidential election in Azerbaijan, Mazahir Panahov, Chairman of the country's Central Election Commission, said Sunday, December 17.

Earlier in December, Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev called an early presidential election for February 7, 2024.

The president 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, Al Jazeera reported earlier.

## Blinken, Fidan Discuss Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan regularly discuss normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on December 15.

"I will say that in all of our conversations — or all the conversations between Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Fidan, that is a topic that comes up for conversation — as part of the conversation. So I won't give a specific readout, but that is something that they regularly discuss when they either get together in person or when they talk on the phone," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller has also referred to Hakan Fidan's statement made in Baku on December 14 that, in his opinion, Armenia and Azerbaijan are closer than ever to a peace agreement.

"We welcome Turkey playing a productive role in resolving this conflict," he added.

## Dujarric Says UN Supports Armenia, Azerbaijan Normalization Path

YEREVAN (news.am) — The United Nations is ready to support Armenia and Azerbaijan in moving towards the normalization of relations. Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, stated in an interview with a US news outlet.

"The UN does not need to play a leading role everywhere in solving peace and security problems. It know that when solving the issues between Azerbaijan and Armenia, other countries have already taken the initiative to find a peaceful solution. The UN-Secretary General doesn't want to involve himself in something just for the sake of being involved and maybe complicating matters," Dujarric said.

Commenting on the progress in the process of normalization of relations between Baku and Yerevan, Dujarric stated: "From my perspective as someone who is not steeped in this, it appears that significant steps have been taken in the past few weeks. The [UN] Secretary-General has welcomed it, and we are committed to supporting Armenia and Azerbaijan as they move on a path towards normalization."

# Artsakh Refugees Find New Home at Camp

CAMP, from page 1

he gave in November, already in the first weeks 175 people had arrived in search of permanent lodgings, while another 100 or so stayed only for a short time. Not long thereafter the situation fluctuated, as some families found places to rent with government financial help, settling in villages where they could also seek employment.

In early November 11 large families lived at the camp, some with members requiring special care. At the time of his interview, Harutyunyan said there were 45 residents, 18 of them children. However, with visits by relatives and former residents who might stay for several days, the camp found it was dealing with daily needs of up to 200 people. By that time, so many more refugees had entered Armenia that state-controlled facilities, like hotels, had been filled, and this camp continued to receive calls and visits from people seeking refuge. Many will stay for a year or more, until they can relocate to more permanent locations. All those residing at the camp receive social as well as legal and psychological support, provided by the camp's staff, volunteers, and state organizations. The funds donated by AGA have also financed the purchase of new warm clothing, for the cold winter months. Now project director Harutyunyan stresses the need for a generator to provide energy for heating; since the facility was formerly a summer camp, there is no central heating available, and alternative means are either insufficient to heat the very large buildings or prohibitively expensive. The buildings themselves are old and would



Old and young enjoy the camp facilities (Photo AGA website)

need renovation.

Most important is the employment possibilities that the contributions from Germany have made possible. The camp can provide salaries for required personnel, a coordinator for the youth, teachers for

elementary and high school children as well as helpers, a cook, assistant cook, and kitchen help, a nurse, custodian, laundry woman, and a bus driver for travel to and from school, as well as Sunday outings. Most of these jobs have gone to Artsakh

together provide instruction for all grades. The camp itself has a kindergarten, which serves the needs not only of the children from Artsakh, but also of children from the nearby villages, which lack such a pre-school institution.

Armenians, which means they have become gainfully employed by the Syunik Development NGO and integrated into the local labor force.

This has not only had a beneficial effect financially, but also, Harutyunyan explained, provides help in overcoming trauma and starting a new work experience in the community. And for the children, obviously, it is enormously important to continue their education. The bus takes them to school in the village of Hermon as well as Yeghegis, which

The camp personnel provide assistance even outside the camp itself, visiting many of the 2,100 Artsakh refugees registered in the Vayots Dzor region, who need food, medicine, study aids and even wood for fuel. Harutyunyan mentioned the need in the next phase of activity to pay special attention to psychological support, since the refugees have obviously suffered significant difficulties arising from their traumatic experience. Not only the dramatic expulsion and trek to Armenia itself, but the 9 months of blockade that preceded it took an enormous toll on the psychological well-being of the population.

In a letter to Tessa Hofmann, co-founder and chairwoman of AGA, the Archbishop of the Vayots Dzor Diocese, Prelate Abraham Mkrtchyan, expressed his deep gratitude for the support, and was especially pleased that three members of AGA, Beate Hansen, Paul-Gerhard Roth, and Andreas Gries, had visited the camp in October. The gifts they brought with them from Germany were a special treat for the youngsters.



Children ready to board the school bus (Photo AGA)

## Pashinyan Concerned About 'Artificial Delay' in Armenia-Azerbaijan Talks

By Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan appears to have suggested that Azerbaijan is dragging its feet on a peace treaty with Armenia sought by the international community.

"We remain committed to our peace agenda within the framework of three principles already agreed upon and hope that recent events in the region and regional countries will not ultimately mean that the peace process is being artificially delayed," Pashinyan said late on Monday, December 18.

"If there is more basis to this view, it must be cause for very deep concern," he added during a year-end reception held at the Armenian Foreign Ministry.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said late last month that Azerbaijan is "not sincerely interested in peace and stability in our region." He pointed to Baku's threats of military action against Armenia and refusal to attend high-level peace talks organized by the European Union and the United States.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev twice canceled talks with Pashinyan which EU Council President Charles Mi-

chel planned to host in October. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov similarly withdrew from a November 20 meeting with Mirzoyan in Washington. Baku accused the Western powers of pro-Armenian bias and proposed direct negotiations with Yerevan.

Meeting with Michel on Monday, Armenia's new ambassador to the EU, Tigran Balayan, claimed that the Azerbaijani side canceled the October summits as part of its "continuous attempts to derail the peace process." Balayan was also reported to urge the EU to help ensure "Baku's return to the negotiation table."

James O'Brien, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia, visited Baku earlier this month in a bid to convince the Azerbaijani leadership to reschedule the canceled meeting of the foreign ministers. The conflicting sides have not yet announced any agreement to that effect.

Armenian officials suggested earlier this year that Aliyev is reluctant to sign the kind of peace deal that would preclude Azerbaijani territorial claims to Armenia. The Azerbaijani leader said late last month that Yerevan itself is "artificially dragging out the process."



# Community News

## Armenian Christmas At St. Vartan Cathedral

NEW YORK — The Nativity and Baptism of Jesus Christ will be observed at New York's St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral on Friday and Saturday, January 5 and 6, 2024.

On Friday, January 5, there will be an Evening Service at 5:30 p.m. The Divine Liturgy will immediately follow, beginning at 6 p.m., celebrated by the Rev. Fr. Davit Karamyan, Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral.

On Saturday, January 6, the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese—leading the Christmas badarak for the first time since his episcopal consecration last fall.



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese

The Morning Service begins at 9 a.m., and the Divine Liturgy follows at 10 a.m.

The sacred music will be sung by the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, under the direction of Khoren Mekanejian.

In Armenian tradition, this feast day commemorates not only the birth of Christ, but also his baptism by John the Baptist. The latter is remembered through the "Blessing of Water" ceremony, which will follow the Divine Liturgy. This year The Godfather of the Cross will be Mr. Kirk Hachigian.

A Christmas reception will take place following services, in Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium of the cathedral complex.

### Local Celebrations

Armenian Christmas will also be observed at local parishes across the Eastern Diocese. Many parishes will celebrate on Saturday, January 6. However, Diocesan parishes have also been authorized to celebrate on Sunday, January 7, if local circumstances so demand.

The cathedral's Armenian Christmas Divine Liturgy will be broadcast live over the cathedral's Facebook page and the Eastern Diocese's YouTube platform. Many local parishes will also broadcast their services.



Demonstrators holding up placards (photo Art Ghazaryan)

## Boston Rally Demands US Action for Artsakh

BOSTON — On the frigid afternoon of November 18, 2023, Zoravik Activist Collective concluded its protest series in support of Artsakh by hosting a Rally to Demand US Action for Artsakh in front of the JFK Federal Building in Boston. In solidarity with 14 organizations in the greater Boston community, the rally's 16 speakers shed light on the ethnic cleansing of over 100,000 Armenians from Artsakh by Azerbaijan in September 2023 after a 44-day war in 2020 and a brutal nine-month blockade in 2023 that deprived the population of food, medical supplies, and fuel.

Activist singer-songwriters Sami Martasian (of Puppy Problems) and Chris Kazarian performed before and during the rally. Martasian's songs about gentrification and Kazarian's song titled When Will We Get to Live? were musical explorations of inequality and injustice that echoed the themes of the rally mentioned by many of its speakers.

The speakers at the rally expressed outrage over the international community's failure to protect Armenians in Artsakh, demanded that the US cut military and other aid to Azerbaijan, highlighted the urgent need for humanitarian assistance for forcibly displaced Armenians of Artsakh, urged American lawmakers to support Armenian democracy and sovereignty, noted the strength of aligning with other oppressed populations, and encouraged the community to do more together.

The organizers had compiled a list of statements, trusted news articles, videos, and other links about Artsakh into the following website: [www.ArtsakhSOS.com](http://www.ArtsakhSOS.com), and this online resource was disseminated to passers-by via postcards and through QR codes on protest signs.

Several speakers noted their outrage about the international community's failure to protect Armenians in Artsakh from Azerbaijani aggression. Reading Zoravik's prepared statement, Dr. Lisa Gulesserian listed numerous times when different state actors and international human rights organizations failed to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh. Referencing a long history of willful neglect by international powers to prevent violence against Armenians, Dr. Henry Theriault on behalf of Genocide Studies International asserted: "Many scholars of genocide, whether they have any kind of focus on the Armenian case or not, are recognizing that what is happening now [in Armenia and Artsakh] is not only



Dr. Henry Theriault, Genocide Studies International (photo Arev Kaligian)

## Rep. Schiff Urges House, Senate to Include Humanitarian Aid for Armenia In Supplemental Funding

WASHINGTON — On December 15, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) sent a [letter](#) to House and Senate leadership urging them to include robust humanitarian aid for Armenia in President Biden's National Security Supplemental funding request. This comes as Armenia supports more than 100,000 refugees displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) by the unprovoked military attacks by Azerbaijan in September 2023, and up to 150,000 refugees in total since the 44 Day Conflict in 2020.

"After systematically starving the people of Artsakh with a 10-months-long blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road that connected Artsakh with the outside world, Azerbaijani forces launched



Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.)

a large-scale attack on Artsakh on September 19, resulting in at least 200 dead and 400 wounded, including children, women, and the elderly, and prompting nearly the entire population to flee for their lives. By the time a UN mission was sent — far too late — to review conditions on the ground, the team reported hearing that only 'between 50 and 1,000 ethnic Armenians remain in the Karabakh region.' The majority of those refugees are now in Armenia, where they arrived in desperate condition and in need of aid," Schiff wrote in the letter.

"We understand the Armenian government has identified a need to allocate more than \$1.5 billion toward the long-term housing needs of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, but significant and sustained support from the international community and United States will be needed to address the short- and medium-term needs of refugees. Alleviating human suffering and meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of the refugees now in Armenia must be a top priority. The national security supplemental must include a robust level of U.S. humanitarian assistance for Armenia sufficient to address the scope of the challenge and demonstrate the U.S. commitment to Armenia's flourishing democracy, as the Armenian people continue to face unprovoked military aggression and threats of genocide at the hands of its autocratic neighbor," Schiff concluded.

Schiff's 30th Congressional District, which includes the cities of Burbank and Glendale, is home to the largest Armenian diaspora outside of Armenia. He serves as Vice Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus.

## COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

# Bishop Parsamyan Celebrates St. John's Anniversary in Milwaukee

By David Luhrszen

MILWAUKEE, Wis. — Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan intended to celebrate St. John the Baptist Armenian Church's 80th anniversary in fall 2022 but was still recovering from serious injuries sustained in a car crash. On Sunday, December 3, 2023, the now bishop, fully recovered after five surgeries, presided over the Milwaukee parish's 81st anniversary liturgy and banquet.

