

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXIX, NO. 21, Issue 4811

DECEMBER 9, 2023

\$2.00

Sarkis Karabashian's Road to Activism

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Samuel Sarkis Karabashian is, as his LinkedIn account announces, “an aspiring geopolitical and national security expert.” A grandchild of



survivors of the Armenian Genocide in his late 20s, he has become increasingly involved in Armenian activities, and

plans to move to Armenia next September for a year at least.

Until the summer of this year, Karabashian was working at Deloitte, the multinational consulting and business services firm, doing national security consulting. Working there some 3 ½ years, Karabashian said, “That was what made me realize how much I like the field, and then, I always felt that I could learn a lot that I could apply to the Armenian case.”

When asked more specifically what he did, he replied, “We worked quietly, and we helped prevent and deter threats to US national security and its interests.” He said he could not speak about it in depth publicly but gave one example: “We worked in person alongside border patrol to figure out how they operate, how they can improve, and what they need — and measure things that they need, because they can then make a case for more funding, and make a case for how X amount of funding can afford what they need, and X objectives or Y objectives can be accomplished as a result. So there is an amount of analysis that goes into it on the strategic level, but in order to get very solid strategic level analysis and recommendations, you have to be in person with them operationally, and just observe and participate as needed.”

One good aspect of this type of job is that the longer you work in this field, the more people you know, he said. People tend in this field to stay and

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Armenian Soldier Killed on Azerbaijani Border

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — An Armenian soldier serving on the border with Azerbaijan was shot dead on Monday, December 4, in what official Yerevan described as an Azerbaijani ceasefire violation aimed at torpedoing peace talks.

Armenia’s Defense Ministry said the soldier, Gerasim Arakelyan, was fatally wounded by sniper fire at an Armenian army post near the village of Bardzruni bordering Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave.

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry denied the “provocative information,” saying that its troops did not breach the ceasefire.

The head of the Bardzruni administration, Arsen Aleksanyan, told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service that local residents heard the sounds of cross-border gunfire. Serious truce violations at that section of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border have been rare until now.

“We strongly condemn these actions of the Azerbaijani side aimed at provoking a new escalation, dragging out the peace process and bringing it to a dead end,” the Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on the deadly incident.

The statement also said that Baku is “continuously rejecting offers from various in-

ternational actors to continue negotiations” with Yerevan.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan deplored Baku’s “refusal to come to meetings organized by various international actors, including the US and the EU” when he ad-

on an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev twice cancelled EU-mediated talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan planned for October. Bayramov similarly withdrew from a November 20 meeting with Mirzoyan that



Armenian soldiers take up positions on the border with Azerbaijan, August 2, 2022.

ressed last week an annual conference of the top diplomats of OSCE member states. His Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov said Yerevan itself is dragging out talks

was due to take place in Washington. Baku accused the Western powers of pro-Armenian bias and proposed direct negotiations with Yerevan.

Humanitarian Aid from Germany Raised For Displaced Armenians of Artsakh

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FRANKFURT, Germany

— In response to the humanitarian catastrophe created by Azerbaijan’s forced expulsion of over 100,000 Armenians from Artsakh, Armenians in Germany have been working with German organizations to supply urgent relief. In the forefront of efforts has been the Armenian Embassy in Berlin, working with Armenian-German groups and church communities.

Refugees streaming into Armenia need everything: material help above all, a place to sleep and reside, basic supplies like energy, heat, bedding and food, but also psychological support and professional assistance to deal with the effects of trauma.

Energy, Light, and Bedding

Already in October, immediately after the expulsion of Armenians from Artsakh, organizations in Germany responded to Armenia’s call to the European Union for assistance. The Agency for Technical Relief (THW) Logistics Center in the city of Ulm, directed by Bernd Urban, organized the transportation of relief goods including 50 electrical power units and 520 sleeping bags for refugees.

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Tekeyan Artsakh Refugees Aid Program Helps Children with Health Issues

By Gayane Muradyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

At the current stage of its Artsakh Refugees Aid Program, the

Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada has decided to help the families of economically disadvantaged Artsakh



Armenian children who need medical treatment. The stories of the families presented below are only a few samples of what tribulations the forcibly displaced Artsakh Armenians are facing.

Nora, one of the displaced, said that her son, Edwin, was only 3 days old on the day the 44-day war began in 2020. They were in a shelter and the child got inflammation of the ear cartilage from the effects of repeated shell explosions. Liquid collected in his head and swelling took place. Edwin was operated on in Stepanakert at the age of 1.5 years, but during the

months of the siege, his medication was stopped. Now the boy is 3 years old and will continue his treatment in Yerevan.

Lyuba’s husband, Armon, was killed at the defense positions during the September 2023 Azerbaijani invasion. Four

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Refugee children from Artsakh cuddling up under warm blankets on new beds in Tavush Province

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Chefs in LA Reunite to Help The Displaced From Artsakh

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Wings of Tatev Recognized as ‘World’s Leading Cable Car Ride’

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NEWS from ARMENIA

28 Percent of Children in Armenia Aged 7-9 Years Old Are Overweight

YEREVAN (News.am) — About 28% of children in Armenia aged 7-9 years old are overweight, the Armenian Health Ministry reports. Obesity is observed in 12.6% of children.

Studies show that the abuse of sweet drinks is fraught with the emergence of overweight and obesity in children. They have a higher risk of health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, other respiratory system diseases, sleep disorders, and liver disease. Being overweight can also have psychological effects, such as depression, social isolation, and low self-esteem.

Armenia to Have First AI Supercomputing Center in The Region

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — The first AI supercomputing center in the region will be opened in Armenia, Vice Speaker of Parliament Hakob Arshakyan said on November 30. The funding for launching the center will amount to approximately 8.5 million USD.

The project was discussed during Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's meeting with NVIDIA executive Jensen Huang in April of this year.

Arshakyan said in a statement that the Cabinet has approved his recommendation on including the AI supercomputing center project in the 2024 state budget, and the proposal will be sent to parliament.

Armenia's Deputy Minister Of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Visits LOFT Meghri Center

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — During his visit to the Meghri community of Syunik Province, Armenian Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Daniel Danielyan was hosted at the LOFT Meghri youth center, established with the support of his ministry.

During the visit, the minister met with the residents of the community, particularly with young people. The possibilities of organizing new events and festivals were discussed with those responsible for coordinating cultural and youth activities in Meghri, the ministry said. Danielyan presented the concept of establishing a community center with a youth, cultural and educational component in the near future.

"At the outset we are going to establish a similar community center in each region, which will have a positive impact on the sociocultural life of the community and will add new quality and color to the community," said Danielyan.

During the meeting with the youth, Danielyan considered the possibilities of organizing new, community-specific festivals and large-scale events in Meghri, emphasizing their role and importance in activating Meghri's youth life, developing tourism, providing cultural entertainment and enhancing the attractiveness of the community.

Court Orders Release of Prominent Armenian General

YEREVAN (azatutyun.am) — An Armenian appeals court ordered on Friday, December 1 the conditional release of a prominent military general who demanded Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's resignation in 2021.

Major-General Grigori Khachaturov was arrested in March this year on charges of money laundering strongly denied by him. A court of first instance allowed prosecutors last month to again extend his pre-trial detention.

Khachaturov's lawyers challenged that decision in the Anti-Corruption Court of Appeals. The latter agreed to grant him bail. At the same time, it placed the general under so-called "administrative control" involving restrictions on his freedom of movement and communication. The court did not immediately specify the extent of those restrictions.

Khachaturov is the former commander of the Armenian army's Third Corps mostly stationed in northern Tavush province bordering Azerbaijan. He received a major military award and was promoted to the rank of major-general after leading a successful military operation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in July 2020, less than three months before the outbreak of the six-week war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

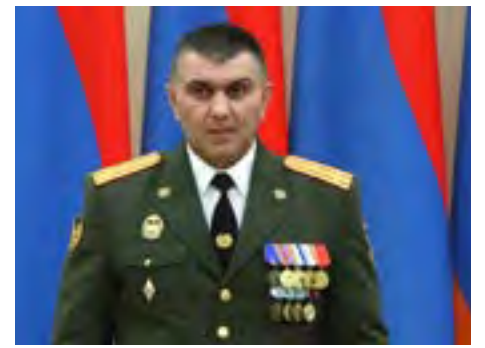
Khachaturov was among four dozen high-ranking military officers who accused Pashinyan's government of incompetence and misrule and demanded its resignation in February 2021. The unprecedented demand was welcomed by the Armenian opposition but condemned as a coup attempt by Pashinyan.

In a separate statement issued in March 2021, Khachaturov said "every day and hour" of Pashinyan's rule "erodes" Armenia's national security. He was fired a few months later.

The charges leveled against the general stem from a controversial criminal case opened against Seyran Ohanyan, a former defense minister who now leads the parliamentary group of the main opposition Hayastan alliance.

Ohanyan was charged in February with illegally allowing the privatization of properties that belonged to the Armenian Defense Ministry. He rejected the accusations as politically motivated.

The National Security Service (NSS) claimed at the time that Khachaturov "de facto" acquired one of those properties at a knockdown price and used it for obtaining a bank loan worth 18 million drams (\$45,000). One of his lawyers dismissed the claim as "laughable."



Grigori Khachaturov attends an award ceremony in the presidential palace in Yerevan, September 20, 2019

Khachaturov's father Yuri was the chief of the Armenian army's General Staff from 2008-2016. He served as secretary general of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization when the current Armenian authorities indicted him as well as Ohanian and former President Robert Kocharyan in 2018 over their alleged role in a 2008 post-election unrest in Yerevan. Armenia's Constitutional Court declared coup charges brought against them unconstitutional in 2021.

Yuri Khachaturov and his second son Igor actively participated in last year's antigovernment protests staged by the country's main opposition forces.

First Armenian-Made Satellite Launched into Space

YEREVAN (azatutyun.am) — A first-ever satellite designed and manufactured by Armenian scientists was launched into space on Friday, December 1. The Hayasat-1 satellite was carried by a SpaceX rocket that blasted off from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

The high-tech device shaped like a 10-centimeter cube was jointly developed by the Yerevan-based Bazoomq Space Research Laboratory and the Armenian Center for Scientific Innovation and Education. Their nascent space program was formally licensed by the Armenian Ministry of High-Technology less than three months ago.