In his sermon, Bishop Mesrop linked St. John's commemoration with the 125th anniversary of the Armenian Diocese in North America. The two events are inseparable, the result of the Ottoman persecution of Armenians that culminated in the Geno-

cide of 1915-1921. Both the Diocese and St. John in Milwaukee, WI, were founded by survivors of persecution. Speaking with warmth and eloquence, Bishop Mesrop compared history to the rear-view mirror of a car and the present to the windshield. We must look behind, but our eyes shouldn't stray too long from where we are headed. He also addressed the courage and inner joy that were hallmarks of the faith that sustained our ancestors and should guide our lives today, despite living in a time of war and hatred.

At the conclusion of *badarak*, a *hokehankist* (service for the repose of souls) was said for the founders of St. John in 1942, the parishioners responsible for building

the new sanctuary in 1986, the bishops who consecrated the church and all of the deceased clergy who served the parish. Rev. Fr. Nareg Keutelian, St. John's visiting pastor for many years, read the encyclical from His Holiness Karekin II, bestowing, at Bishop Mesrop's recommendation, a pectoral cross on St. John's current priest,

including parishes, if they are untended. In his toast, he commended St. John for triumphing over entropy with the help of the Diocese, Hambardzumyan and the strength of its members. Diramayr Lynn Kaishian was presented with the Diane Blinka Award for Woman of the Year. Credited with co-founding Hye Camp, she was active for de-



Bishop Parsamyan and the members of St. John's Church in Milwaukee

Rev. Guregh Hambardzumyan. The award was granted to Hambardzumyan for his pastoral service.

During the luncheon and program that followed, Chicago's Hamazkayin Sardarabad Dance Ensemble performed contemporary and traditional Armenian choreography; Jan Avakian Kopatich played piano; and Donny Rask's slide show, "81 Years of History," provided memories of past decades. In his welcoming remarks, Parish Council Chairman Lyle Dadian stressed that "it's the people who make this community strong."

As the afternoon continued, Deacon Garo Garibian of the Diocesan Council spoke of entropy, the inevitable disintegration of everything in the material universe,

including numerous St. John committees and is the mother of Rev. Fr. Sahak Kaishian, who was present for the ceremony.

Hambardzumyan sang a powerful rendition of Komitas' *Hayasdan* before speaking about the Church's role as "the dawning of the Kingdom of God, a reminder of God's providence" and the place where "Christ dwells among us." In his closing remarks, Parsamyan reflected on the meaning of time. In Greek, he said, there are two words for time: *chronos*, meaning the length, and *chiros*, referring to the quality of time. Eighty-one years is a long time and the quality of time spent at St. John can be measured by a community that hasn't fallen to entropy but continues to live and grow in faith and heritage.

## THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

### Annual Winter Break

The current issue will be the last issue of 2023.

Our next issue back will be dated January 6, 2024. That issue will feature our annual Christmas Greetings.

We wish our readers a safe and Merry Christmas and New Year as well as a happy Armenian Christmas.

We are grateful for our readers' support during for our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which was commemorated with two spectacular events.

See you in 2024!

Telephone (617) 924-7400

### Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET  
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN  
PAUL BEDROSIAN  
LARRY BEDROSIAN

### Nardolillo Funeral Home

Est. 1906

John K. Najarian, Jr.

Rhode Island's Only Licensed Armenian Funeral Director

1278 Park Ave. Cranston, RI 02910 (401) 942-1220  
1111 Boston Neck Rd. Narragansett, RI 02882 (401) 789-6300

[www.nardolillo.com](http://www.nardolillo.com)

### Giragosian

F UNERAL H OME

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC  
Mark J. Giragosian  
Funeral Counselors

576 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, TEL: 617-924-0606  
[www.giragosianfuneralhome.com](http://www.giragosianfuneralhome.com)

## OBITUARY

### Anahid Najarian

Born in Syria

WATERTOWN — Anahid Najarian, of Watertown, died peacefully in her sleep on December 14, 2023.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, she was the daughter of the late Norair and Zenount Artinian. Anahid moved to the United States in 1967, and soon started her life in Watertown.

Devoted wife to her loving husband Nishan, they were married for 50 years prior to his passing in 2022. Together, they were a fixture in the St. Stephen's Armenian community.

Anahid is survived by her daughter Sonia, her son Ara (Christine), and her grandsons Andrew and Wyatt. She was pre-deceased by her husband Nishan, and her brothers Haroutun and Vartan. She is also survived by loving nieces and nephews.

Funeral Service were at St. Stephen's Church in Watertown on December 18.



Interment was private for family.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to Alzheimer's Association, in memory of Anahid Najarian or to Saint Stephen's Armenian Church.





## COMMUNITY NEWS

## ATP's 8 Millionth Tree Planting Marks Beginning Of 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations

WOBURN, Mass. — Armenia Tree Project (ATP) reached an extraordinary milestone on December 1, as it planted its eight millionth tree at the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan's Malatia Sebastia District. As ATP approaches its 30th anniversary, this event stands as a testament to the organization's unwavering commitment to the greening and reforestation of Armenia.

The celebration at the Avedisian School was a vibrant showcase of unity, youth-leadership, and the invaluable support of ATP's partners.

Synopsys Armenia, the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and Fuller Center for Housing Armenia were among the distinguished guests who joined school administrators and students for this momentous occasion.

Elen Baghdasaryan, a student representative from Artsakh, delivered a welcome speech alongside Hamlet Varpetyants from Armenia. They emphasized the symbolic significance of tree planting as a gesture of love and hope for Armenia's future. She shared, "This is the first time I'm planting a tree, and it symbolizes new beginnings as we [Artsakhsis] have to start our lives again here in Armenia."

The celebration continued with traditional Armenian music and dance, including the energetic Yarkhushta, symbolizing the strength and resilience of the Armenian people. Students orchestrated a human figure-eight, representing the eternal nature of Armenia and the unity of our cultural past, present, and future.

ATP's choice to plant the eight millionth tree at the Avedisian School reflects the deep appreciation for their longstanding partnership. Over two decades, the school has actively participated in ATP's environmental education and tree planting initiatives, eco-club activities, and greenhouse projects.

Rousanne Arustamyan, ATP's Yerevan Coordinator, expressed gratitude to sponsors, partners, and volunteers, acknowledging their indispensable role in making the eight millionth tree a reality. "With your help, we've been able to expand our planting efforts, implement community projects, educational initiatives, and partnerships across Armenia and beyond," she emphasized.

The eight millionth tree serves as a poignant reflection of the organization's impactful year in 2023. This year alone,



The planting of ATP's eight millionth tree at the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan's Malatia Sebastia District

ATP planted 712,481 trees, established over 200 hectares of new forests, and distributed fruit trees to over 1,200 families in border villages.

As ATP approaches its 30th anniversary in 2024, the leading environmental organization in Armenia is proud to know that each of those eight million trees have found homes in cities, towns, villages, schools and forests. Throughout 2024, ATP will host a series of events across the U.S. and Armenia to celebrate the 30th anniversary, and looks forward to solidifying its green legacy for years to come.

For more information, visit [ArmeniaTree.org](http://ArmeniaTree.org) or email [info@armeniatree.org](mailto:info@armeniatree.org).

## Attorney Amal Clooney Files Suit Against French Company on Behalf of Over 400 Yazidi Plaintiffs

By Sabrina Souza and Zoe Sottile

NEW YORK (CNN) — More than 400 Yazidi-Americans represented by renowned human rights attorney Amal Clooney filed a lawsuit in New York on Thursday, December 14, alleging French conglomerate Lafarge SA conspired to provide material and funds to support ISIS terrorist campaigns against the ethnic minority.

Filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act in the Eastern District of New York, Clooney and former diplomat Lee Wolosky aim "to hold Lafarge accountable for its admitted criminal conspiracy with ISIS and to obtain justice for the Yazidi people," according to a news release from Amal Clooney Media.

Yazidis are a Kurdish-speaking ethnic and religious group with significant populations in Iraq and Syria. A 2021 UN investigation determined ISIS's systematic persecution of the group, including forced conversion to Islam and the killing and enslavement of thousands of Yazidis, constitutes genocide.

"Lafarge has admitted to a conspiracy that aided ISIS by providing millions of dollars in cash to ISIS, and is alleged to have provided ISIS with cement to construct underground tunnels and bunkers used to shelter ISIS members and hold hostages, including captured Yazidis," the news release states.

Nadia Murad, a 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner and a Yazidi human rights activist, is the lead plaintiff in the case.

The 426 other plaintiffs are all American



Nadia Murad poses for a portrait with international human-rights lawyer Amal Clooney at the United Nations headquarters in March 2017. (Reuters / Lucas Jackson)

citizens of Yazidi and Iraqi descent whose "families are survivors of a systematic genocide against the Yazidi people that began in Sinjar, Iraq in 2014," the news release said.

The facts of the case are "really shocking," Clooney said in a Sunday interview with CNN's Fareed Zakaria. "Just when the genocide against the Yazidis was beginning in Iraq, that ISIS committed, this company that had already been funding ISIS for a year ramped up its support for ISIS."

"The factory that Lafarge was operating through in Syria was just 52 miles away from Raqqa, which was the center of the slave trade that the Yazidis became subjected to, the women and young girls," the attorney said.

Clooney added compensation for the victims will allow them to "rebuild their lives and also to be able to go back" to their homes in Iraq after being displaced.

"This is the first meaningful chance for compensation for these victims of ISIS," she said.

see YAZIDI, page 11



A Virtual Lecture  
Organized by the

**Tekeyan Cultural Association**

**Metro Los Angeles and Montreal chapters**

**Live Zoom interview with Linda Euljekjian,  
wife of civilian hostage Vicken Euljekjian**

The interview will be conducted in Armenian,  
English and Arabic languages

**Saturday, December 23, 2023**

**10 AM Los Angeles – 1 PM Montreal – 8 PM Beirut**

Please register to participate online:

**<https://cutt.ly/Vicken>**



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Boston Rally Demands US Action for Artsakh

RALLY, from page 7

part of the genocidal process that started in the 1890s with the goal of eliminating Armenians from the entire Caucasus and Western Armenian regions, but it is also, just what has happened now, also, is either already genocide, or on the verge of becoming genocide, according to the UN Convention and other applicable international law.”

Rally speakers also noted that international inaction was not the only contributing factor — the United States government provided military and other aid to Azerbaijan that enabled its aggression against Armenians, and this aid must be stopped immediately. As Gulesserian of Zoravik explained, “The United States actively built the military of Azerbaijan over decades with hundreds of millions of dollars in US military aid. The US thus had a direct role in helping Azerbaijan reach its genocidal goals.” Judy Norsigian of Our Bodies Ourselves highlighted the connection between the US and Israel that allowed Israel to sell Azerbaijan weapons that were used to terrorize and kill Armenians: “it’s really important that we also ask our legislators to do what they can to apply pressure upon Netanyahu not to provide such weapons to Azerbaijan as it now seeks to take over southern parts of Armenia proper. They will not stop, they will continue to do whatever they can. And our job is to hold our legislators’ feet to the fire as best we can.”

Many of the rally’s speakers called for the urgent needs of Artsakh Armenians forcibly displaced by Azerbaijan. Knar Krafian speaking on behalf of the Northeastern Armenian Student Association noted that while she and her peers “are lucky enough to continue our education and carry on with our lives,” while “most Artsakhtsis our age are focusing on survival.” Gulesserian on Zoravik’s behalf asserted: “With sanctions against the Aliyev clan and no



Shant Parseghian, PACNE (Arev Kaligian photo)



Herman Purutyian, Armenian Assembly (photo Arev Kaligian)

more aid for Azerbaijan, Armenians might have a future. But the Armenians of Artsakh who fled Azerbaijani persecution need help now. The elderly sleeping in the streets and the malnourished children need immediate humanitarian assistance, and the paltry 11.5 million that USAID just promised to send to help ease the plight of Armenians is not enough. We demand that our Congressional representatives do more: Send more humanitarian assistance to Armenia NOW! If we could give hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to Azerbaijan to help cause this catastrophe, the least we can do is send adequate aid to save the lives of those directly victimized by it.”

Speakers with personal connections to the region noted that democracy in Armenia and Artsakh must be protected. Nairi Krafian’s speech on behalf of the Armenian Youth Federation was delivered by Knar Krafian, who described how visits to the Caucasus showed her that “Artsakh was a beacon of hope for all oppressed peoples, and a shining example of the good that could come from decolonization and democratic values,” but how “the beacon of light that was Artsakh was overcome by the darkness of Azerbaijani oppression and colonialism.” Judith Saryan, represent-



Armine Avetisyan, Zoravik (photo Arev Kaligian)

ing Democracy Today, echoed the sentiment: “America and the West did nothing to help the fledgling democratic Republic of Artsakh during the nine month blockade by Azerbaijan and Russia which starved the people and led to their inability to protect themselves against the Azerbaijani attack.” Documentary photographer Winslow Martin noted: “Armenia cannot alone insure peace and stability in the region. Today, the border of the Republic itself is not safe. The free, independent democratic nation continues to be threatened with military incursion by its autocratic neighbor. No nation born in and committed to freedom and justice in the world should let this stand. To ignore such crimes is to embolden this and other potential perpetrators of such crimes around the world.”

Speakers noted the strength of aligning with other oppressed peoples. Emra Altindis on behalf of Bostonbul, a Boston-based Turkish organization, asserted: “Just in the last month, all these companies who are sending weapons to the world, specifically to Israel, made 27-billion-dollar profits just in the last month. And these American companies are directly collaborating with the Israeli military complex, which supported the Azerbaijan regime during these attacks on Karabakh. And I think we need to see this connection between the suffering of the people in Palestine and the suffering of the people in Karabakh right now.



Judy Norsigian, Our Bodies Ourselves (photo Arev Kaligian)

They are so connected. And I hope this ethnic cleansing will stop in Karabakh, and in Gaza, as soon as possible. And I hope these oppressor regimes in Azerbaijan, in Turkey, in Israel, that they will lose, and we will find ways to live in peace and harmony.” Ihsan Karahasi, an activist with Zoravik, talked in Western Armenian about the shared struggles of Kurds and Armenians against Turkish violence. Aïcha Belabbes, an activist with the Muslim Justice League, spoke about the shared histories of indigenous Palestinians and Armenians victimized by oppressive, genocidal, well-equipped regimes.

Several speakers urged the community to take a more active role in advocating for Armenia and Artsakh. Referencing Azerbaijan’s campaign to destroy Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh, Tamar Melkonian, speaking

on behalf of Amaras Art Alliance, explained: “We, who proudly bear the name Amaras [an Armenian monastery in Artsakh built in the 4th century where the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, Mesrob Mashdots, founded the first educational center for teaching it; the monastery is currently located in territory controlled by Azerbaijan], now have a heavier duty, to always remember this name and elevate its history and importance.” She urged the community to work in concert to prevent more cultural heritage destruction: “Together we stand to strengthen our resolve and to preserve that rich cultural heritage and ensure it thrives and prospers for generations to come.”

Herman Purutian of the Armenian Assembly of America – New England encouraged the community to keep working: “Our job is to make sure that we hold our government accountable in all ways. Last week the Senate passed the [“Armenian Protection Act of 2023”], which would take away the ability of the President to waive Section 907. It is a good start, but it is not done yet. It has to go through the House, and this is where we come in holding our government accountable. Each of you, I ask, that you reach out to your representatives. You can use the Armenian Assembly resources, you can use the Armenian National Committee’s resources. Reach out to your representatives and make sure that they ensure the passage of



Aram Kaligian, Armenian National Committee of Eastern Massachusetts (photo Arev Kaligian)

the resolution through the House and that bill goes to the President’s desk.”

Aram Kaligian, who spoke on behalf of the Armenian National Committee – Eastern Massachusetts, asserted that “It is important to get out in the streets and show our Congressmen, our leaders, our Senators that what happens in Armenia matters to us and that is important to us. When 100,000 Armenians are starved and terrorized and driven out of their homes, and we don’t hit the streets, it says to our Congressmen that it is not that important to us.” Kaligian went on to urge the attendees to take concrete action for Artsakh: “In terms of leveraging political support, the easiest thing you can do right now is to go to the ANCA website and sign up to be a rapid responder.

*continued on next page*



## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

So, whenever ANCA sends an email to President Biden, or the Congress, or Secretary Blinken demanding sanctions on Azerbaijan, or cutting military aid, an email gets sent in your name to your Congress[person] or Senator.”

The speakers at the rally were joined in spirit by Massachusetts Senators Edward Markey and Elizabeth Warren — both of whom have offices in the JFK Federal Building, who submitted statements of solidarity to be read at the rally in their absence.



Knar Krafian, Armenian Youth Federation and Boston and Northeastern University ASA (photo Arev Kaligian)



Berge Ayvazian, First Armenian Church, Belmont (photo Arev Kaligian)



Lisa Gulesserian of Zoravik (photo Arev Kaligian)

Senator Ed Markey wrote: “I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all of you for being here today, and for your continued advocacy on behalf of your Armenian family and friends who are being impacted by the ongoing displacement and dire humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. I want to take this opportunity to reassure you that my awareness and concern for you has remained steadfast.”

“On September 26, I signed a bipartisan, bicameral letter to the Department of State and the Department of Treasury calling on Secretaries Blinken and Yellen to impose sanctions on individuals in the Government of Azer-

Emra Altindis, Bostonbul (photo Arev Kaligian)

baijan associated with the military attacks against and brutal blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh.

“And on September 21, I signed the Supporting Armenians against Azerbaijani Aggression Act, along with six other senators, to protect and provide humanitarian assistance to Armenians impacted by the genocidal actions taken by the Government of Azerbaijan. I once again wish to express my sincere thanks for your relentless advocacy.

“I will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you all to lay bare truth and to push for understanding, sustained peace, and prosperity in [the region].”

Senator Elizabeth Warren wrote: “Although I regretfully cannot be with you in person today, I strongly share your concerns about Azerbaijan’s recent attack in Nagorno-Karabakh, the need to protect Armenia and Arme-



Chris Kazarian, singer, songwriter, activist (photo Arev Kaligian)



Sami Martasian, singer-songwriter with Puppy Problems (photo Arev Kaligian)

nians, and the worsening humanitarian crisis.

“In September I joined my colleagues to call upon the State Department and Treasury Department to impose sanctions on those in the Azerbaijani government responsible for the attacks and blockade against Nagorno-Karabakh. I have also requested to be added to Senator Padilla’s resolution condemning Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor and human rights violations by Azerbaijani officials against Armenian civilians. My office has been regularly in touch with the State Department to express these concerns.

“I stand with the Armenian community during this extremely concerning time. We must hold accountable Azerbaijani officials responsible for this attack, blockade, and human rights violations. I will continue to press the Biden Administration to stand up for the Armenian people, including providing humanitarian aid, and to prevent the humanitarian crisis from escalating even further.

“Thank you for your advocacy on such an extremely pressing issue, and I look forward to our continued efforts to protect the Armenian people.”

The rally was organized by the Zoravik Activist Collective and co-sponsored by a coalition of Boston-area youth, activist, and advocacy groups, including the Pan-Armenian Council of New England, the Armenian Assembly of America – Massachusetts, the Armenian National Committee of Eastern Massachusetts, and the Armenian Youth Federation – Greater Boston Nejdeh chapter.



Emra Altindis, Bostonbul (photo Arev Kaligian)



Ihsan Karahasi, Zoravik (photo Arev Kaligian)

## Attorney Amal Clooney Files Suit Against French Company on Behalf of Over 400 Yazidi Plaintiffs

YAZIDI, from page 9

In August 2014, the United Nations estimated more than 400,000 Yazidis were driven from their homes in Iraq by ISIS, which is designated a terrorist organization by the United States.

Murad told CNN it was important for her to continue to share her story “to remind the world about horrific crimes ISIS committed against Yazidis and in order to prevent this from happening again.”

Her mother, four brothers, and other relatives were killed by ISIS during the genocide, she said.

Murad previously said she and other unmarried women were taken as sex slaves and passed around to various ISIS militants, and that thousands of other women and young girls remain missing to this day.

The complaint alleges Lafarge’s support for the terrorist campaign remained steady and even increased during the peak of ISIS’s brutality in the Middle East, “as ISIS publicized beheadings of U.S. citizens and journalists and began its campaign of executions, rape, and terror against Yazidi civilians,” the news release said.

According to the news release, the large group of plaintiffs includes individuals “who were injured by ISIS, owned land and homes that were destroyed, or had family members who were displaced, injured, kidnapped, or killed by ISIS.” A significant number of the plaintiffs are Yazidi-Americans who relocated to Nebraska, Clooney told CNN.

Lafarge SA, a global building materials manufacturer, previously pleaded guilty in 2022 to conspiring to provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations, in a case brought by the United States De-

partment of Justice.

In the case, Lafarge SA admitted it had paid nearly \$6 million to ISIS and another terror group, the Al-Nusra Front, “in exchange for permission to operate a cement plant in Syria from 2013 to 2014,” according to the DOJ press release.

As part of the guilty plea, Lafarge agreed to pay approximately \$777 million in criminal fines and forfeiture to the United States.

“None of this money, however, has been used to pay compensation to the victims,” the news release stated.



# Arts & Culture

## Violinist Diana Adamyán Shines In Boston Debut

By Ara Arakelian

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. – The Pickman Hall of the Longy School of Music was brimming with excitement last Thursday evening, December 7, when violinist Diana Adamyán took the stage for her much-anticipated Boston Recital Debut, presented by the prestigious Celebrity Series of Boston. She performed with one of Boston's most distinguished artists, pianist Renana Gutman.

Adamyán, 23, may not be a household name, but if this recital and her latest streak of successes are any indication, she is well on her way to a solid career as a violinist and an artist with a unique voice. After winning the coveted Menuhin Competition in Germany in 2018, her professional advancement was briefly interrupted by the pandemic amid wide engagement cancellations and misfortunes that befell the classical music presenters. But as the fog of Covid lifted, Adamyán bounced back. One of the most influential artist management firms, Opus 3 Artists, signed her up in 2021 and has since steadily – and measurably – provided her with guidance and performance opportunities around the world. A few impressive debuts ensued, including appearances as soloist with orchestra in Germany, and in the United States in Aspen, Colorado, as well as with the Boston Pops for the Armenian Night at the Pops, all in 2022.

Adamyán's diminutive figure belies her inner strength and tenacity. On the stage, wearing a warm yet timid smile, she exudes confidence the minute the music starts. And she draws in the listener as she goes on her journey.

For this recital, Adamyán found in Gutman the consummate collaborative partner who supported her throughout a varied and eclectic repertoire. Playing on a 1760 Nicolo Gagliano violin which pre-dates by 21 years the Mozart sonata (in B-flat, K. 378) for violin and piano which opened the program, Adamyán articulated the contrasting themes of the first movement with sensitivity and restrained joy. Ms. Gutman's mastery of the classical style and spontaneity contributed to the humor, sparkle, and the energy of the *Rondo* movement, which the duo conveyed with great aplomb.

The rarely performed Five pieces for violin and piano (Op. 81) by Finnish composer Jean Sibelius followed the Mozart. Written in a span of a few years after World War I, these salon pieces range from the introverted to the zestful and highlight the capabilities of the violin as an expressive instrument. Here Adamyán seemed completely at home; instrument and artist blended, and passionate storytelling became the goal. The middle piece (*Valse*) was notable for its touch of sadness and inward character while the *Aubade* (Dawn) was memorable for its lightness and optimism. A charming but melancholic *Humoresque* (No. 3, Op. 89) also by see DEBUT, page 14



Podcaster Maxim Saakyan

## New Podcast Explores Incredible Life of Aurora Mardiganian

LONDON — In the vast landscape of podcasts, a new narrative journey dedicated to one of the most famous victims of the Armenian Genocide is unfolding. Uncovering Roots, a series by Maxim Saakyan, dedicated to bringing forth stories that are often overlooked, stories that not only need to be told but deserve to be at the forefront of our collective consciousness. “Uncovering Roots” delves into the extraordinary life of Aurora Mardiganian, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide who became a Hollywood star based on her life.

The debut mini-series launched on December 10 and has managed to receive good recognition since its release. It was featured as the *Guardian's* podcast of the week while Spotify put it as their number one documentary to listen to. The three episodes in the series explore various details about Aurora's life and the film.



The original poster for her film, “Ravished Armenia”

Aurora's story isn't just a survivor's story. She became a symbol of survival, resilience, and perseverance. As Atom Egoyan called her in the podcast, a Super Survivor who was able to recount her story to so many. And with that, she saved so many lives with the film raising money for Near East Relief.