High-Technology Minister Robert Khachatryan pledged continued government support for the program when he spoke after the successful launch of Hayasat-1. He called it a "very remarkable and heartening" development.

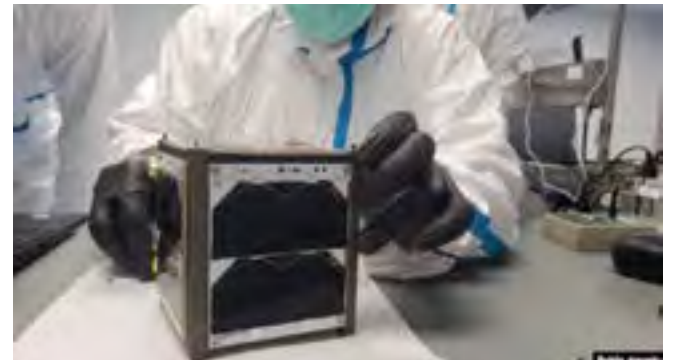
Bazoomq's co-founder and executive director, Avetik Grigoryan, spoke of the "resumption" of Armenia's space-related activities, alluding to Armenian scientists'

past contributions to Soviet space programs. Hayasat-1 is "only the first step" in that endeavor, he said.

"We need to have our own capacity to develop satellites, launch them and give them the functions and tasks we want because otherwise we would be dependent on big powers that may and may not be willing to support us," argued Grigoryan.

SpaceX launched Armenia's first satellite into space in May 2022. The Armenian government reportedly purchased the ArmSat-1 satellite from Satlantis, a Spanish company that specializes in the production of small satellites and cameras for them. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at the time that it will be used for a wide range of purposes, including border control, natural disaster management and geology.

The government pledged to open a satellite operations center in the country before the end of 2022. However, the construction of the facility appears to have fallen behind schedule.



The Hayasat-1 satellite

Armenia's arch-foe Azerbaijan launched its first communication and observation satellite into space in 2013. The Azerbaijani army reportedly used satellite images for its offensive military operations carried out during the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.



Government officials, scientists and reporters in Yerevan watch a live broadcast of the launch of a first Armenian-made satellite into space on December 1, 2023

Pashinyan's Party Seeks to Oust Another Opposition Mayor

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (azatutyun.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party has moved to oust the mayor of a major community in Armenia's northern Lori province affiliated with an opposition group.

Civil Contract lost control of the community comprising the formerly industrial town of Alaverdi and over two dozen smaller towns and villages as a result of local elections held in September 2022. It fell short of an overall majority in the local council empowered to appoint the community head.

The opposition Aprelu Yerkir party secured such a majority and installed its member Arkadi Tamazyan as mayor after teaming up with former President Levon Ter-Petrosian's Armenian National Congress (HAK) party. The HAK won only one seat in the council.

One of the council members representing Aprelu Yerkir, Simon Zakharov, unexpectedly defected from the party in July, putting Tamazyan's position at serious risk. Zakharov denied media reports that he was co-opted by his pro-government colleagues, but he did back earlier this week a Civil Contract bid to replace Tamazyan through a vote of no confidence. Zakharov's defection gave Pashinyan's party enough votes to do that.

Under Armenia law, local councils cannot discuss and vote on motions of censure more than once a year. Aprelu Yerkir tried to take advantage of this provision in October, initiating a vote of no confidence in Tamazyan which its councilors never planned to back. Civil Contract representatives say the initiative is null and void because the local council did not make a quorum needed for a formal debate on it.

Tamazyan on Friday, December 1, denied that and said it is the ruling party's motion that is illegal. He said he will therefore not convene a special session of the council demanded by its pro-government members keen to unseat him.

"Let them challenge my decision in court," the Alaverdi mayor told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Tamazyan said later in the day that he has asked the Armenian government to disband the local council and call a snap election in the community. The law allows but does not require the government to do so.

Civil Contract's local leader, Davit Ghumashyan, dismissed the request. He said the Alaverdi council will meet early next week to remove Tamazyan and elect him as new mayor.

"Our initiative is absolutely legal," added Ghumashyan.

Ghumashyan is a former member of former President Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). He was elected mayor of a village close to Alaverdi on the HHK ticket in 2017 a year before Pashinyan toppled Sargsyan and swept to power. Ghumashyan pledged allegiance to Pashinyan's team shortly after the "Velvet Revolution."

Tamazyan on Thursday, November 30, effectively accused the ruling party of engineering Zakharov's defection. The mayor labeled the defector as a "rat" motivated by "personal interests."



Arkadi Tamazyan, May 20, 2022.

Karabakh Armenians to Receive Pensions in Armenia

YEREVAN (JAMnews) — The Armenian government approved "the procedure for determining and issuing pensions to those from Nagorno-Karabakh." This refers to people of retirement age who moved to Armenia after the hostilities in September this year.

Since December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor, the only road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. On September 19, 2023, the Azerbaijani armed forces launched a military operation, which ended the next day. The authorities of the unrecognized Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR) announced that the republic had ceased to exist. Almost all Armenians left NK territory within a week at the end of September, as soon as Azerbaijan unblocked the Lachin corridor and it became possible to leave.

The Armenian government has recognized the Armenians arriving in the country as "persons taken under temporary protection, i.e. refugees." Now the members of the Cabinet of Ministers have approved a project under which all of them will be able to receive the pension they are entitled to. To do so, they will simply need to fill out an online application. If there is information about them in the pension database of the NFP the right to a pension will not be reviewed, the working experience will be

preserved. A mandatory condition for receiving a pension in Armenia will be registration at the place of residence in Armenia.

According to these regulations, pensions will be assigned until the end of 2028, in accordance with the Armenian legislation. And then, if necessary, both the length of service and the right to receive a pension will be reconsidered.

Senior category retained; amount of pension not

"A person taken under temporary protection and recognized as a refugee, whose pension file is saved in the NK Pension Database, can submit an online application for receiving a pension to the relevant authorities of the Republic of Armenia until June 1, 2024," Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs David Khachatryan said.

Those who submit online-application will choose their preferred bank for receiving payment.

The Deputy Minister assured that no other documents will have to be attached to the application. He also said that the refugees' right to pension would not be reconsidered, with duration of work within NK counting toward the amount.

However, according to the decision of the Armenian government, the amount would be calculated according to local legislation.

"Pensions will also be received by those who have now entered retirement age"

Those who have reached the age of 63 but have not yet received a pension can also apply for a pension, subject to the same regulations. Pensions will be assigned no earlier than October 1.

"For example, if a person turned 63 on September 15, 2023, and applied on December 11, 2023, they will be assigned the status of pensioner from October 1, 2023," the government draft says.

Due to the decision to pay pensions to an additional number of people, Armenia's budget expenditures for October-December 2023 will increase by 2.3 billion drams (\$5,750,000).

The same regulations will apply to Karabakh Armenians who have obtained Armenian citizenship

According to the draft approved by the Armenian Government, it is authorized to "determine the procedure for applying for pensions for persons with refugee status, assign pensions to them, and carry out recalculation."

However, it says that the same procedures are proposed to be extended to those included in the NK pension base who have already submitted a relevant application and obtained citizenship of the Republic of Armenia.

Tekeyan Artsakh Refugees Aid Program Helps Children with Health Issues

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boys are now growing up in the family, ages 7 to 26. Seven-year-old Artyom was diagnosed with sarcoma and is being treated at the Yolian Yerevan Hematology Hospital named after Yolian. The family lived in Gishi village of Martunu region in Artsakh. Now they live in Aintun village of Ararat Province. "We left everything in Artsakh, from the graves of relatives to happy care-free times. I left in Artsakh what I will not find anywhere. I left my homeland, but the dream of returning to Artsakh remained with us," Lyuba exclaimed.

Victoria lived with her husband Sevak in the city of Martuni, Artsakh, until September 19. Four minor children, aged 6-15, were growing up in their family. On September 19, Sevak was killed while defending the positions of the city. Now Victoria and the children live in the city of Echmiadzin of Armavir Province. The boys have a hard time overcoming the longing for their home, yard, and friends in Artsakh. They have psychological problems adapting to a new place. "They feel orphaned

without Artsakh," Victoria explained. "Artsakh also remained an orphan without its people."

Karine's family of seven, five of whom are minor children, lived in Stepanakert, Artsakh's capital. Now they have settled in Lori Province. "Unexpected shots were heard in the morning. We thought they were training exercises, but then the sounds of the shots became clearer and closer. People were running on the street. We decided to go out, leaving home, car, everything. We only managed to get the children out," Karine related. The son, 14-year-old Armen, has kidney cancer. During the blockade, he could not take the necessary medication. Now he is registered at the children's clinic and is receiving a course of treatment.

Ruzanna Harutyunyan's large family of 11 people needed fuel to escape. Only seven liters of gasoline were needed to get the family to Goris. Her husband, Davit, was waiting in line to get fuel from the gas station outside Stepanakert. Davit was standing nearby during its explosion and received burns of various degrees. He is

still undergoing post-operative therapy at the burn hospital, and Ruzanna's five-year-old daughter, Adriana, has a chronic blood disorder and is being treated at the hospital.

There are 4 minor children aged 3 to 16 in the 6-person family of Baghdasar and Irina Sevumyan. They lived carefree in Shekher village of Artsakh's Martunu region. The youngest boy, Baghdasar, was found to have a cyst when he was three years old. He was operated on once, but the doctors advise that another operation is necessary. Now they live in Yeghegnadzor, in Vayots Dzor Province.

The 10-member family of Arthur and Zhanna Baghdasaryan lived in the village of Chan in the Martakert region of Artsakh, including 16-year-old Mariam, 14-year-old Davit, 12-year-old Alexey, 10-year-old Raya, 7-year-old Marina, 6-year-old Henry, 3-year-old Rudik and 2-year-old Monte. Now the family lives in Malishka village of Vayots Dzor Province. "If we are not in Artsakh, it doesn't matter where we will be. Artsakh was a paradise," they say.

As can be seen from these examples,

most Artsakh families are large ones with many children. Having multiple children was always encouraged there as part of the goal of the Artsakh government to preserve the unique language or dialects of Karabakh, and its cultural and even genetic inheritance.