“The motivation behind Uncovering Roots is deeply personal for me. As an Armenian, the amount of people inside the United Kingdom who don't know about the genocide really hurts me. Then we look at Aurora's story, and it's just so unbelievably shocking. It's so unbelievable that so many people didn't actually think she existed. Like she was a fictional character that was made up to represent the pain Armenians went through. But she was real. She not only went through the genocide, but she went through Hollywood exploitation as well. This story isn't just about teaching people about the genocide; it's about honoring her story,” said Saakyan, who is based in London.

The podcast delves deep into Aurora's life, weaving together her oral testimonies and interviews with those who knew her intimately. The narrative becomes an investigative journey into the fate of a forgotten Armenian genocide survivor turned film star. It unravels the complexities of Hollywood exploitation, the unwavering

see PODCAST, page 13

## Ruben Yessayán

100% Armenian and  
100% Spanish

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN-MADRID — Pianist, composer, teacher, musical manager Ruben Yessayán was born in Madrid in 1978 to Armenian father and Spanish mother. He began his musical studies at the age of eight. He obtained his professional title through the Arturo Soria Conservatory, studying piano with Rafael Solís and harmony with Enrique Igoa. In 1998 he joined the Manhattan School of Music in New York, where he studied piano with Nina Svetlanova and cham-



ber music with Isidore Cohen. He obtains a Bachelor's degree in 2002 and a Master in 2004. He gave recitals in Europe, Africa and the US. As a composer and arranger, his works have been premiered in Europe and the US. He has been the artistic director of the International Festival “Villa de Medinaceli” since 2007. In 2013 he founded Musica Humana, an interdisciplinary project with a renewed concept of the concert experience within classical music. He has also been appointed since last January the director of the Maria Rosa Calvo-Manzano Municipal School for Music and Dance in Madrid.

“...rarely have I heard such a lesson in interpretative grace...Rubén Yessayan knew how to play the piece in a tender and exquisite manner, falling in love with it and making us witness the miracle of its creation in a cold and grey afternoon...a pianist who presented a varied program, quite like a mosaic, and transported us with the magic of his interpretation... thanks particularly to his interpretative quality, his good taste and wise talent...” (Ideal de Granada – J. A. Lacarcel – “When the piano becomes poetry”). “...his recent recording on the Verso label rendering the first book of Preludes on the Debussy Year, displays an unorthodox and imaginative program – Book I from *Préludes* and *Children's Corner* – which rivals in freshness and poetic gestures with the Debussy of Crossley or Lubimov, revealing at the same time the major talent of a multifaceted player, open and demanding (Diverdi Magazine, David Rodríguez Cerdán)” (from <https://www.rubenyesayan.com>).

see PIANIST, page 13



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Ruben Yessayán: 100% Armenian and 100% Spanish

PIANIST, from page 12

**Ruben, let's start our conversation with the festival you lead and the project you founded. What new dimension do they bring to modern classical music scene?**

Well, these are two very different projects which in the beginning grew in my mind as two artistic beings that would complement each other since at that time I was very much involved with expressing my musical and artistic personality in different contexts. As you know, in many occasions in the world of Art you begin with an idea, thinking it will be developed and executed in a certain way, but somehow ends up breathing a life of its own. So this is basically what happened with these two projects; one of them, the festival, remained as a constant in my musical life whilst the other one took more the form of an experiment which due to lack of funding had to be interrupted, although many of the things that we tried and accomplished I think remain dormant within my creative spirit, waiting to be transformed into an artistic reality that will only reveal itself when the time is right.

Regarding the Music Festival, this began as a project that was meant for the long term and I can honestly say that after 16 seasons our team managed to accomplish the main objective of creating some sort of a durable Institution. It is a festival that has remained small and humble in resources and structure but very big in spirit and creativity. As it happens with all artistic projects of modest size and funding, you have to become very creative with your ideas, your mission and your programming, since I think nowadays music festivals are not just venues for music dissemination but can transform into socio-cultural networks which in our case bridge the world of music and musicians with cultural heritage and sustainable economics in the context of provincial life, being as we are located quite far from any important urban area.

**Thanks to you, Armenian music is played regularly in Spain. You are also the composer of unique contemporary modern musical compositions. Can they**

**also be considered examples of Armenian music?**

Well, in the sense that I am Armenian all my music is really Armenian music as well as Spanish, but if what you are referring to is compositions with some kind of Armenian flavor or arrangements of folk music, then the answer is also affirmative. I prefer to view myself in the light of the first definition since I consider myself 100-percent Armenian and 100-percent Spanish. All my music, whether it has some kind of folk influence or has been composed in some typically contemporary style will always have a character, a personality, nuances and textures derived consciously or unconsciously from this rich cultural heritage which I have the luck to possess in my soul and genes.

**Your album "Eternal Song" presents Armenian classical music written for the piano; it won the silver medal at the Global Music Awards. Please speak about that and other Armenian projects of yours.**

"Eternal Song" came up as a necessity after working as music advisor for the movie "The Promise," focused on the Armenian Genocide. My job for this movie had to do mainly with research on folk music, folk instruments and the general use of music in everyday life. I discovered so many beautiful things about our culture and our musical heritage that I was absolutely compelled to create a personal work to celebrate the many virtues of Armenian music. I gathered a collection of music which I thought was representative of different styles, a sort of a kaleidoscope of our spirit reflected through its music. A mixture of composers old and new which represent not only our best traditions but also present and future paths of creation. Here I included my own arrangements of Komitas songs for Piano Trio as a way of bridging the old with the new. I can honestly say that this is one of the works I'm most proud of.

In terms of other works of mine involving Armenian music, we are right now finishing production on a double CD celebrating the music of Gurdjieff, which hopefully will be out in the next few months, and I

can say that it is a work that has nothing to do with anything I've done before.

**Ruben, years ago I corresponded with your father, Suren Yesayan, who once danced Spanish dances and then engaged in making castanets for dancers. Please tell us about him and the history of the Yesayan family in general.**

"The story of my father is quite unique. He came to Spain in the 60s from Aleppo to be a flamenco dancer. He was a lover of Spanish culture and was able to be a member of the best Spanish dance ballet of the time, having the opportunity to dance with some of the best Spanish dancers in history. Even though he quit after just a few years to go into business, to this day he keeps remembering and telling us fantastic stories from that time. Of course, being a musician, I am very fond of these stories since I have also been very interested in Spanish traditions of Music and Dance. The Yesayan family now is split between Spain and the United States, but we wouldn't be Armenians if we didn't have relatives in many different parts of the world (*laughs*).

**Is it true that Armenians and Spanish have similar temperaments?**

Yes, I think they do. We share very strong characters, a certain sense of national pride, although for different reasons, a beautiful cultural heritage and a huge wealth of creative talent. In general, you'll find that most Armenians who come to Spain to live feel themselves at home, and Spaniards who visit Armenia find it very exotic but at the same time very familiar. Armenians like my father have always felt welcome in Spain since I think that we have a very open and welcoming society. Spaniards as well as Armenians always love a good party around good food and plenty of spirits!

**I remember your solo concert held years ago at the Komitas Chamber Music House in Yerevan, under the auspices of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. Along with European composers, you presented the works of Aram Khachaturyan and Arno Babadjanyan, as well as two preludes by your old friend,**

**composer Armen Bedrossian, also born in Madrid. What memories do you cherish from your visit to Armenia?**

Yes, if I recall correctly, it must have been 2005 or 2006. It was obviously one of the most special concerts for me, something I needed to do at least once in my life. I remember putting together quite a demanding program and feeling the warmth and support of the audience which was so fantastic. I very much hope one day I might be able to repeat this experience. Unfortunately, there is not much more that I can recall from this trip, since because of preparations for this concert I stayed home whilst my family travelled there a few days in advance, so they are the ones who actually had the chance to travel around the country, and I know they loved it. I had been there with my father a couple years before so it was okay, I guess, but certainly another journey to Armenia is something that is bound to happen sooner or later.

**Do you continue to cooperate with Armen?**

Definitely, Armen and I have kept collaborating in different projects, the most important being an album with all his piano music which is so interesting and evocative, as well as an honest representation of his craft and capacity to compose in different styles. I enjoyed very much working on his compositions knowing that a lot of them would be played for the first time, so it was also a big responsibility for me. The album is called "Origines" from 2017, and I highly recommend any Armenian music lover to check it out. Another interesting feature about this album is that it was recorded in his own home studio an hour away from Paris where he actually lives. We both worked intensely on this project and are very proud of the result.

**We are looking forward to new visits and concerts of you, Armen and all our talented compatriots in Armenia. Thank you, Ruben, for the interesting conversation!**

Thank you, Artsvi, for a wonderful interview and wish all the best to you and your readers.

## New Podcast Explores Incredible Life of Aurora Mardiganian

PODCAST, from page 12

resilience of a remarkable woman, and the tragic transformation of a once-record-breaking film into a "lost film."

As we traverse the riveting narrative terrain of *Uncovering Roots*, a multifaceted cast of voices guides us. From renowned director Atom Egoyan and Carla Garapedian to silent movie expert Anthony Slide — each contributes a unique perspective. The podcast also features insights from the nurse who provided care for Aurora during the 1990s, adding layers of authenticity and nuance to the storytelling.

Born in 1901 in the Armenian village of Chmshgadzak, Aurora's life journey began amid the horrors of the Armenian Genocide at the tender age of 14. Her survival against all odds became a testament to human endurance.

After numerous escapes from various camps, she eventually reached Tbilisi, Georgia, where she encountered the famous Armenian commander Andranik Ozanian. He gave her a mission — to travel to America and tell the world about the Armenian Genocide. True to his di-

rective, she arrived in America, forced to relive her trauma while recounting her story to a translator. Her words transformed into a book and, subsequently, a film. The film, which broke box office records in the country and traveled across the world, eventually faded from public memory. The podcast meticulously examines the lost film, "Auction of Souls," presenting various theories, including the poignant possibility of a deliberate campaign by Turkey to destroy it.

While the possibility of intentional destruction by Turkey looms, it's crucial to contextualize this within the era of silent cinema. A recent study by the Library of Congress illuminates the stark reality — of the nearly 11,000 silent films produced in the United States between 1912 and 1929, a mere 30 percent endure, and many in incomplete forms. The fragility of these cinematic relics is undeniable, yet amidst this fragility, there remains a glimmer of hope for rediscovery.

The podcast introduces the captivating account narrated by Eduardo Kozanlian (voiced by Roberto Belo-Rovella). In

1994, he embarked on a quest to Yerevan in pursuit of the elusive film. A narrative unfolds through countless meetings and phone calls, culminating in the triumphant retrieval of the precious 18 minutes. Regrettably, Aurora, the central figure in this cinematic odyssey, was not alive to witness this revelation; she had passed away a few months before the discovery.

The journey of the film itself is a compelling saga, recounted by Eduardo Yervant Setian emerges as a key figure in this odyssey, transporting the cinematic treasure from France to Armenia. Each step of this journey adds layers to the story — a narrative that extends beyond the frames of the film and encapsulates the resilience of a survivor's tale, immortalized in precious celluloid.

In this intricate dance between past and present, the podcast not only narrates the story but weaves it into the broader tapestry of history and cultural preservation. The search for the lost film becomes a metaphor for the broader quest to reclaim narratives that time has sought to erase.

"Uncovering Roots" is driven by a pro-

found belief in the power of creativity as an educational tool. Saakyan's conviction extends to the notion that creative avenues, be it in history, culture, or contemporary affairs, offer the most effective means of teaching and fostering understanding.

The medium of audio, according to Saakyan, provides an intimate connection with the audience, where the narrator's voice resonates directly in the listener's ears. Contrary to the trend of condensed one-minute videos, there is a unique potency in the extended narrative format of podcasts, ranging from 30 to even 60 minutes.

The podcast aims to tell stories from many regions, not just in Armenia. Specifically the SWANA (South West Asia and North Africa) region! There will be exciting episodes coming up in 2024, including the story of Armenian flags before 1918 when the official flag of Armenia was adopted.

"Uncovering Roots" has been released on all major podcasting platforms, including Spotify and iTunes.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Violinist Diana Adamyan Shines in Boston Debut



Diana Adamyan, left, with Renana Gutman

DEBUT, from page 12

Sibelius closed the first half of the concert.

After intermission came Edvard Baghdasaryan's *Rhapsody for violin and piano*, a favorite of Armenian violinists. Written in 1958, this one-movement work is intensely emotional and requires virtuosic prowess. Through its varied sections there are yearnings, dances, and other folk themes, while a certain sense of suspense is always in the air. It received a dramatic rendition by Adamyan and Gutman.

Camille Saint-Saens's *Sonata No. 1* for violin and piano was the final work on the program. This somewhat neglected work in four movements was composed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in a period known as the "Golden Age" of the violin sonatas in France. The opening movement called *Allegro agitato* with darkly passionate phrases infused with syncopation that gave it momentum, gave way to a gentle *Adagio* movement featuring a delicate dialogue between the violin and the piano. Adamyan and Gutman's interchange was noteworthy for its grace, unity of purpose and communicative character. Their effortless, technically brilliant performance in the *Allegro molto* movement brought to close a very rewarding concert program. The enthralled audience responded with a standing ovation, nudging the artists to perform a tantalizing encore, Fritz Kreisler's *Schön Rosmarin*.

Born in Yerevan, Armenia into a family of musicians, Adamyan completed her studies this year at the University of Music and Theater Munich with world-renowned teacher Prof. Ana Chumachenko. Previously, she was a student of Prof. Petros Haykazyan at the Tchaikovsky School of Music in Yerevan and studied under the guidance of Prof. Eduard Tadevosyan at the Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory.

Currently residing in Switzerland, Diana spends time charting her professional growth, learning new repertoire, and focusing on recording projects. She has upcoming concerts with the Colorado Springs Philharmonic in the US, and in Europe with the Bruckner Orchester Linz, Uppsala Chamber Orchestra, Nuremberger Symphoniker, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie and the Saarbrücken Kaiserlautern.

In her biography, Adamyan credits the Armenian General Benevolent Union and YerazArt organization as having had great impact in her early development. She is also the recipient of a scholarship from Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben. Her previously mentioned Gagliano violin is generously on loan from the Henri Moerel Foundation.

## Armenian American Museum Hosts Chevy Chase Country Club Reception

GLENDALE — The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California hosted a special brunch reception with long-standing donors of the museum at the Chevy Chase Country Club. The event provided a unique opportunity for donors to connect with museum leadership and fellow supporters of the cultural and educational center.

Board of Trustees Co-Chair Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, delivered welcoming remarks to kick-off the reception.

"The Armenian American Museum is go-

ing to be a vital center for the preservation and advancement of our culture, history, and heritage," stated Board of Trustees Co-Chair Archbishop Hovnan Derderian. "We are strengthening the future of our children, our community, and our people by supporting the museum's benevolent mission and vision."

Board of Governors Member Kevon Kevonian delivered the keynote remarks at the reception featuring an exciting progress report on the museum project.

"The brunch reception was organized to bring longtime supporters of the museum



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian



Berdj Karapetian



Kevon Kevonian

together and express our appreciation for your commitment to the project," stated Kevonian. "As we embark on the next exciting chapter of the museum construction, we welcome your contributions, participation, and feedback to help shape the future of the museum."

The event was sponsored by Kevon and Alexia Kevonian.

Executive Chairman Berdj Karapetian

led a Q&A session and provided key updates on the construction, programming, and development of the museum project. Young Leaders Council Chair Aleen Ohanian invited young professionals to join with the museum and contribute to its advancement. Architect Aram Alajajian of Alajajian Marcoosi Architects also provided a walkthrough of the museum building with a 3D model at the reception.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Books

## Chahinian, Kasbarian, and Nalbantian Publish New Book on the Armenian Diaspora

LONDON/NY – I. B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, has announced the publication of an edited volume by Talar Chahinian, Sossie Kasbarian, and Tsolin Nalbantian titled *The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century*. The book is part of the series *Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World* edited by Bedross Der Matossian. The book is dedicated to Khachig Tölölyan, the founder of Armenian Diaspora Studies.

From genocide, forced displacement, and emigration, to the gradual establishment of sedentary and rooted global communities, how has the Armenian diaspora formed and maintained a sense of collective identity? Building on discussions of Tölölyan's work and its impact on various conceptualizations of the Armenian Diaspora, in all its heterogeneity, this volume brings together historians, cultural theorists, literary critics, sociologists, political scientists and anthropologists to explore how Armenian Diaspora elites and their institutions emerged in the post-genocide period and used 'stateless power' to practice forms of social discipline on collective identity and of belonging and loyalty among Armenians. Focusing on cultural, religious, political and literary production, as well as community groups and leaders in such far-flung cities of the Armenian Diaspora as Amsterdam, Addis Ababa, Aleppo, Beirut, Detroit, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Los Angeles and Paris, this collection offers original insight and novel perspectives on the history and experience of the Armenian Diaspora through the long 20th century, from the role of the fin-de-siècle émigré Armenian press to the experience of Syrian-Armenian refugees in the 21st century. More broadly, this book shows how diasporic history and transnational practice can help re-conceptualize and illuminate non-state forms of power and governmentality, that a diaspora's statelessness can not only be evidence of its power, but that it can also act as an alternative and complement to the nation-state.

The volume is divided into three sections, each featuring a set of chapters that engage with one of Khachig Tölölyan's key theoretical contributions to Diaspora Studies.

The first section "*The Logic of the Sedentary*": *Com-*

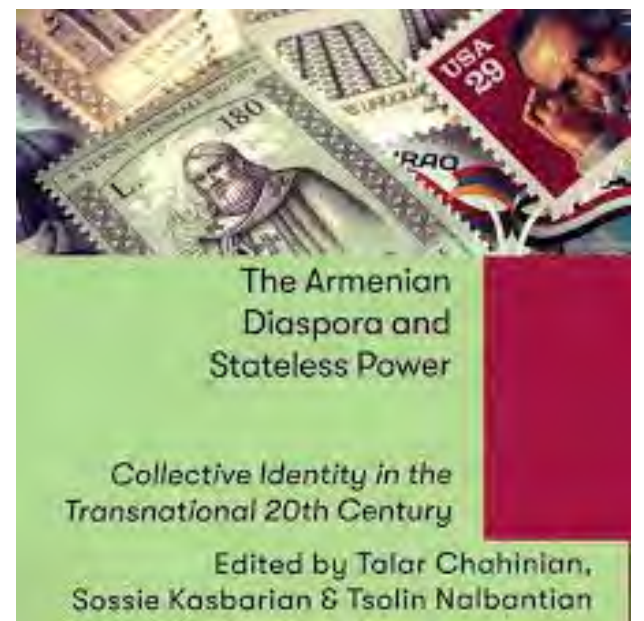
*plicating Notions of Home and Homelands* includes chapters by Boris Adjemian, "In Search of the Sedentary: Rethinking Homelands in the Armenian Diaspora,"; Gegham Mughnetsyan, "Armenian Displaced Persons: From Displacement to a Diaspora Community,"; and Nare Galstyan, "Diaspora-Homeland elations Re-examined: The case of Syrian Armenian in the Netherlands."

The second section "*Diasporic Social Formation: Leadership Elites, Institutions, and Transnational Governmentality*" includes chapters by Hasmik Khalapyan, "Forging Diasporic Identity in the *Fin de Siècle* Armenian Periodical Press in Europe,"; Vahe Sahakyan, "Transnational Politics and Governmental Strategies in the Formative Years of the Post-Genocide Armenian Diaspora (1920s-1930s)," Lilit Keshishyan, "Defiant Adherence: Cultural Critiques in Late Twentieth Century Armenian Diaspora Literature,"; and Christopher Sheklian, "The Liturgical Subject of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Recent Waves of Migration."

The third section "*The Social Text of Diaspora*": *Diasporic Becoming and Legibility in Diaspora's Semantic Domain* includes articles by Sylvia Alajaji, "Sounding Armenian: The Contours of the Diasporic Musical Imaginary,"; Karen Jallatyan "Toward the Diaspora": The Performative Powers of Vahé Oshagan's Poetry,"; Talin Suciyan, "The Armenians in Turkey: From Autochthonous People to Diaspora,"; and Hrag Papazian, "Are Istanbul Armenians Diasporic? Unpacking the Famous Debate."

The Afterword to the book is written by Khachig Tölölyan and the Epilogue by Sebouh Aslanian.

Chahinian, Kasbarian, and Nalbantian commented on the book saying: "This project was developed in a protracted period of multiple crises. Working together, as editors, was a source of support not just to bring this volume to fruition, but also one of comfort, refuge, and solidarity throughout our daily experiences and struggles across three countries and time zones. Our gratitude goes to all the authors in this collection for their intellectual camaraderie and especially to Khachig Tölölyan, whose body of work, mentorship, intellectual generosity, and vision has inspired and guided this collection and the intellectual



paths of its editors and contributors. We dedicate this book to him and to his future students."

Bedross Der Matossian (University of Nebraska, Lincoln), the editor of the series highlighted the importance of the volume saying: "This is the most important edited volume on the Armenian Diaspora published in the last decade. By bringing together a new generation of scholars from different disciplines, Chahinian, Kasbarian, and Nalbantian have raised the bar of the discourse on Diaspora Studies that goes beyond simple representations of the different Armenian communities to a sophisticated interdisciplinary analysis of diaspora(s) in the local, regional, and global contexts."

Talar Chahinian lectures in the program for Armenian Studies at UCI, where she is also visiting faculty in the Department of Comparative Literature. She is the author of *Stateless: The Politics of the Armenian Language in Exile* (Syracuse University Press, 2023) and co-edits *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*.

Sossie Kasbarian is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Stirling. She is co-editor of *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East – Contextualising Community*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2015) and co-editor of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*.

Tsolin Nalbantian is Associate Professor of Modern Middle East History at Leiden University. She is the author of *Armenians Beyond Diaspora: Making Lebanon Their Own* (2020) and co-editor of *Practicing Sectarianism: Archival and Ethnographic Interventions on Lebanon* (2022).

Copies of *The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century*, are available for purchase from the Bloomsbury Press website. Use code: GLR AQ7 to receive a 35-percent discount.

## Ben Alexander's *Ararat in America: Armenian American Culture and Politics in the Twentieth Century* Published

LONDON/NEW YORK — I. B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, has announced the publication of Dr. Ben F. Alexander's book *Ararat in America: Armenian American Culture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*. The book is part of the series *Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World* edited by Bedross Der Matossian (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

How has the distinctive Armenian-American community expressed its identity as an ethnic minority while "assimilating" in the United States? This book examines the role of community leaders and influencers, including clergy, youth organizers, and partisan newspaper editors, in fostering not only a sense of Armenian identity but specific ethnic-partisan leanings within the group's population. Against the backdrop of key geopolitical events from the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide to the creation of an independent and then Soviet Armenia, it explores the rivalry between two major Armenian political parties, the Tashnags and the Ramgavars, and the relationship that existed between partisan leaders and their broader constituency. Rather than treating the partisan conflict as simply an impediment to Armenian unity, Benjamin Alexander examines the functional if accidental role that it played in keeping certain community institutions alive. He further analyses the two camps as representing two conflicting visions of how to be an ethnic group, drawing a compari-



son between the sociology-of-religion models of comfort religion and challenge religion. A detailed political and social history, this book integrates the Armenian experience into the broader and more familiar narratives of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War in the US.

Alexander commented on the book saying: "This project took me in all directions. There's the horror of the genocide of course, and the tragedy of an archbishop's assassination, but there's also some humor, like the way members of the American-born generations satirized their elders who wanted to arrange their marriages, and the way they critiqued each other's manners at Armenian youth dances. I also managed to get a good look at the CIA and FBI files on General Dro's activities after World War II, so that's in there too, as is material from the State Department files on post-war repatriates to Soviet Armenia who changed their minds and wanted to come back. As I looked at the publications of

the competing political parties that wanted to cultivate the loyalty of the coming generations, I found differences, not only in political opinion, but in approaches to how to be an ethnic group. As a dissertation, I stopped the research at 1955, but expanding it for this present book was a real crash course in the things that happened in the 1970s and beyond."

"This is a groundbreaking book that attempts to understand Armenian intra-ethnic relations in the U.S during

a tumultuous period of the 20th century," said Der Matossian, the editor of the series. "Benjamin Alexander, a well-seasoned scholar of American history, puts the Armenian Americans in the larger context of American history. By doing so he provides us with a better picture of the Armenian experience in the United States in the 20th century," he concluded.