The Tekeyan Cultural Association is grateful for all those who have supported its program of direct aid to the Artsakh displaced. All donations go without any administrative fees to help the Artsakh Armenians, and each case is investigated closely. Earlier stages of the aid program, to burn victims and their families, and other needy families, are described in prior articles in the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

If you want to help, please send donations in the USA to the following address: Tekeyan Cultural Association Artsakh Aid, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, or online at <https://givebutter.com/AGuStb>; and in Canada, to Tekeyan Cultural Association Artsakh Aid, 825 Manoukian Str., Ville Saint-Laurent, Quebec H4N 1Z5, Canada or online here.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Parliamentary Delegation Will Not Participate in Upcoming CSTO Meeting

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — Speaker of Parliament Alen Simonyan and the Armenian parliamentary delegation will not participate in the upcoming Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Parliamentary Assembly (PA) Council meeting, the Armenian parliament's press service said in a statement.

The 16th plenary session of the CSTO PA meeting will take place on December 19 in Moscow. Simonyan has sent a letter to Russian State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin notifying him about the decision.

Armenian, US Security Officials Meet at White House

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia, Armen Grigoryan, met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the White House in Washington on December 5.

Grigoryan and Sullivan discussed issues of mutual interest in the areas of security and the economy, and lauded the steady dynamics of development of Armenia-US bilateral relations, Grigoryan's office said in a readout.

The officials also discussed the regional security situation, and Secretary Grigoryan reiterated Armenia's commitment to continue the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization and peace process.

India Ready to Participate in Infrastructure Development in Armenia

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — The centuries-old relations between Armenia, India and Iran are a strong foundation for cooperation in present days, Ambassador of India to Armenia Nilakshi Saha Sinha said on December 5.

Speaking at the New Regional Reality and the Crossroads of Peace forum in Yerevan, the Indian Ambassador said that Armenia and India have historic ties, and Iran is a bridge that has contributed to the development of the relations.

"India and Iran are closely cooperating as part of the North-South international transport corridor initiative, which connects the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf with the Caspian Sea, towards Russia and Europe. We are ready to work with Armenia to understand how the country can benefit from the opportunities of this corridor," the ambassador said.

Speaking about the Crossroads of Peace project developed by the Armenian government, the Indian ambassador said that this initiative presented by Prime Minister Pashinyan seeks to promote connectivity in the Caucasus, including railways, roads and power transmission lines, through the development of infrastructures.

"Armenia is currently develop-

Azerbaijan, Armenia Hold Border Meeting Amid Stagnant Peace Talks

By Heydar Isayev

Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to discuss the delimitation of their mutual borders as part of wider talks on a peace treaty that show little sign of progress.

On November 30, the state commissions of Armenia and Azerbaijan on border delimitation met for the fifth time at the Ijevan (Armenia) - Gazakh (Azerbaijan) section of their border. The commissions are chaired by deputy prime ministers Mher Grigoryan from Armenia and Shahin Mustafayev from Azerbaijan.

After the meeting, the foreign ministries of the two countries released nearly identical statements.

"The sides continued the discussion of border delimitation issues and touched upon a number of organizational and procedural issues," the Armenian ministry reported.

"The parties have reached preliminary agreement on the text of the Order for organization and conduct of sittings and joint working meetings" between the commissions, it further said, adding that they have also arranged to "commence the elaborations to agree upon the draft Regulation on joint activity" of the commissions and agreed to "intensify the conduct of the meetings."

That indicates the meeting was at least more productive than the last one in July, after which the foreign ministries only reported that their discussions would continue.

However the meeting did not engender hope among observers for progress toward any actual demarcation work and toward the ultimate aim of signing a peace agreement.

"Sadly, short meeting and we can understand why. Five meetings since the border commissions first met in May 2022 and they still haven't agreed on how to regulate and hold them," British journalist Onnik Krikorian, who has long covered the peace process, wrote on X. "Yeah, 'intensifying' the process might be a good idea."

The peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been at a crossroads for a while, especially since Baku's full takeover in September of Nagorno-Karabakh, the territory that had been at the heart of the dispute between the two countries for more than 30 years.

After that, it looked like there were no more barriers to reaching a peace treaty between the two countries, with the de facto Armenian government in Nagorno-Karabakh initiating its own dissolution and Armenia accepting the territory as part of Azerbaijan.

Nowadays the sides have been disagreeing over who should mediate their disagreements.

While Armenia has been seeking to pivot away from Russia and toward the West, Azerbaijan has been rejecting Western countries' involvement in the peace process. Since September, Azerbaijan has been airing grievances against France and the US, both of which had been mediators in the conflict ever since the 1990s, when the First Karabakh War was being fought. Azerbaijan resents Paris and Washington's objections to the September offensive and the subsequent Armenian exodus from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan has expressed preference for resolving the conflict within the region - either bilaterally or through the mediation of countries like Georgia, Turkey, and Rus-

sia.

Meanwhile, an OSCE meeting of foreign ministers was convened on the same day as the border talks. The top Azerbaijani and Armenian diplomats were both there but did not meet.

In his speech to the Council, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan reiterated Armenia's assertion that, after Azerbaijan's "ethnic cleansing" of Nagorno-Karabakh, Baku is eyeing an attack on Armenia.

"Even after having this done [seizing all of Karabakh] the claims of the Azerbaijani side were not halted. Now the entire sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia has become the target of our neighbor. This, coupled with continuous hatred, military rhetoric, use of force and threats of use of force, refusal to come to the meetings organized by various international actors, including the US and the EU, illustrates that this country is not sincerely interested in peace and stability in our region."

For his part, Azerbaijan's Jeyhun Bayramov said that all the Karabakh Armenians left of their own volition and were free to stay in their homes. He accused Yerevan of needlessly dragging out the peace process and railed against "biased and one-sided actions by certain third parties [that] seriously affect the process."

"Despite all the challenges, Azerbaijan remains committed to the soonest resumption of direct negotiations to finalize the peace agreement. We publicly offered Armenia to meet on the mutual state border, or in an impartial and neutral third country."

(Heydar Isayev is a journalist from Baku. This article first appeared on December 1 at Eurasia.net)

Russian, Armenian FMs Meet Amid Tensions

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (Azatutyun.am) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan on Thursday, November 30 for the first time in months amid unprecedented tensions between their countries.

The talks, described by the Russian Foreign Ministry as a "short conversation," were held on the sidelines of a meeting in North Macedonian's capital Skopje of the foreign ministers of OSCE member states.

The ministry said Lavrov and Mirzoyan discussed bilateral ties and the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process. It reported no concrete understandings reached by them.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry issued an unusually short statement on the talks. It said only that Mirzoyan "once again presented the Armenian side's positions regarding the Russian policy and the steps taken on bilateral and regional agendas."

Russian-Armenian relations have significantly deteriorated over the past year primarily because of what Armenia sees as a lack of Russian support in its conflict with Azerbaijan. Tensions between the two longtime allies rose further in the run-up to and after Baku's September 19-20 military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Russian Foreign Ministry accused Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian of systematically "destroying" those relations and reorienting his country towards the West. Pashinian and other Armenian lead-

ers charged, for their part, that Russia has failed to honor its security commitments to its South Caucasus ally.

The deepening rift is increasingly calling into question Armenia's continued mem-

bership in Russian-led military and trade blocs comprising several ex-Soviet states. Pashinian last week did not rule out the possibility of pulling his country out of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, left, and his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan meet in Skopje, North Macedonia on November 30, 2023

bership in Russian-led military and trade blocs comprising several ex-Soviet states. Pashinian last week did not rule out the possibility of pulling his country out of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

According to the Russian readout of the Skopje talks, Lavrov reaffirmed Moscow's

readiness to "vigorously" facilitate an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal based on understandings brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Yerevan now seems to prefer Western

mediation of the peace talks. It has ignored Lavrov's recent offers to host fresh talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers. Moscow claims that peace efforts by the United States and the European Union are primarily aimed at driving Russia out of the South Caucasus.

Armenia, Azerbaijan Trade More Barbs over Peace Treaty

By Ruzanna Stepanian

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (Azatyun.am) — Armenia and Azerbaijan have accused each other of dragging feet on a bilateral peace treaty sought by the international community.

The foreign ministers of the two South Caucasus countries traded the accusations on Thursday, November 30, when they addressed an annual meeting of the top diplomats of OSCE member states held in North Macedonia's capital Skopje. The two men avoided holding talks on the sidelines of the ministerial conference.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan again condemned the recent Azerbaijani offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh that restored Baku's control over the region and



The foreign ministers of OSCE member states meet in Skopje, North Macedonia on November 30, 2023



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan

forced its practically entire population to flee to Armenia.

"With the tacit consent of the international community, Azerbaijan has achieved its long-standing goal: to get the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh without its Armenian population," Mirzoyan declared in his speech.

"Now the entire sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia has become the target of our neighbor," he went on. "This, coupled with continuous hatred, military

rhetoric, use of force and threats of use of force, refusal to come to meetings organized by various international actors, including the US and the EU, demonstrates that this country [Azerbaijan] is not sincerely interested in peace and stability in our region."

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev twice cancelled EU-mediated talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian planned for October. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov similarly

withdrew from a November 20 meeting with Mirzoyan that was due to take place in Washington. Baku accused the Western powers of pro-Armenian bias and proposed direct negotiations with Yerevan.

Bayramov reiterated that offer and complained about "biased and one-sided actions" of unnamed third parties in his speech at the Skopje conference. He claimed that Yerevan itself is dragging out talks on the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty.

"The continuation of geopolitical intrigues organized by some actors is counterproductive and only serves to drag out the peace process," added Bayramov.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken telephoned Aliyev and Pashinian on Monday, November 27, to discuss ways of kick-starting the process. No dates for fresh Armenian-Azerbaijani talks were announced as a result. Blinken met with Mirzoyan at Skopje on Wednesday, November 29.

Armenian officials suggested earlier that Aliyev is reluctant to sign a peace deal that would preclude Azerbaijani territorial claims to Armenia. Azerbaijan's September 19-20 offensive in Karabakh raised more fears in Yerevan that it may also invade Armenia to open a land corridor to the Nakhichevan exclave.