Actor Eric Bogosian, author of *Operation Nemesis: The Secret Plot that Avenged the Armenian Genocide* (2015), said of the book, "A serious and deeply researched investigation into the Armenian presence in the United States. It answered many questions I have had about who we were and how we Armenians have made our way as an immigrant population in America. Ben Alexander's book gave me fresh insight into the lives of my grandparents." Khatchig Mouradian of Columbia University noted, "In this compelling contribution to ethnic studies, twentieth-century Armenian American history comes to life in all its hues and shades. Alexander's incisive exploration of the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of Armenians in the United States is a must-read for those interested in identity and culture in America."

Alexander is adjunct associate professor at New York City College of Technology. He is the author of *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age* (2015) and *The New Deal's Forest Army: How the Civilian Conservation Corps Worked* (2018).

Copies of *Ararat in America: Armenian American Culture and Politics in the Twentieth Century* are available for purchase from the Bloomsbury Press website. Use code: GLR AQ4 to receive a 35-percent discount.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## The Vegan Armenian Kitchen's Darehats

LOS ANGELES — “I enjoyed this specialty bread during my first year in Armenia and received the revered ‘lucky’ piece — and had many more incredible years in Armenia,” says author, writer, and recipe developer Lena Tashjian. “Darehats is an Armenian traditional bread served when the family gathers around the holiday table, the chef or cook cuts the bread and serves it to the members of the family and their guests. The family member who receives the portion of bread with the coin (the revered piece) is granted good luck and blessings during the upcoming year.”

“The Darehats, or Bread of the Year, is a naturally vegan bread prepared for the New Year. It is usually served on New Year’s Day or early January (or really, at any time of year). It features a beautiful design on top, similar to gata. In addition to kneading the dough, many chefs may add a coin or fruit seed on top of the middle layer before sealing it. The cake is then cut into 12 pieces to represent the New Year — or depending on how many people will be enjoying it. It is said the tradition of Darehats (other names are Dari, Grgene, Kloj, etc.) began centuries ago. In the spring, the first man or baker prepared the bread using the last of the dried fruits and decorated it with seeds. The bread was dedicated to the gods in the hope of a productive crop for the new year,” adds Lena.

### INGREDIENTS:

- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup neutral oil (vegetable or canola oil)
- 3/4 cup warm/room temperature water
- 1 cup chopped dried fruits (such as raisins, dates, figs, and apricots)
- 1 cup crushed nuts (such as walnuts and almonds)
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- Pinch of salt, to taste
- 2 to 3 tablespoons Simple Syrup (page 19 of the Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook, or substitute maple syrup)
- A handful of sesame seeds, nigella seeds, or hemp seeds (optional)
- A clean coin or fruit seed (optional)

### PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Mix the flour, baking soda, and sugar in a large bowl. Add the oil and water and combine well, kneading the dough. It will be a stretchy/spongy dough.

If you want to decorate the top of the bread, set aside a small golf ball-sized amount of the dough. Split the rest into two equal parts and set aside. In another bowl, combine the dried fruits, nuts, cinnamon, salt, and stir. Add the syrup to this bowl to lightly bind them together.

In an oiled round 12” X 4” cake pan, flatten out one half of the dough after

lightly re-kneading it. Spread the nut-fruit mixture across it. Place the clean coin or seed somewhere on the nut-fruit mixture.

Lightly knead and flatten the second half of the dough on a flat surface before placing it on top, making sure to seal all around. If you saved some dough, make a shape of your choosing to decorate the top of the bread.

Optional: Brush some water on top of the dough and sprinkle on your choice of seeds.

Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, and then broil on low for an additional 1 to 2 minutes until the top is golden brown.

Note: Don’t forget to let guests who will be enjoying this bread know their piece may have a coin or fruit seed inside to avoid any choking hazards or chipped teeth.

This recipe is featured in The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook, to order go <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/product/vegan-armenian-kitchen-cookbook/>

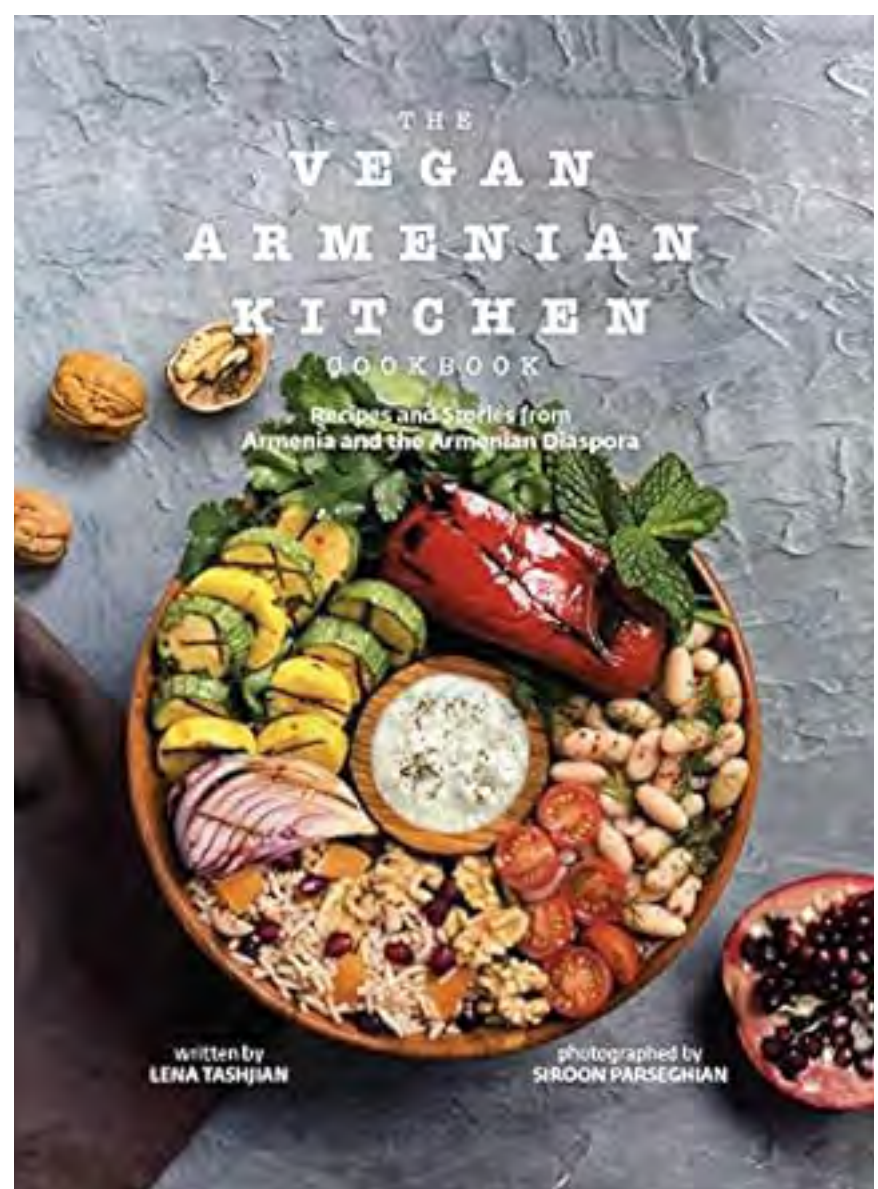
The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook (published in 2020) can be ordered on The Vegan Armenian Kitchen website, where recipes, videos, and more will be shared. While the majority of recipes found in the cookbook are naturally plant-based or Lenten, Lena Tashjian has veganized a few Armenian classics, including khash. This cookbook showcases that it is possible to reduce or eliminate animal product consumption while still enjoying many classic Armenian dishes and recipes. It is an updated collection of plant-based recipes and stories from Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. It is a self-published collaborative project between Lena, the author and recipe developer, and Siroon, the photographer and food stylist. The 265-page book contains 119 recipes, and covers a range of items, including herbs, pastes, syrups, drinks, breakfast, salads, soups and stews, bread, main dishes like various types of dolma (tolma) and bean dishes, accompaniments (especially various rice, bulgur and potato dishes) and desserts. Information is provided on folk practices like reading coffee grounds or toasting customs. The photographs make the various food items seem tantalizingly close and appealing.

On June 16, 2021, it was announced that The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook was shortlisted for the <https://tastecanada.org/2021-taste-canada-awards-shortlist/> Taste Canada Awards. The Taste Canada Awards “annually honours superior writing and publishing throughout Canada’s culinary community, in English and French.”

### REFERENCES:

- <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/veganarmeniancookbook>
- <https://www.instagram.com/veganarmeniancookbook/?hl=en>
- <https://www.instagram.com/veganarmeniankitchen/?hl=en>
- <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/darehats-pronounced-dar-ee-hots-new/>
- <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/recipes/darehats-armenian-cake/>
- <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/tag/armenian-cuisine/>
- <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/blogs/2022placeyerevan/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/posts/armenian-new-year-bread-tarehats-or-darehats-pronounced-dar-ee-hots-new-year-bre/10157937507290794/>

© Copyright 2023 The Armenian Vegan Kitchen. All Rights Reserved.







## COMMENTARY

# Member Event at Armenian Museum of America Mixes Art, Philanthropy & Community

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America's second annual Members Reception and Christmas Gallery Stroll on December 7 was a huge success with more than 125 members in attendance. It was a lively evening of networking, enjoying art, and supporting our compatriots in Armenia who were displaced from Artsakh.

Guests enjoyed Armenian and Christmas songs performed by pianist Levon Hovsepian and were welcomed by remarks from Museum President Michele Kolligian and Executive Director Jason Sohigian.

Last month the museum announced a fundraising drive which was offered to everyone in attendance and is still available online and in the Gift Shop; 100 percent of proceeds from the purchase of the new line of Michael Aram Christmas ornaments in Museum's Gift Shop will go towards humanitarian relief for the Armenians of Artsakh.

Reflecting on the current situation, Museum President Michele Kolligian remarked: "Our mission to preserve and share Armenian art, history and culture has never been more important. The Genocide of innocent Armenians living in Artsakh and 120,000 people forced to flee from their homeland was beyond horrific. To add to these evil and vicious acts, the Azeris have been destroying our ancient churches, monuments, museums, and any other reminder of Armenia's religious and cultural contributions to history and are actually claiming Armenian artifacts as their own! It is important now more than ever to preserve our cultural history, which is housed here in the largest Armenian museum outside of Armenia."

A number of museum trustees were in attendance along with artist Ara Oshagan,



Executive Director Jason Sohigian, President Michele Kolligian, artist Ara Oshagan, Trustee Carolyn Mugar and Vice President Bob Khederian (Daniel Ayriyan photo)

so guests had an opportunity to meet him and discuss his "Disrupted, Borders" installation in the Adele and Haig Der Manueelian Galleries. For more information or to support the Armenian Museum of America, please visit: [www.armenianmuseum.org](http://www.armenianmuseum.org).



These girls helped with ornament sales benefitting Armenians from Artsakh.



Vice President Bob Khederian, Trustee Mark Kolligian and Leah Talatinian, chair of the Museum's Marketing Committee and Senior Officer for Marketing and Communications for the Arts at MIT (Daniel Ayriyan photo)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**JANUARY 8** — 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 Kheyma Dinner, 6:15 p.m. Mezza and social, 7 p.m. dinner, \$20 per person. All our welcome. 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown.

**JANUARY 27** — 2nd Annual Khash Breakfast, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, sponsored by the Armenian Church at Hye Pointe Men's Club, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. Suggested Donation \$150. 18 and under complimentary. All are welcome to enjoy a hearty traditional Armenian breakfast with all the fixings. Limited seating available, RSVP by January 17, 2024. Contact Ed Kibarian (781) 838-1056 Myles Couyoumjian (978) 852-2959. Call/text/leave a message. In case of event re-scheduling, donations are transferable but non-refundable.

**FEBRUARY 11** — Encounters and convergence: An Aesthetic of Mind, Spirit and Vision" Lecture and Presentation by Dr. Seta B. Dadoyan. On the occasion of the publication of her Encounters and Convergences: A Book of Ideas and Art (2023). Sunday, 3 p.m. Free and Open to the Public. Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic St., Arlington.

**APRIL 6** — Concert by Vahan Artsruni (guitar) and Nelly Manukyan (flute). Premiere performance of works inspired by the poetry of Komitas, complemented by arrangements of Sharakans by Mesrop Mashtots, original songs based on the works of renowned poet Razmik Davoyan (1940-2022). Saturday, 4 p.m. Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic St., Arlington. Co-sponsored by The Armenian Music Festival of Rhode Island, Amaras Art Alliance. Donation: \$30 through ACF office (781-646-3090) or by visiting [amarasonline.com](http://amarasonline.com)

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.

## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
UNITED STATES

**EDITOR**

Alin K. Gregorian

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Aram Arkun

**ART DIRECTOR**

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan,  
Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian  
Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe  
Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald  
Papasian, Benjamin Poghosyan, Suren  
Sargsyan, Harut Sassounian, Hagop  
Vartivarian

**REGIONAL**

**CORRESPONDENTS**

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-  
Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian,  
Michelle Mkhlian

YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott

BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

PARIS: Jean Eckian

SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian  
Demirjian

CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

**PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

**VIDEO CORRESPONDENT**

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA  
02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

Other than the Editorial, views  
and opinions expressed in this  
newspaper do not necessarily  
reflect the policies of the  
publisher.

# What May Happen in 2024 in Armenia – Azerbaijan Negotiations

By **Benjamin Poghosyan**

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

Three months ago, hopes were high that Armenia and Azerbaijan were close to signing a peace agreement by the end of 2023. The logic behind this was the narrative that the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the fate of the Armenian population were the main obstacles to the peace agreement. After the military takeover of Nagorno Karabakh by Azerbaijan in September 2023, what could else hinder the peace process? Everything was ready to finalize the agreement during a meeting in Granada on October 5, and then sign the peace deal in Brussels or Washington by the end of 2023.

Then, suddenly, Azerbaijan pulled away from negotiations. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev canceled his visit to Granada, rejected the EU offer to hold a leaders' summit in Brussels by the end of October 2023 at the "original Brussels format," and canceled the meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers scheduled for November 20. Azerbaijan hinted that it was ready to continue negotiations in Moscow, use the 3+2 platform, or launch bilateral talks. Armenia resisted the idea of resuming negotiations in Moscow, stating that it was interested in meeting on Western platforms, but agreed to have bilateral talks at the end of the day.

On November 30, the Armenian and Azerbaijani Commission on delimitation and demarcation met at the Armenia – Azerbaijan border and agreed on its charter. On December 7, Armenia and Azerbaijan made a significant step forward by adopting a bilateral statement on pushing forward the peace process, exchange of POWs, and also Armenia's support to Azerbaijan to host the UN's climate change conference (COP29) in Baku in 2024.

Meanwhile, the US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, James O'Brien, visited Baku and met with President Aliyev on December 6. According to different sources, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to hold a foreign ministers' meeting in January 2024. As it became clear that no peace agreement would be signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan by the end of 2023, experts and politicians sought to anticipate what 2024 would bring to the Armenia - Azerbaijan peace process.

There could be different scenarios, and it is incredibly challenging to assess the likelihood of each of them, especially given that the process is heavily influenced by external factors, such as the war in Ukraine, the results of the upcoming EU and the US elections, and others. However, one thing is clear: Azerbaijan holds the initiative, and Baku will decide the course of history. Aliyev may decide that he needs a peace agreement before the February 7, 2024, snap Presidential elections to close "the Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh chapters" and participate in the elections with the program for the new "post-conflict Azerbaijan." Another option is to sign a statement with Armenia on bilateral relations before the elections, which could have patterns of the road map while continuing pressure on Armenia after February 7, 2024.

However, President Aliyev may decide that he does not need any agreement or statement with Armenia before February 7, 2024, and take part in the elections as a national hero who restored Azerbaijani territorial integrity and achieved more than his father. Even if the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers meet in Washington in January 2024, it will not result in any breakthrough. If nothing is signed before February 7, there could be two scenarios afterward.

If President Aliyev thinks that Azerbaijan needs a peace agreement in the short term, he may engage in meaningful negotiations with Armenia. However, Azerbaijan may believe that it can take from Armenia through military means much more than through any agreement. In this case, Azerbaijan probably will wait until autumn 2024 to use the US presidential elections as a "geopolitical window of opportunity" to launch another military incursion into Armenia. The goals of that military operation may be limited to taking additional strategic heights inside Armenia or controlling so-called enclaves, or Azerbaijan may seek to open the so-called "Zangezur corridor" by force.

As we see, Azerbaijan has multiple choices, not between bad and good but between good and better. Regardless of its choices, Azerbaijan will likely continue its active engagement within the 3+2 format, sending a clear message to Russia, Iran, and Turkey that it is not interested in having greater Western presence and influence in the South Caucasus. It will cement Azerbaijan's position as a country that seeks to act in line with the interests of the regional powers and will continue to add to tensions in Armenia – Russia and Armenia – Iran relations, presenting Armenia as a country that seeks to bring the West closer to Iran's borders and Russia's backyard. The EU's decision to grant EU candidate status to Georgia increases EU involvement in the region. However, the Georgian government skillfully balances between different regional actors, maintaining partnerships with the EU, the US, China, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey and develops relations with Russia and Iran.

After two humiliating defeats in 2020 and 2023, Armenia has lost its ability to influence regional developments significantly and is in a reactive mode now, taking action in response to Azerbaijani initiatives. The potential developments in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations mainly depend on Azerbaijani's decisions. However, it does not mean everything is decided, and Armenia should wait for its fate. The critical goal for Armenia in 2024 is to avoid geopolitical blunders of 2020 and 2023. Armenia should understand that one of the prevailing patterns of the emerging post-unipolar world is the regionalization of geopolitics, where regional powers and regional groupings will have more and more influence and impact. In this context, Armenia should be cautious not to become or to be perceived by Russia, Iran, and Turkey as a regional spoiler in the South Caucasus.

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

## LETTERS

### Time for Armenians to Set the Record Straight

To the Editor:

Recently a well-educated Jewish acquaintance of mine sent me an article lamenting the statement by Turkish President Erdogan that he "doesn't consider Hamas to be a terrorist organization." I responded by the old saying that "when you lie down with dogs, you wake up with fleas," followed by a long list of Israel's negative actions against Armenia/Armenians in its effort to ingratiate itself with Turkey.

No surprise — I didn't hear back from him.

At a dinner party, another "odar," someone who is considered to be smart, questioned the fact that Armenia is the oldest Christian nation as well as emphatically stating that "no one would want to conquer Armenia because it's too small." I certainly set her straight about both of her allegations.

This was followed by another "odar," a PhD, who claimed that Armenian jewelers were selling diamonds and with the profit were buying weapons and selling them to Russia. When her feet were put to the fire to tell us from where she got this erroneous information, her response was "everyone knows this."

Again I felt the need to set her straight and went to great lengths to do so. No surprise — I've opted out of future dinner parties which include the same invitees.

These experiences enforce my previous letter to the editor entitled "Why Don't they Care About Us." They also beg the question: Who should we blame for this type of ignorance? Armenia is a small country both in size and population, doesn't have oil resources, etc., so most of the major powers don't feel that it's important enough to support. While they give copious amounts

of aid in support of Ukraine and Israel for their war efforts, both countries are always in the news, while there are only snippets of information about Azerbaijan's unprovoked aggression towards Armenia, the death of thousands of soldiers and civilians, the subsequent nine month blockade preventing food and humanitarian aid from getting to 120,000 Armenians, the explosion which killed hundreds trying to flee another genocide and the mass depopulation of our ancestral land makes it on the news.

These experiences reinforce my opinion that it's our fault because it seems obvious that since the media doesn't think that our homeland and people are important enough to cover, then we need to do it ourselves. My suggestion was and remains to encourage our organizations to pool their resources

see LETTER, page 19



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenia Could Have Gotten A Better Deal in the Prisoner Exchange with Azerbaijan

Thirty two Armenian prisoners of war, languishing in a Baku jail for a long time, were finally freed and returned back to their overjoyed families. I will analyze the background and circumstances of their release, pointing out why Armenia should have gotten a much better deal.

1) The agreement to end the 2020 war, signed by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, included a clause that mandated that "an exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detained persons and bodies of the dead is to be carried out." Pashinyan's blunder was that no deadline was set for the implementation of this clause, thus allowing Azerbaijan to keep the Armenian prisoners as long as it wished.

2) Pashinyan's second mistake was that, shortly after the end of the 2020 war, Armenia released all the Azeri prisoners, while Azerbaijan released only some of the Armenian prisoners. There was no all for all exchange.

3) Even though the 2020 agreement did not impose any preconditions for the release of the Armenian and Azeri prisoners, Pashinyan made his third mistake by turning over to Azerbaijan the maps of Armenian landmines in Azeri-occupied Artsakh in return for the release by Azerbaijan of a few more Armenian prisoners. Pres. Aliyev learned the valuable lesson that he can extract more concessions from Armenia by the slow and gradual release of the Armenian prisoners. In other words, Aliyev discovered that the Armenian prisoners were more valuable for him if he kept them in a Baku jail, and released a few at a time in return for further concessions from Armenia.

4) Pashinyan's obsession over an unnecessary "Peace Treaty" with Azerbaijan provides yet another opportunity for Aliyev to extract further concessions from Armenia, including the demand for additional Armenian territories during border adjustment negotiations, the return of Azeris to their previously inhabited villages inside Armenia, and acceptance of the so-called Zangezur Corridor linking Eastern Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhichevan instead of a road under Armenia's control, as mentioned in the 2020 agreement.

5) Pashinyan should have refused all meetings and negotiations with Azerbaijan until the removal of its forces from the territory it occupies inside Armenia and the return of all Armenian prisoners of war.

6) Azerbaijan agreed to exchange two Azeri soldiers with 32 Armenian pris-

oners of war because Armenia withdrew its own candidacy and lifted its veto of Azerbaijan hosting next year's prestigious international climate change conference (COP29) in Baku. This is the only reason why Aliyev agreed to have such a lop-sided exchange of prisoners. None of the other publicly mentioned reasons are true. Contrary to baseless speculations, the U.S., EU, NATO, Russia, Turkey, and Iran played no role in arranging this prisoner exchange. It was Aliyev's strong desire to use the conference as a means to show off Baku as an internationally significant capital in order to deflect attention away from Azerbaijan's serious human rights violations and war crimes. Aliyev had gone to great lengths to host other major events in Baku, such as the Formula One Car Race, the Non-Aligned Conference Summit, Eurovision, European Games, etc.

7) Given Aliyev's fixation on hosting the Climate Summit in Baku at any cost, Armenia should have sought the release of all Armenian prisoners of war, not just 32 of them. In addition, Pashinyan should have demanded the release of the high-ranking Artsakh officials who were captured and jailed by Azerbaijan at the end of September 2023.

8) In the meantime, over 100,000 exiled Artsakh Armenians are suffering in Armenia, deprived of the most basic necessities, such as housing, food, and medicines. Artsakh Armenians have left behind all of their possessions. The Armenian government should file a lawsuit in the World Court demanding that Azerbaijan pay compensation for the confiscated properties of Artsakh Armenians.

9) The above cited issues raise serious questions about the high praise lavished on Pashinyan by his supporters who are proud that he scored a major success with the release of 32 Armenian prisoners. Little do they know that a more competent Armenian leader could have gotten much more concessions from Azerbaijan than the return of some of the Armenian prisoners.

10) Pashinyan's supporters are also ecstatic that various international leaders expressed their satisfaction with the exchange of the prisoners, hoping that this would lead the two countries to signing a 'Peace Treaty.' What Pashinyan's supporters do not understand is that a 'Peace Treaty' would not actually bring peace to the two countries, since Aliyev has already violated most of the terms of the 2020 agreement. What assurance can anyone have that he will respect future agreements?

These foreign powers care about only one thing: their self-interest rather than the national interests of Armenia.

They are pleased that Pashinyan is making repeated concessions to Azerbaijan, so that the international community can benefit from Azerbaijan's oil and gas, while ignoring Armenian interests and turning a blind eye to Aliyev's violations of the human rights of his own people.