Humanitarian Aid from Germany Raised for Displaced Armenians of Artsakh

AID, from page 1

These goods were sent first to a THW center in Bavaria, where tents, lighting equipment and field beds were added, the entire shipment worth 450,000 Euro, Urban said. The final transport to Armenia went by air freight.

Psychological Support

Several organizations with teams in Germany, including those of international scope, have been active, among them Caritas, Bread for the World, UN Refugee aid, Bread for the World, and Doctors without Borders, to name a few. Narime Danielyan, leader of the Doctors without Borders medical team in Goris, reported that the refugees from Artsakh, having lost everything, need mental health support as well as medical treatment. The group, which has been treating patients in Goris since late September, offers mental health consultations and psychological first aid from professional psychologists. "Our approach involves several steps, including building trust, ensuring well-being, stabilizing those in acute distress, providing practical assistance, rebuilding social connections, offering coping strategies, and connecting them to additional resources and care," Danielyan said.

Make Every Event a Fundraiser

It has become common for groups to transform events, some of which may have been originally organized for other purposes, into fundraisers for the Artsakh refugees. On November 25, in the city hall in Halle, a "thank-you event" was held to commemorate the twin city relationship established on March 6, 2023 between Halle (Saale) and Gyumri (Armenia). The German-Armenian Friendship Society Halle-Gyumri organized the gathering, attended by State Parliament President of Sachsen-Anhalt, Dr. Gunnar Schellenberger, the Honorary Consul of Armenia, Michael Schmidt, Halle city representative, Dr. Patze, Chairman of the German-Armenian Friendship Society Halle-Gyumri, Armen Klisch, Honorary Consul of Germany in Gyumri, Alexan Ter-Minasyan, as well as the director of the TUMO Center in Gyumri, Lena Kara-

petyan, who delivered greetings. Stephen Bridges, Business Development Manager of TUMO International, also spoke and members of the Armenian Embassy in Berlin were present. Artem Sargsyan provided music on the Duduk. During the meeting, funds were raised to provide support for the Artsakh Armenians, forced to leave their homeland.

On November 16 the Armenian Colors Jazz Quartet directed by Vahagn Hayrapetyan held a benefit concert for a capacity crowd in the Hall of the All Saints Court Church in Munich, honoring the 120th anniversary of composer Aram Khachaturian. Dr. Christine Sasse, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Bavaria, and Helmut Pauli, Chairman of the Council of the European Cultural Foundation EURO-PAMUSICALE, delivered opening remarks.

The concert, entitled "Khachaturyan Meets Jazz," featured famous works by the Armenian composer and conductor interpreted in jazz, as well as works by Komitas and Tigran Mansuryan. Concluding the concert was the symbolic work entitled "Peace" by Vahagn Hayrapetyan. The audience, which included political and public figures as well as members of the Armenian community and jazz lovers showed their enthusiastic appreciation.

The entire proceeds from ticket sales together with the German-Armenian Society (DAV Social) were sent to Armenia, to provide relief for refugee families from Nagorno-Karabakh.

The concert was organized by EURO-PAMUSICALE with support from the Armenian Embassy in Germany. It was under the patronage of the Armenian Ministry for Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, as well as the Honorary Consul of Armenia Dr. Christine Sasse and the Spine and Joints Center Munich (WGZM).

The following day, November 17, the Jazz Trio offered a repeat performance with a benefit concert on the same theme, this time in Palais Biron in Baden-Baden. Here guests were greeted by Honorary Consul of

the Republic of Armenia in Baden-Württemberg Günter Pilarsky, representatives of the Armenian Chamber of Commerce (IHK) in Baden-Württemberg, Robert W. Huber, and Chairwoman of the German-Armenian Music Society Ani Aghabekyan. Again, the group performed jazz interpretations of works by Khachaturyan, as well as Komitas, and pieces by pianist Vahagn Hayrapetyan. Khachaturyan's renowned "Sabre Dance" opened the second part of the concert and Vahagn Hayrapetyan's "Peace" was performed.

Here, too, all proceeds from the ticket sales to the concert, which received enthusiastic standing ovations, went to the Armenian Relief Organization (Armenische Hilfswerk Organisation), for families driven out of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Role of the Churches

Church groups have been most active. At the general conference of the German Bishops in late September, the chairman Dr. Georg Bätzing had depicted the plight of at least 100,000 Armenians expelled from Artsakh, and urged action. Several church groups have responded. The Gustav-Adolf Works and Diaspora Work of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), and the Saxony state church donated 5,000 Euro to the Armenian Evangelical church. This was in response to calls by the sister church in Armenia for assistance.

Father Hovhannes Hovsepyan of the Armenian Evangelical Church had reported at the onset of the expulsions that communication with parishioners in Artsakh were extremely difficult, and that the entire population would be forced to leave. "We have to find shelter and supply the refugees with essential needs. It is a huge task. The situation is dramatic. We need whatever you can donate." The pastor had 300 parishioners and co-workers in Artsakh for whom he sought assistance. According to Rolf Bareis, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia, the Armenian Ambassador there had also issued calls for assistance.

The churches have also intervened on the political level. On November 3, the EKD

press office released a letter written by the Chairman of the German Bishops Conference, Dr. Georg Bätzing, together with the Chairman of the Council of the EKD, Council Chairwoman Dr. h. c. Annette Kurschus, and the Chairman of the Working Group of Christian Churches in Germany, Archbishop Radu Constantin Miron, addressed to German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. In the name of the Christian churches in Germany, the letter called for the Berlin government to intervene in protection of human rights in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. "Without the intervention of the international community, the ethnic Armenians remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh are at the mercy of the Azerbaijan government and military," it read. The religious leaders therefore called on the Foreign Minister to "take meaningful steps to move the Azerbaijan government toward a just and peaceful solution to the conflict." Though Armenia is expected to receive international support, "in view of the dimensions of the task, it is overburdened. The Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev," it continued, "claims further regions of the territory of the Republic of Armenia." Protection is therefore required. The Christian leaders called for "a qualified and powerful UN or EU peace mission." Furthermore, they asked the German government to address the EU, urging it to "review its relations to Azerbaijan – including its trade and energy relations." This is a reference to the far-reaching deal negotiated by EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen in July 2022, whereby Azerbaijan would export 8 billion cubic meters of gas per year, to be augmented by expanding capacities for transport. The deal, negotiated in the wake of the Ukraine war and terminated supplies from Russia, has been criticized widely. In the letter to Baerbock the religious leaders stressed, "Human rights issues must have the highest priority." They also ask for increasing financial aid to Armenia for refugee relief and furthermore warn of the danger that the 1000-year-old Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh be destroyed, in light of the ravages of the 2020 war.

Community News

Gecko Robotics to Speed Submarine Construction for US Navy

By Evan Robinson-Johnson

PITTSBURGH, Penn. (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*) — Rear Admiral Scott Pappano came to Gecko Robotics' North Side headquarters with a billion-dollar problem: The US Navy needed a faster way to build submarines.

Its first Columbia class submarine was supposed to be ocean ready by 2027 as part of a \$132 billion replacement plan, and critics were already warning that the timing and scope were unrealistic.

As it turned out, Gecko's dexterous robots — which generate millions of data points as they traverse industrial equipment checking for cracks, corrosion and other damage — could offer just the solution. The ultrasonic bots were already inspecting Naval warships that had seen years of use. Gecko CEO Jake Loosarian argued they could be just as useful on the construction side, saving manufacturing costs while establishing data that could be referenced in future maintenance cycles.

"This is a critical asset that's going to be defending our nation. It is so important to understand what the manufacturing looks like at the beginning to ensure that taxpayer dollars are actually getting a quality outcome," he said.

In a matter of months, Gecko landed a demonstration contract to put its system to the test. The company would not say how much the contract — essentially a proof of concept — was worth. The Department of Defense only reports contracts over \$7.5 million.

The expanded partnership comes as Pittsburgh tries to flex its advanced manufacturing prowess and capitalize on federal infrastructure investments. Gecko is part of a network of industry ambassadors organized by the Pittsburgh Technology Council that have pitched the region's defense manufacturing potential in Washington.

The subs also add to a growing list of defense-backed projects in the region as concern grows over a possible conflict with China.

"Every ship that's in dry dock and not patrolling seas means that the world is a riskier place," Loosarian said.

The demonstration contract came through the BlueForge Alliance, a nonprofit integrator supporting the U.S. Navy's Submarine Industrial Base. It is not directly linked to the effort from Pittsburgh's Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Institute to help the Navy triple submarine output through a consortium of Pennsylvania builders. Loosarian said he didn't know about that work until the ARM Institute announced it on Oct. 19.

Gecko has previously focused on the private sector, gathering data from nearly 70,000 commercial assets across the globe, including ships, see SUBMARINE, page 7



Jack Koutoujian waited for the elevator inside 140 Clarendon. "The best thing in life is to have your own room," he said (photo Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff)

A Miracle on Clarendon Street

How a Back Bay Building Became Apartments for Homeless People

By Shirley Leung

BOSTON (*Boston Globe*) — For about 15 years, Jack Koutoujian was homeless, the result of a downward spiral that began with a divorce. He frequented the shelter run by Pine Street Inn, then bounced between rented rooms. At 79, he never again expected to have a home he could call his own.

By year's end, he and about 100 other formerly homeless people will have moved into studio apartments in the most desirable of Boston neighborhoods: the Back Bay.

"Thank God, you have something over your head, outside it's so cold," said Koutoujian, who once lived in a house in Belmont. "The best thing in life is to have your own room and especially the bathroom."

Call it the Miracle on Clarendon Street, born of a pandemic that led one developer to back out and another to step in with the improbable idea of converting a historic building in the Back Bay into affordable housing. Projects like these typically take years to pull together, but this one took just a little over a year from the filing of its plan to the start of renovations.

In a region desperate for affordable housing, 140 Clarendon stands out for how public and private sectors came together, cobbling together 15 sources of government funding and financing from MassHousing, the Boston Housing Authority, and other agencies. Then a neighborhood threw its support behind the project, welcoming people coming out of homelessness into its backyard.

Whether 140 Clarendon becomes a model for affordable housing or just a unicorn in the world of real estate remains to be seen. But this much is clear: If there's a will, there's a way to create housing with a sense of urgency.

"It really comes back to political leadership," said Darcy Jameson, vice president of development for Beacon Communities, which partnered with the Mount Vernon Company to develop 140 Clarendon. "The city and state wanted to make this happen."

The 13-story building sits a couple of blocks from Copley Square, a neighborhood of glitzy condos and glassy skyscrapers. Turns out it's also an ideal place for 210 units of affordable rental housing, with access to public transit (the Back Bay T station is next door) and amenities such as the Boston Public Library, churches, and grocery stores.

For close to a century, YW Boston — the former YWCA — owned the Clarendon Street property. The nonprofit's administrative office is there, and the Lyric see MIRACLE, page 7

Global ARM Expands DC Lobbying Team

WASHINGTON — Global ARM, a newly formed nonprofit organization focused on enhancing security and economic ties between the US and Armenia, expanded its D.C. advocacy by retaining the lobbying firms McKeon Group and Plurus Strategies. McKeon and Plurus will focus their lobbying efforts on Congress, the executive branch and think tanks with influence over US foreign policy. Both lobbying groups have significant bipartisan ties in Washington.

"Global ARM is laser-focused on advocating for deeper economic and security ties between the US and Armenia," said Timothy Jemal, president of Global ARM. "Our mission is to advocate for a free, independent and more secure future for Armenia and the Armenian people. We will combat hate, extremism and authoritarianism in the South Caucasus and seek justice for Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh who were ethnically cleansed from their indigenous homeland. We are very pleased to have the McKeon Group and Plurus Strategies onboard."



Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, left, with Timothy Jemal (Photo taken on June 7, 2023)

Global ARM is a US-based nonprofit organization formed in 2022 by experienced lobbying and political professionals to implement smarter, stronger and more effective pro-Armenia and pro-Artsakh lobbying in Washington, D.C. Global ARM is non-partisan and not aligned with any political party or government inside or outside of Armenia. Global ARM has established an office in Washington.

The US remains a key actor to deter further Azerbaijani aggression, hold Aliyev accountable for documented human rights abuses and provide increased humanitarian, economic and security assistance to Armenia at a time when the country's existence is at stake.

"For more than 20 years, politically connected Azerbaijani and Turkish lobbyists in Washington have succeeded in pursuing an aggressive anti-Armenian lobbying and PR agenda," added Jemal. "We have been playing a high-stakes lobbying and political game without the best team. We are confident that with the McKeon Group and Plurus Strategies on board we will succeed in strengthening US-Armenia ties and bringing Azerbaijan to justice. We welcome additional funders and supporters."

For more information, contact: Timothy Jemal, Tjemal@globalarm.org. Web site: <https://www.globalarm.org>.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Eric Adams Attended Nearly 80 Events Celebrating Turkey

By Joe Anuta, Jason Beeferman and Maya Kaufman

NEW YORK (Politico) — As Brooklyn borough president, Eric Adams attended nearly 80 events over eight years to celebrate Turkey — including a flag-raising in 2015, a charity ball in 2018 and a Zoom meeting with the Turkish consul in 2020.

In 2019, as he was embarking on a run for New York City mayor, he joined Martha Stewart at a gala celebrating Turkish Airlines — a company now caught up in an ongoing FBI probe into Adams' campaign finances. At the event, Adams was photographed holding hands with two company officials over a sheet cake; after winning the mayor's race, he appointed one of those officials — Cenk Öcal — to his transition team.

And after assuming the mayoralty last year, Adams delivered virtual remarks at a real estate conference in Istanbul, which was attended by two top city officials.

"Like New York City, Turkey has always been a crossroads of many cultures and a dynamic place to do business," Adams said during his remarks, which were left off his daily public schedule and have never been reported.

These revelations — uncovered through a POLITICO review of thousands of pages of public schedules from his time as borough president and reams of social media posts — shed light on Adams' unusually strong relationship with Turkey, which has drawn scrutiny from federal investigators. The FBI is looking for evidence the mayor's 2021 campaign colluded with the Turkish government and accepted illegal campaign contributions.

The investigation, which touches people in Adams' inner circle, threatens to undermine his ability to run the city during a time of crisis and makes him more vulnerable to challengers as he gears up for reelection in 2025.

The sprawling case has gripped New York politics as the mayor scrambles to fend off a cascade of negative headlines. Federal agents recently raided or conducted interviews at a dozen locations as part of the probe, CNN reported — including the home of Adams' political fundraiser.

Days after the Nov. 2 raid, FBI agents approached the mayor on a city street, reportedly dismissed his security detail, and seized several electronic devices from him. Officials have issued at least one grand jury subpoena to a former city official, CNN reported. And last week, a City Hall staffer who previously served as Adams' liaison to New York's Turkish community was reported to the feds and then suspended after administration officials said she "acted improperly" — without specifying her actions — the New York Post first reported.

The staffer — Rana Abbasova, according to a person with knowledge of the investigation granted anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter — flagged at least three meetings and events related to Turkey when Adams was borough president,

the review of his schedules shows. Among them was a 2015 grand opening celebration for a Turkish restaurant in Brooklyn, which she marked as "important."

As investigators pursue their case, more details are coming to light about the Turkish outreach of a politician who has made a habit of cultivating ties to the many ethnic communities across New York City. And some of those connections are with organizations now turning up in the probe.



Eric Adams

On Nov. 2, for example, the home of a Turkish Airlines executive was among the locations raided by the FBI, according to CNN.

POLITICO's analysis of Adams' Borough Hall schedules turned up three mentions of the airline: Two planned banquets celebrating the carrier in 2019 and 2020, and a cryptic entry on Oct. 2, 2015 that simply read: "Reschedule 4 p.m. turkish airline. Rana my gifts."

That same year, Adams took two trips to Turkey — one in August funded by multiple entities including the Turkish consulate, according to a financial disclosure obtained by POLITICO. Local news outlet THE CITY recently reported Turkish Airlines also chipped in for that trip, but that was omitted from the required annual disclosure. Four months later, the financial disclosure shows, an organization called the Association of Young Tourism Leaders funded another trip to Turkey for Adams.

The junkets were among a half-dozen trips the mayor has said he made to the country, including a 2017 sojourn with his son, Jordan.

Two years later, Adams attended a soiree at the ritzy Metropolitan Club in honor of 25 years of direct flights between Turkey and the U.S. One photo displayed in a lifestyle magazine shows Adams at the center of a throng of Turkish Airlines executives and flight attendants. Another reveals him holding hands with Mustafa Dogan, the airline's vice president of sales for the Americas, and Öcal, the airline's New York director.

Öcal was later named to the infrastructure committee of the mayoral transition team, which numbered around 800 people,

a campaign spokesperson confirmed.

Earlier this year, a social media post shows Adams hobnobbing with a Turkish airlines executive during a reception tied to the United Nations General Assembly at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Turkish Airlines did not respond to requests for comment.

A spokesperson for the mayor had no comment and referred POLITICO to a Tuesday press briefing where Adams said that he is cooperating with the authorities but declined to provide detailed answers to most questions about the probe.

"Whatever the reviewers are looking for, we are fully cooperating with it," Adams said. "And my role is to allow them to do their job without interference — and I have to do my job of continuing to make sure the city navigates the various issues that we are facing."

Ibrahim Kurtulus, a prominent member of the New York Turkish community, said the mayor's ties with Turkish organizations are no different than those of other constituent groups.

"The fact of the matter is that this is an international city. There are many people and many ethnic groups who request that their elected officials hear their concerns and get to know their identities, values and religion," Kurtulus said in an interview. "I don't know why the media is cherry picking and singling out the Turkish American community."

Travel to Turkey was not limited to the mayor.

In October 2022, Frank Carone, then Adams' chief of staff, took the stage at the real estate conference in Istanbul where Adams spoke virtually to extol the benefits of investing in New York City. He was joined by Edward Mermelstein, the city's international affairs commissioner, who appeared on a panel and delivered a deadpan summary of the city's housing challenges.

The trip was paid for by GYODER, a Turkish real estate umbrella group, according to public records and City Hall. While Mermelstein reported it in his annual financial disclosure on file with the city's ethics board, Carone left it off of his. He told POLITICO that he pays his own way for foreign trips.

A City Hall spokesperson, Charles Lutvak, said the two aides attended to advance New York's affordable housing work, develop diplomatic relations and improve the city's global standing.

The FBI's probe has zeroed in on whether Adams improperly pressed city government officials in 2021 to allow the opening of a \$300 million high-rise that housed the Turkish consulate in midtown Manhattan.

As a planned ribbon-cutting approached, fire safety officials refused to give the structure the green light. Adams, who had won the Democratic primary but had not yet taken office at the time, intervened. At the behest of the Turkish consul general, Adams texted then-FDNY Commissioner Daniel Nigro to ask him to look into the issue, and

the building was subsequently given a temporary certificate of occupancy.

Later that year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was on site to snip the ribbon.

Nigro has received a grand jury subpoena and spoken to FBI agents, CNN reported. At a weekly press conference Tuesday, the mayor defended his actions with Nigro as typical and appropriate.

"We reached out because I had the largest Turkish population outside of Paterson, N.J., in this country," Adams said.

Within weeks of taking office as Brooklyn borough president in 2014, Adams hosted the consul general at Borough Hall and met with his successors six more times over the years. The only country whose representatives he met with more often was China, according to his public schedules.

The New York Turkish consulate's Instagram page, which dates back to 2019, includes 19 posts featuring Adams, making him one of the more frequent elected officials to grace the profile. In one, posted about six weeks before Adams was sworn in as mayor, Turkey Consul General Reyhan Özgür smiles and shakes hands with Adams in a crosswalk outside the Turkevi Center.

"Consul General Reyhan Özgür briefed Mr Adams on the new state of the art building and offered him a guided tour," the caption reads. "Expressed special thanks to Mr. Adams for his constant engagement w/ Turkish American community in NYC."

As borough president, Adams was also featured in articles in Turkish-American media outlets and once expressed his desire to buy property in Istanbul.