## Reflecting on Life Through the Liturgy: Prayers from an Adopted Son of Armenia

By John Hughes

Standing in the sunlit back row of St. David Armenian Church in Boca Raton, Florida, the part of me that seeks God's attention kneels at the unlit altar of St. Zoravor Church in Yerevan, Armenia – too many miles away, but as close as the earthy smell of incense.

It has been 12 years since my prayers in St. Zoravor asked for guidance as I returned back to life in America. For just as many years (2000-2012) Armenia was my home. From evening glimpses of snowy Mount Ararat to morning walks on the sands of the Atlantic, the path there to here has not been straight and could not have been predicted.

So here I am hearing again a language I still don't understand but listening to a voice that doesn't need words, sorting out the journey.

Till very recently I've not lived in a place where there was a Diaspora community. Finding Armenians in Boca has been a bonus. I've bought Armenian string cheese and Jermuk spring water in a Russian market here. Some of the names on mailboxes in my building end in "ian". My name doesn't; but it's likely that I've experienced more of the ancestral home than most of these who are now my neighbors.

I've arrived at St. David early (proof that my odar DNA hasn't been altered by my years in Armenia, where late arrival for anything is assumed). My pale, freckled skin that not even the Florida sun can darken makes me easily spotted, even if being a foot taller than everybody else doesn't.

"Good morning," Father Sevak says.

"Bari Luys," I reply.

"Oh, you speak Armenian," the reverend says. I'm not going to lie to a clergy, so my first confession this Sunday informs the pastor that "hello" and "thank you" are about the extent of my linguistic abilities.

I tell him that I lived in Armenia; that I was a journalist there; that I had an Armenian wife and have Armenian stepchildren.

He tells me that he is from Echmiadzin, that he got his theological training in Sevan. And the simple mention of those well-known places connects me to him.

When I see him several minutes later, Father Sevak is dressed in liturgical attire in the company of deacons extending the silver cross to this congregation. I kiss the relic and am rushed with memories of my baptism at St. Zoravor, of Father Hovanes, and his gracious indulgence of my needing an interpreter to relay his sanctifying blessings; of the rose-gold cross my "brother" Armen put around my neck.

Back to the reality of this Sunday I watch the rituals of these transplants whose roots go deeper than mine. And for the first time in my Armenia Experience, I think I understand how it feels to be away from home.

Like much of today's global church congregation, this one is mostly elderly. Some of the women cover their heads in scarves. Men and women here carry faces of burden, brightened by smiles of faith, or at least of tolerance.

Most here, I suspect, are forever Diaspora – descendants from Lebanon or maybe Syria. Or maybe they are simply snowbirds from Watertown, but all are heirs to the displaced of the original genocide. Liturgical sameness dissolves borders and timelines. Fellowship over common dishes after the service connects disparate nations of one people.

I wonder whose faces show up in their prayers. In mine I see shop tenders and bus drivers and doctors and children whose names I've never known but whose presence in a place are the threads of my ties to their home. And I see those who became family: Armines and Gayannes and Anahits; several Armens and Aras; Harut and Hayk; Tadevos and Seda; Ashot; Zorab. And Babken, my little brother who survived the Gyumri earthquake and became my best man.

And these days, especially, I see the faces of friends I made in many visits to Artsakh. And I remember lighting candles inside Ghazanchetsots church in Sushi and ache to know that it has now been ruined by enemy bombs. I recall laying flowers on the grave of an eight-year old in Martuni killed in the first Karabakh war. Now I wonder what un-survivable suffering his family must endure after

being forced from their home and his eternal rest. . .

I've not been back, and recently my companion asked why. I told her it was because I wanted it to always be the way it was, and I know that it won't. That's the Irish in me. It's complicated.

But this anointed incense (khoun) wafting through St. David – 7,000 miles from St. Zoravor -- is so familiar, so effective in its ability to transport a willing spirit, I am taken there and loved ones are joined. And it feels like home in the heart.

(Journalist John Hughes founded the New Times Journalism Training Center in Yerevan and was editor of its online news daily, ArmeniaNow 2001-2016.)

## Time to Set the Record Straight

LETTER, from page 18

and hire a PR firm to show the world just how important Armenia is as the first Christian nation, to highlight the long list of achievements of our people in every field and to encourage business in and tourism to Armenia. In other words we need to "blow our own horn" because our enemies believe that "perception is reality" when they float lies trying to rationalize their actions i.e. Azerbaijan rationalized its invasion of Artsakh by saying that they were eliminating terrorists.

This isn't a new suggestion of mine but it's one that needs to be revisited. Another suggestion was to organize a think tank comprised not only of a broad spectrum of the brightest Armenian minds but also non-Armenians to formulate long term plans. And a third suggestion was to organize a committee of high level businessmen to approach major corporations to build subsidiaries in Armenia to supply products to Armenia and the Caucasus. This has a two-fold positive effect. It not only provides jobs but the lobbyists of these corporations will lobby for Armenia's security since they want stability in the regions in which they are invested. I hope that at some point the Armenia Diaspora will embrace different forms of advocacy because doing the same old, same old isn't working for us.

Adrienne G. Alexanian  
New York



# Azerbaijan Says It's on Target to Double Gas Exports to Europe

By David O'Byrne

Azerbaijan is on target to double its gas exports to Europe by 2027, according to President Ilham Aliyev.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony for the Bulgaria-Serbia interconnector gas pipeline in Niš, Serbia, on December 10, Aliyev confirmed that Baku will meet its promise to Brussels to double its gas exports to Europe to 20 billion cubic meters a year by 2027.

"The numbers already show that we are confidently moving towards this goal," Aliyev said, explaining that Azerbaijan exported just over 8 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe in 2021 which will rise to "about 12 billion cubic meters" for this year.

"This will account for 50 percent of Azerbaijan's total gas exports," he said.

To double gas exports to Europe, Baku has to both increase gas production and increase the capacity of the three transit pipelines that make up the Southern Gas Corridor, which carries Azerbaijani gas from the Caspian Sea to European markets.

Data released on December 13 shows production for January-November reaching 44 billion cubic meters, up 3.5 percent on the same period in 2022, with exports over the same period totaling 22 billion cubic meters, up 9.5 percent.

Some projects aimed at further boosting production are underway.

TotalEnergies, which began producing gas from Azerbaijan's Absheron gas field in July, confirmed in September that it will lift production from 1.5 billion cubic meters a year to around 5.5 billion cubic meters a year.

Meanwhile, BP, which operates Azerbaijan's main Shah Deniz gas field and ACG oil field has begun drilling deep wells into what it hopes are major reserves beneath both existing fields and Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR has hopes of boosting production from its Umid gas field.

But the huge investment needed to bring new gas production online and to expand the pipelines has to be balanced by agreements with gas buyers in Europe, confirm-

ing that they will buy the gas when it is available.

To date that hasn't happened, with Azerbaijani officials complaining that European buyers have been slow to commit to purchasing the extra gas that Azerbaijan has promised Brussels it will supply by 2027.

Some export agreements have been signed.

Next year will see Bulgaria import 1 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas, double the 500 million cubic meters supplied this year, while a new agreement with Belgrade will see SOCAR export 400 million cubic meters of gas to Serbia next year, via the new Bulgaria-Serbia interconnector.

However, the major European gas buyers further west have yet to commit.

It's not clear why. Azerbaijan's September military offensive to seize Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in the emptying of the region's Armenian population, was not received well by the EU, in particular by some member states like France. There's been no indication that this has had an impact on European interest in buying Azerbaijani gas, however. (TotalEnergies, France's biggest energy company, continues to operate its Absheron field.)

In January this year the operator of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) which carries Azerbaijani gas from the Turkey-Greece border, through Albania and on to Italy, held an open tender for buyers to book extra pipeline capacity for gas they planned to import

TAP confirmed it had received commitments for only an extra 1.2 billion cubic meters a year, considerably less than the 10 billion cubic meters needed to double Azerbaijan's exports to Europe to 20 billion cu m/yr.

A second tender planned for later in 2023 has not materialized.

At the same time, there has been no confirmation of any work to expand either the South Caucasus gas Pipeline (SCP) which carries Azerbaijani gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey or the TANAP pipeline which carries the gas across Turkey to Greece.

The combined capacity of both will have to be expanded by at least 10 billion

cubic meters a year if Baku's promise to double exports to Europe to 20 billion cubic meters a year by 2027 is to be met.

That promise, made in July last year in a landmark agreement with the European Union, came in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine which has seen Russian gas exports to Europe fall to zero and saw European gas prices surge to unprecedented levels.

(The political aim of reducing EU dependence on Russian gas was arguably undermined a few months later, when Azerbaijan began purchasing Russian gas to meet its own needs.)

Subsequently, however, Europe's gas situation has eased with new liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminals being commissioned across the continent and major LNG exporters such as the U.S. and Qatar working to increase exports.

Increasingly Azerbaijan's gas exports, which can only be made via the Southern Gas Corridor pipelines, are having to compete with more flexible LNG exports, delivered by sea to floating terminals which can easily be moved to different locations according to demand.

And with efforts to boost Azerbaijani production to the required levels still in the early stages, Baku is unable to confirm exactly how much more gas will be available and when.

## Other Possibilities

Baku does have some other options which could boost the volume of gas available for export.

Baku has ambitious plans for renewable power generation, which, if realized, will greatly reduce domestic gas consumption.

Speaking in Niš, Aliyev confirmed that his government has signed agreements for the development of 10 gigawatts of renewable power-generating capacity.

How much of that will actually be developed, and when, remains to be confirmed.

Azerbaijan's latest power generation data, released on December 15, shows that 93 percent of the republic's power is still generated by thermal power plants - mostly burning gas, with just 7 percent coming from renewables.

Another option open is for Baku to import more gas to meet domestic needs, allowing it to increase exports, or to transit gas from other countries directly.

Recently revived interest in the development of a pipeline across the Caspian to carry gas from Turkmenistan to Europe, already appears to have cooled.

However, Azerbaijan's existing deal under which it imports gas from Turkmenistan via Iran could be further expanded with Tehran signaling earlier this year that it was expanding its pipeline capacity in readiness for further transit.

That extra pipeline capacity could also be used to supply Turkey.

A recent meeting between Turkish and Turkmen officials resulted in an agreement for the two sides to explore the possibility of Turkey also importing Turkmen gas via Iran.

If realized, that could reduce Ankara's dependence on Azerbaijan, which last year supplied Turkey with 8.7 billion cubic meters of gas, 16 percent of Turkey's imports, again freeing up more Azerbaijani gas for export to Europe.

However, such a move would also require a new agreement between Ankara and Tehran over Turkey's existing deal to import 9.6 billion cubic meters a year of Iranian gas which expires in July 2026.

(David O'Byrne is an Istanbul-based journalist who covers energy. This article originally appeared on the website Eurasianet.org on December 18.)

## Netflix to Film Several German Series in Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Several Netflix films and television series will be filmed in Armenia.

Member of Parliament Sisak Gabrielyan from the Civil Contract Party credited the latest amendments made to the law on film for the deal.

He said that a memorandum of cooperation has been signed with German actor and producer Til Schweiger's agent.

"As expected, the latest amendments made to the law on film have made Armenia attractive for filmmaking. Today at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport we signed a memorandum of cooperation with German actor, film producer Til Schweiger's agent. A total of three films, 'Underdog,' 'Dead by Dawn,' and 'Collapse' (8-part Netflix film), will be

filmed in Armenia. Filming is planned to start in the beginning of the year. This will be the first application of the new law. As a reminder, in case of maintaining the regulations, the state will return to the filmmakers between ten to forty percent of the invested money. In the coming days the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport will publish the list of the respective products and services, as well as the terms and regulations of use. According to experts, our country is very convenient for filmmaking in terms of its location. Throughout the year, almost at any given time you can have snow-capped mountains and asphalt melting heat at the same time, and beautiful modern buildings, streets, and abandoned villages and factories," Gabrielyan said on social media.



## Celebrations at St. James Armenian Church

WATERTOWN — St. James Armenian Church celebrated the Parish's name day, the 92nd anniversary of the Parish, and the 30th anniversary of pastor Rev. Arakel Aljalian entering the priesthood, on Sunday, December 17. The program was presided over by Bishop Mesrob Parsamyan, primate of Eastern Diocese of the Armenian church.

Along with others, tribute was paid to Deacon Apkar Potookian, above, for his many years of dedicated service. From left are Aljalian, Parsamyan and Potookian.