His schedules also show four separate events with the Turken Foundation — a group run by family members of Erdoğan, according to a report in THE CITY, which found board members donated thousands of dollars to Adams' mayoral campaign.

These interactions were part of a yearslong bid to cultivate a relationship with Brooklyn's ethnic communities as Adams eyed Gracie Mansion. Since becoming mayor, he has continued to show a keen interest in bonding with dignitaries from foreign nations and the associated diasporas in New York City — namely through scores of flag-raising ceremonies.

"He found communities who felt ignored and marginalized and when he saw them and worked with them, they were 10 times more appreciative than a community that expects to be prioritized by government — and so you would get an outpouring of support proportionally larger than their size," campaign adviser Evan Thies said in an interview. "Some would say that is smart politics, but it is also who Eric is as someone who himself was marginalized and underappreciated."

Other observers put it more bluntly. "The man knows how to play the political field," said Kurtulus, who is involved in the flag-raising ceremonies at Bowling Green Park in Manhattan. "He has turned Bowling Green into campaign headquarters."

Gecko Robotics to Speed Submarine Construction for US Navy

SUBMARINE, from page 6
factories and power plants. Last October, it landed a three-year contract with Siemens Energy to inspect equipment across Europe.

But military applications have become increasingly promising.

"Our government sector is growing extremely quickly," Loosarian said. "Next

year, we'll have some exciting new announcements of contracts we're working on."

For the naval subs, digital weld inspections will eliminate the risk of unknown weld conditions and free up skilled workers for higher value tasks, Gecko said. The company won't work with finished submarines but rather with several tiers of the Co-

lumbia-class supply chain.

Gecko said prior to the partnership, the Navy kept submarine maintenance data on PDFs.

"These are Cold War-era ways of maintaining critical assets and infrastructure that protect our borders," Mr. Loosarian said.

The Navy did not respond to a request by press time. BlueForge Alliance declined to

comment.

Gecko's system will allow builders to reference a "digital twin," which the CEO described as "a pretty groundbreaking combination of software and robotics."

"If you can understand from the beginning, it helps inform and predict what will go wrong and how to optimize the assets over time."

Robert Philibosian, L.A. County D.A. Who Oversaw McMartin Preschool Case, Dies at 83

By Anthony De Leon

LOS ANGELES (*Los Angeles Times*) — Robert Philibosian, the former Los Angeles County district attorney who oversaw the prosecution in the controversial McMartin Preschool case and later served as legal commentator in another high-profile trial, the criminal case against O.J. Simpson, has died at the age of 83, according to his family.

Philibosian, who served as the county's 38th district attorney from 1982 to 1984, was battling West Nile encephalitis and fell into a coma, daughter Janet Philibosian Valenzuela said. He was removed from life support on Monday, November 27.

Family members said in a statement: "He was a true public servant and always put others before himself. He helped countless people advance their careers with no expectation of anything in return. He cherished his family (including his entire large extended family) above all else and devoted his life to his wife, his children and our spouses, and his beloved grandchildren. He took such pride in all of our accomplishments and we can't imagine our lives without his constant presence."

In 1982, Philibosian was unanimously chosen by the Board of Supervisors to succeed Dist. Atty. John Van de Kamp following Van de Kamp's election to state attorney general. The *Times* reported at the time that the board decision came "after a series of roll calls marked by high drama and intense lobbying."

Philibosian won out over two highly touted candidates, US Atty. Stephen Trott and former Republican Assemblyman Dave Stirling. Lobbying to the board on his behalf was political ally and California Gov.-elect George Deukmejian. After three split roll calls, Supervisor Kenneth Hahn changed

his mind and provided Philibosian the vote he needed.

Board members denied they were swayed by Philibosian's close ties to the governor and pointed to his 15 years of experience as a prosecutor.

Upon accepting the board's appointment, Philibosian pledged "all my efforts toward making the district attorney's office as effective as possible."



Robert Philibosian was L.A. County's district attorney from 1982 to 1984 (*La Canada Valley Sun*)

During his time as district attorney, Philibosian prosecuted civil cases regarding toxic waste disposal and environmental, consumer and antitrust law, as well as criminal matters. But perhaps the case that drew the most headlines was the prosecution of staff members at McMartin Preschool in Manhattan Beach who were accused of child molestation.

Peggy McMartin Buckey, her son, Ray Buckey, and her mother, Virginia McMartin, were among seven at the preschool initially indicted on 115 counts of child molestation by Philibosian, the presiding district attorney during the infamous case.

Ultimately, the case resulted in no convictions. All charges were dropped by 1990, with the entire case lasting seven years and costing taxpayers more than \$13 million,

Deukmejian, then the attorney general, appointed him as chief assistant attorney general of the criminal law division, where he served from 1979 until 1982. In this position, he directed the state's criminal appellate prosecution and oversaw initiatives against consumer fraud and antitrust issues.

"Robert Philibosian was an iconic figure in California's legal and political scene, leaving an indelible mark on the legal community and beyond," the Association of Deputy District Attorneys said in a statement. "His unwavering commitment to service, his dedication to mentorship, and his steadfast love for his family defined his illustrious career and life."

At the height of the media frenzy surrounding the O.J. Simpson trial, Philibosian served as a legal commentator for ABC News, becoming a highly visible media figure throughout the trial. He appeared regularly on "Nightline," "World News Tonight," "20/20" and "Good Morning America," heading up ABC's coverage of special events during the trial, including closing arguments and the verdicts.

Sheppard Mullin — where he was a partner and legal counsel, working there from 1994 until his death— released a statement saying Philibosian had made "a lasting impression on the legal and political community, and his tireless commitment to advocating for justice stays with all of us."

"He was a brilliant attorney, a keen strategist and a consummate professional," the statement said. "To know Bob was to know him as a friend and a mentor, with generosity felt by all. His advice was treasured, whether he was advising clients on legal matters or providing words of wisdom to colleagues at the firm."

Philibosian was born in Selma, Calif., on September 29, 1940.

He earned a bachelor's degree in history from Stanford University and, in 1967, a law degree from Southwestern Law School. He passed the California State Bar in 1968.

"Everybody who came in contact with him respected him. Whether it was the client or the adversary, Republican or Democrat, everybody respected," said Guy Hलगren, who was partners with Philibosian at Sheppard Mullin.

Philibosian is survived by his wife of 54 years, Nancy Philibosian; children Janet Philibosian Valenzuela and Robert Philibosian; five grandchildren; and siblings Diane Philibosian and Richard Philibosian.

making it the longest and most expensive trial in American history.

The *Times* reported that some jurors in the trials involving the Buckeys "said the children appeared to have been led by questioners to claim they had been molested. Others said that so much time had passed that the memories of the children — who passed from toddlerhood to adolescence in the course of the legal proceedings — couldn't be trusted."

Mary Ann Jackson was one of the preschool employees and original defendants against whom charges were dismissed. She told the *Times* that she blamed the hysteria and political ambitions of Philibosian, who was in a reelection bid, for a "weak case."

He would lose his reelection race to Ira Reiner in 1984.

Philibosian joined the Los Angeles County district attorney's office in 1968, rising to become head deputy in charge of the Van Nuys branch in 1979.

Rose Ashchian

NORTH FALMOUTH, Mass. — Rose (Malkasian) Ashchian of North Falmouth, formerly of Newton, MA, passed away on December 1, 2023. She was the beloved wife of the late Karlo Ashchian, devoted mother of Carnig Ashchian and sister of Gladys Danielson and her husband Peter and the late George Malkasian. She was the sister-in-law of Stephan Ashchian and his wife Nectar and Janet Hanzatian, aunt of Alex Ashchian and his wife Lilliann, Michael Ashchian, Levon Hanzatian and his wife Denise, Alice Martin and her husband David, Serena Arnold and her husband Rob, and Janine Danielson. She is survived by many loving great nieces and great nephews.

Her funeral service took place at Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Cambridge, on Wednesday, December 6, and internment was at Newton Cemetery, Newton, MA. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Holy Trinity Armenian Church.



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COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

Loosia Stepan Stepanians (July 20, 1933-November 28, 2023): Devoted Matriarch

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Loosia Stepan Stepanians, known to her friends and family as Lily, passed away on November 28, 2023 after suffering complications from Covid. She was 90.

She was the daughter of Minas and Vartanush (Ghazarian) Stepanians, who left Arnavir, Russia, in the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution, for Ghazvin, Iran, with their two sons. Loosia was the family's only child born in Iran.

She was the widow of Torgom Aftandil Kocharians, who had passed away in 2020.

Lily and her family moved to the US in anticipation of another revolution, this time in Iran, in 1978. The family made its home in Cambridge.

Loosia grew up in a loving family in Ghazvin. The family moved to Tehran when she was a teen. Upon the death of her father in his early 50s, and with her older brother studying in France, she and her other brother and mother lived together in the heart of the city. It was there that she first met her future husband and the love of her life, Torgom.

The couple married in 1959 and raised their two daughters in Tehran.

Nothing brought more joy to Lily than having her family and friends over for large, joyous and relaxed feasts, where she covered the dining table from one end to the other with dishes, each made lovingly and expertly. Once a guest was at her table, saying they did not have room for any more was simply ignored and their plates



were filled again.

She was a kind, devoted mother to her daughters. When the family permanently moved to Cambridge, following daughter Anahid, who had enrolled earlier that year at Boston University, she threw herself into life in her new country. She again created a warm home for her family, opening her doors to all their and their children's friends, who were welcome anytime. For her, serving food to her family was how she showed her love. In addition to the traditional Armenian, Russian and Persian cuisine which she had long practice in, she had a stack of

dogeared *Bon Appetit* magazines, which she mined for creative recipes, to the delight of her family and friends.

She always wanted to uphold the Armenian traditions of her native Iran and had been an active member for many years of the local Iranian-Armenian organization, the Armenian Society of Boston. For decades she helped the organization in making its annual *nazook* as well as the Easter and Armenian Christmas meals of rice, smoked fish and *kookoo*, a type of Persian herb frittata.

She also enjoyed listening to Armenian music, which she would do while working in her kitchen. She loved reading books in Armenian and English, with a soft spot for fellow Salmast native, author Hakob Melik Hakobian, whose penname was Raffi.

She brimmed with pride when speaking about her children or grandchildren. As much as she loved her daughters, the love she had for her grandchildren, Raffi and Tenny, was even grander. When they were with her and her husband, she was happiest, lighting up with pure joy. Her grandchildren only had to ask for something in order for her to make it her one mission to obtain it.

She and her husband traveled close to a dozen times to Armenia and Artsakh. While she always preferred to stay home, her husband's love for traveling to Armenian lands made her a happy travel partner.

For more than a decade, she had been suffering from increasingly poor health.

Loosia leaves behind her daughters, Ana-

hid Kocharians (Alfred Gharakhanian) and Alin Kocharians Gregorian; grandchildren Raffi Gharakhanian and Tenny A. Gregorian; nieces and nephews Alenoosh (Markus) Stepanians, Miganush Stepanians (Vahe Zeroonian), Armineh Stepanians and Minas Stepanians.

In addition to her husband, she was predeceased by her brothers, Stepan Stepanians and Avedis Stepanians, as well as sisters-in-law Adelina Petrosian and Nelik Markarian; brother-in-law Mais Kocharians and sister-in-law Rozik Nazarian.

The death of her husband at the height of Covid's isolation devastated her and marked her steep decline.

As our readers know, Alin Gregorian has been working as editor of the *Mirror-Spectator* for over two decades. The staff of the newspaper express their profound condolences to Alin and her entire family on this occasion.

A wake will be held at the Bedrossian Funeral Home, 558 Mount Auburn St., on Sunday, December 3, 1-4 p.m. Funeral services will be held on Monday, December 4, at St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, 38 Elton Ave., Watertown, at 11 a.m. Interment will follow at Cambridge Cemetery. A memorial lunch will be served at the church hall immediately afterwards.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be sent to St. Stephen's Armenian Church, Tekeyan Cultural Association Artsakh Refugee Aid Program or All for Armenia.

How a Back Bay Building Became Apartments for Homeless People

MIRACLE, from page 6

Stage Theatre is on the second floor. Boston Public Schools' Snowden International occupies the basement. There was even a small 66-room hotel (run by the YW), as well more than 100 subsidized rentals.

In 2019, the board of YW decided to sell the property because owning and managing it was taking away from its core mission of empowering women and fighting racism. The board also wanted to capitalize on a hot real estate market and use the proceeds to finance YW programs for decades to come.

All was going according to plan — until the pandemic struck. The first buyer wanted to convert the property into a high-end hotel but terminated the deal when the bottom fell out of the travel market. That gave Beacon, which lost to the hotel developer in the initial bidding, another chance.

Beacon Chairman Howard Cohen corralled city and state officials to come to the table with financing. Beacon and Mount Vernon would purchase the building for about \$51 million. Then Beacon would spend another \$40 million to renovate the property and manage it. The developers would allow the commercial tenants, the YW, the Lyric, and the Snowden — which all supported the project — to stay, as well as residents in the rental apartments.

Beacon's plan called for the hotel section to be converted into studio and one-bedroom units, doubling the number of apartments in the building to 210. To qualify for the units, which are subsidized under the federal Section 8 housing program, tenants can't earn more than \$51,950, or 50 percent of the median-area income for a single person.

For formerly homeless residents, the income cap is \$31,150, or no more than 30 percent of the median-area income. Rents for similar market-rate apartments are close to \$3,000 a month.

Tenants were allowed to stay in the building while Beacon created 111 units of so-called permanent supportive housing for

formerly homeless people — with Pine Street Inn providing case managers and other services to these residents.

While Pine Street is known for its shelters, the nonprofit owns or manages 960 apartments in the Boston area. That's more than double the number of shelter beds it operates. Pine Street carefully vets tenants, conducting criminal background checks and other screening to ensure they can thrive liv-



A lounge area inside 140 Clarendon. The 13-story building sits a couple of blocks from Copley Square (photo Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff)

ing on their own.

When Beacon called Pine Street Inn about providing services at 140 Clarendon, Jan Griffin, the nonprofit's vice president of housing development, couldn't believe her ears.

"This was a cold call. We have done some projects [like this], but this is the first time a for-profit developer called and said, 'We have a project we want you to get involved in,'" recalled Griffin. "Of course, we jumped at it."

Beacon and Pine Street, both experienced players, proved a potent combination that

made the project more attractive to lenders, said Mark Teden, vice president of multi-family programs at MassHousing.

Still, it took months for city and state officials to get the financing over the finish line. They knitted together an alphabet soup of state loans and a package of state and federal tax credits. The city kicked in a \$6.3 million grant and forgave a \$2 million loan the YW had taken out on the building.

hood Association of the Back Bay.

The Back Bay community isn't insulated from the housing crisis; residents see the effects with homeless people congregating by the Boston Public Library and other public spaces. Supporting 140 Clarendon was a way to be part of the solution.

"We are not claiming to be some marvelous saviors," said Roetter. "We're trying to do all that we can within our limited powers to improve the situation for as many people as possible."

For YW Boston, there's symmetry in its longtime headquarters becoming synonymous with affordable housing. The organization was founded in 1866 to provide housing for young single women, many of them immigrants who came to Boston to work as maids.

"It seemed almost the perfect full circle to be able to go back to our housing roots," said YW CEO Beth Chandler. "The importance of housing in people's lives has not changed."

As to whether 140 Clarendon is a model that can be replicated, the answer is clear to Boston Mayor Michelle Wu. The project was underway before she was elected in 2021, but she holds it out as an example of what's possible. Already, her administration has in the pipeline about 900 units of housing for the formerly homeless, all of which rely on public funding including millions of dollars from the city.

"We've always been a city that doesn't back down from big, hard challenges," said Wu, who plans to meet the residents of 140 Clarendon in the coming weeks. "It's really a reflection of our neighborhoods and our city's commitment to wanting to make sure everyone has what they need in their community."

(Shirley Leung is a Business columnist and host of the *Globe* Opinion podcast "Say More with Shirley Leung." Find the podcast on Apple, Spotify, and globe.com/saymore.)

"We do the complicated stuff," said Kathleen Evans, MassHousing's senior manager of subsidy and grant programs. "This is why we exist."

Typically, neighbors stall affordable housing proposals, but that was not the case here. Within a couple of months of the project's filing with the city, the Back Bay Association, which represents businesses, and the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay, which represents residents, wrote letters in support.

"We're often accused of being NIMBYs," said Martyn Roetter, chair of the Neighbor-

Sarkis Karabashian's Road to Activism

ACTIVISM, from page 1
assume higher level positions, so networking makes a difference here.

Karabashian also began a master's degree program in security studies at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service in August 2022. He said it specializes more in the defense and security realm as opposed to traditional international relations. As of July 2023, he became a fulltime student, planning to graduate next May.

He previously obtained a bachelor's degree in 2019 from Biola University in business administration and business analytics.

The Road to Armenia

"It has been this gradual story of restoring something that was lost," Karabashian said of his involvement with the Armenian culture and community, and Armenia itself. His grandparents were genocide survivors. His mother's parents were from Van and Izmir, he thought, and had left the Ottoman Empire prior to the Genocide to settle in the US, first in New York and then in Pasadena before that became known as a major community of Armenians. His father was born in the US to a mother who didn't speak any English and struggled to survive in this country. Karabashian speculated that as his father belonged to an earlier generation, born in 1937, he saw being Armenian as a detriment so he attempted to become more American.

However, his mother, raised in Pasadena, worked at the Armenian Assembly of America and helped organize a trip to Armenia in 1988. His father went on this trip and the two fell in love and got married. Karabashian was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

He said, "My parents did speak in Armenian but I think they wanted me to assimilate so they gave me an English name, Samuel, a biblical English name. They were a very religious family. We spoke Western Armenian generally but over time I lost it, the ability to speak, because we prioritized English in the house. I also didn't grow up around an Armenian community."

However, he did have some important experiences with Armenians, including with two Armenian exchange students Karabashian's parents hosted when he was a child. These teenagers, Karabashian said, grew up to be very influential people with great integrity in Armenia, who years later became important contacts in Armenia.

Karabashian's connection with Armenia dramatically changed when he was 16 years old. In 2013, his family took him to Armenia for the first time. They went to all the major touristic attractions, but then one day his mother ran into Peter Abajian, with whom she used to work at the Armenian Assembly. Abajian had become executive director of the Paros Foundation and was leading a group of college students on a trip called Service Armenia. He invited the Karabashians to join the group and distribute Toms shoes in a village.

"When I helped give out shoes to these children, something in my heart lit up. I remember that moment very clearly, seeing a kid so excited to have his first pair of Toms shoes," recalled Karabashian. The next two consecutive summers Karabashian formally joined the Service Armenia program and got to see various regions of Armenia. After that, he said, he interned briefly with the Homeland Development Initiative Foundation, with founder Timothy Straight, doing some international marketing work for several weeks in Armenia during the summer of 2016 after his freshman year of college.

At Biola, he said there was no Armenian students' association, but there was one

at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) where he had friends, and he worked with them. Biola, in Anaheim, California, is a Christian university, he said, and there were few Armenians there. Yet, he said, "I am very conscious about the fraternal aspect of being Armenian, so I would always find the other Armenians around campus, [and say,] you are Armenians, you are going to be Armenian, and we are going to be friends. There were a few who were very whitewashed, so through our friendship I helped them find value and beauty in their Armenianness. One of those guys I am friends with to this day."

Karabashian did an internship as an analyst at the Center for Strategic Initiatives, which was a government-affiliated think tank in Yerevan that developed foreign direct investment opportunities for infrastructure, focusing on the top three indus-



Sarkis Karabashian, fourth from left, at a Paros Service Armenia program

tries of tech, tourism and agriculture.

In the summer of 2019, having graduated college, Karabashian interned with the Armenian National Institute in Washington as part of the Armenian Assembly of America summer internship program, after a brief period at the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia. Dr. Rouben Adalian, its director, recalled recently: "Sam distinguished himself with his energetic commitment to his internship and his serious interest in learning about his Armenian heritage. He deeply appreciated the work at the Armenian National Institute (ANI) and took pride in making his contributions to its mission. He also displayed qualities of leadership that made him the center of a very dynamic group of summer interns."

Then in 2021, he went back to Armenia with Paros during the pandemic on a young professionals service trip. When asked recently about Karabashian, Paros Executive Director Abajian declared, "I am very proud of how Sam's connection to Armenia has grown over the years. I have spent a fair amount of time discussing Armenia and its development with Sam and I have witnessed his passion to figure out just how he can benefit Armenia and its development through his time, talent and career."

It was during this 2021 trip, Karabashian said, that he came into contact with iGorts, a program of the Armenian government which invites diasporan professionals to work in the public sector or government of Armenia for a year, and Birthright Armenia, a program for young professionals to volunteer in Armenia. He began thinking about returning for one year and also improving his mastery of the Armenian language. He started teaching himself and can read and write now.

At Deloitte, Karabashian said that he had a few projects that concerned Armenia. One is a water sustainability project that Deloitte implemented with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Deloitte oversaw the contract and delegated the actual work to local partners. Karabashian said he helped conduct interviews with specialists with his medium-proficiency Armenian. He did research on the water sector, measuring the viability of the project, and educated a lot of the company leaders on the project, as most of them had not been to Armenia for almost two decades.

Most recently, while concluding his studies at Georgetown, Karabashian tried to incorporate Armenian issues in his work. He said, "What I have been doing mainly at the moment is writing a lot, making every single one of my finals and midterm papers

To achieve this, he said, "My idea is to bring more *odars* [non-Armenians] to Armenia to experience it because I have seen with every single Armenian, including myself, and with *odars*, that when they go to Armenia, there is something in their soul that wakes up. There is something in that experience with this country, its history, its spiritual Christian roots and the tangible nature of the country's existence."

He did a small test of this this last summer, when he invited six friends to go with him to Armenia: "So I brought six of my friends from college, all *odars*, and one Armenian who had never been to Armenia, and I took them everywhere. I took them all the way down to Syunik, I took them to Khndzoresk, Karahunj and Yerevan. I had them meet local friends and *spyurkahay* [diasporan] friends who were visiting." They interviewed people during the trip, as one of the friends was a videographer, and asked questions like what it meant to be Armenian, or why people love Armenia, and ended up with a small documentary.

"After this trip, not one of my friends walked away the same. It was one of the most memorable experiences that they had," Karabashian related. It convinced him that his mission should be to bring more non-Armenians to Armenia from Ivy League circles. He looks to a Jewish organization called itrek as a model. It organizes trips for non-Jewish graduate students in fields like law, STEM, policy and business to Israel so that when they eventually reach positions of power and influence they remember Israel. He said, "I have the same vision for Armenia. I am currently trying to start a non-profit. My vision and desire is to see more Armenians and Armenian student associations in universities across the country organize trips to Armenia and bring their *odar* friends... One day they will speak up and have a voice, and say, I was there. This place is worth protecting. This place is worth keeping alive. We should be involved. It is wrong for us to sit back and watch."

He is looking for donations and also initially for a 501c3 organization to partner with until his paperwork with the IRS goes through. He is going to Armenia for two weeks this December to volunteer as much as he can in Meghri, in southern Armenia, as well as prepare for his move to Armenia next year after he finishes his studies. He remarked, "What I am doing is a bit independent and the details are still coming together. I have a saying: whenever you go to Armenia, you don't really plan because Armenia will inevitably plan for you."

When asked about how the domestic Armenian political scene might affect his work, Karabashian was not very concerned, declaring that "despite the bitterness that a lot of diasporans are feeling towards the current administration in Armenia, my policy is that you have to work with what you have...and if you are not willing to work with what you have to make it better, then you are not worthy of complaining in the first place."

An important thread ever-present in Karabashian's life is his faith. He said, "I will do whatever God calls me to. I will always proclaim the Gospel as best as I can in the moment when I see somebody needs and wants to hear it. I am growing in my faith. I am trying to figure it out. I know that whatever we are doing we are called to represent Jesus. I am trying to figure out how that looks like for me." Consequently, he may also work with organizations like Samaritan's Purse, an Evangelical Christian organization providing emergency aid while preaching the Gospel.

about issues like the Zangezur "corridor," and US policy towards Armenia. In the meantime, I try to advocate with representatives on the Hill as well as friends that I have who are in the State Department or are serving in the European and Eurasian Affairs area."

Connecting People with Armenia

Karabashian stressed that he feels a deep loyalty to the United States: "I owe the US. It afforded my grandparents the ability to live and survive after the Genocide, so I do everything I can to give back with the opportunities that God gives me." While an American first, he said, "My goal is to get this degree, work for a little bit more, and see if I will be a good fit for iGorts or maybe another NGO, where I could advise, help and connect the right people, because I think that Armenia needs help and there is a lot it can offer the West. There are a lot of good things it can contribute to the world. It just needs the time, stability and the willingness of diasporans who are competent and smart to contribute more than just monetarily, but intellectually, and generously with their time."

He has an overall vision. Armenians want the world to know their pain and struggle and who they are, but despite their clamoring for attention, he said, "We have never achieved more than being simply a weird place on the map that no one has ever cared to look at, or a footnote in history, or [connected with] a trending media personality in American culture, or blocking highways [as part of protests in Los Angeles] and pissing people off." However, Karabashian said he has come to understand that people do not care about what you try to tell them. He said, "They care about what they have experienced personally," and this is the way trust and rapport is developed.



COMMUNITY NEWS



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

To Our Readers

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

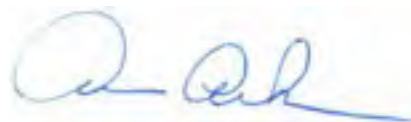
The *Mirror-Spectator* has covered the violence and political uncertainty affecting Armenia and Artsakh, supported efforts at humanitarian fundraising, and secured new young correspondents in Armenia, Artsakh and the US as well as two prominent political columnists from Armenia. We continue to provide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

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

Sincerely,



Alin K. Gregorian
Editor



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Arts & Culture

Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian Lectures on Early Tradition Of Armenian Manuscripts

By Careen Derkalousdian

FRESNO, Calif. (HyeSharzhoom) — “Manuscripts are the living works of the Armenian people,” said Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian. On Thursday, November 9, Der Mugrdechian, Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State, gave a presentation on “Armenian Manuscript Painting: The Early Tradition.”

Der Mugrdechian has taught courses in Armenian art and architecture at Fresno State for more than thirty-eight years. He is a former president of the Society for Armenian Studies and the General Editor of the Armenian Series at Fresno State. His presentation was part of the Grace and Paul Shahinian Armenian Christian Art Series, sponsored by Dean Shahinian.

Der Mugrdechian began his lecture by discussing the creation of the Armenian alphabet in A.D. 406 by St. Mesrop Mashtots. He noted that one of the reasons for the creation of the alphabet was to promote and instill Christianity within the Armenian people. The majority of Armenian illustrated manuscripts are Gospels, with text from the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These Gospel manuscripts are often called “illuminated,” a term which symbolizes how Jesus Christ brought light into the world; in the same way, the painting or illumination of manuscripts brings the light of Christianity to the Armenian people.

It is estimated that there are more than 30,000 Armenian manuscripts in existence today, of which over 10,000 are illustrated. The largest collection of Armenian manuscripts in the world is held in the Mesrop Mashtots Matenadaran in Yerevan, Armenia, where over 12,000 manuscripts are held in vaults under specific temperature and humidity conditions. The “Mayr Tsutsak” [Mother Catalog] on the Matenadaran website provides detailed information on many of the manuscripts held in the Library. The second largest Armenian manuscript collection is located at the St. James Armenian Monastery in Jerusalem, where over 4,000 manuscripts are held. Other notable manuscript collections are located in Venice, Italy; Vienna, Austria; and the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon.

Der Mugrdechian highlighted the unique structure and order of Armenian manuscripts, beginning with the Eusebian Letter and Canon Tables and concluding with the colophon, or memorial note. The Eusebian Letter is essentially an explanation of how to use the following canon tables, which are an index that helps one

see MANUSCRIPTS, page 14



Armenian Sundaie

We Knead Your Dough Chefs in LA Reunite to Help the Displaced from Artsakh

By Ani Duzdabanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — Behind the dark gray wall with the floral mural on busy Melrose Avenue, Ronan’s wood-fired ovens are baking a different kind of dough. Pungent zaatar flavors and the slightly charred smell of a bread along with the tanginess of cured meat make an unprecedented debut in this Italian pizzeria run by chef-couple Daniel and Caitlin Cutler. For one time only, on November 27, the restaurant serves two different menus – the original Ronan menu and a special one, featuring the Armenian diaspora inspired dishes curated by a guest chef, Daniel’s longtime friend and colleague, Kristel Arabian. This fundraising dinner with the promising title “We Knead Your Dough” is a project which was “thirteen years in the making,” as Kristel says.

Kristel and Daniel used to work together more than a decade ago in several local restaurants. Later, Kristel opened her own business recruiting chefs and other employees for the food industry while Daniel opened Ronan. Today, many years later, they cook together again and donate all proceeds to the All for Armenia organization. The goal is to help the 120,000 Armenians from Artsakh who were forcefully displaced as a result of a long-lasting conflict with Azerbaijan.

see CHEFS, page 13



Sujukh pizza

Elena Seropova *‘I Never Forget My Roots’*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/LEIPZIG, Germany — Theater and film actress Elena Seropova was born in 1964 in Moscow. In 1988, she graduated from GITIS, the Russian Institute of Theater Arts in Moscow. In her last year, together with her colleagues, she took part in organizing the Youth Miniature Theater “Impulse,” then she was enrolled in the troupe of the Theater-School of Musical Art. Seropova made her film debut in 1984 with the film “The Legend of Silver Lake.”

This actress became widely famous for her role as Jemma in Evgeniy Gerasimov’s melodrama, “The Trip to Wiesbaden.” Elena also starred in the films “Country Season,” “Revelation of Ivan Efremov,” “Idol,” “Without Evidence,” “The Killer,” in the Hungarian television film “Golden Time,” in the British series “Sharp II,” in the American films “Stalin,” “Tina and Lance,”



Elena Seropova in “Golden Time”

“Bus to the Queens,” and in German films and TV series.

In 1989-1990, Seropova appeared in Moscow Television programs. In the 1990s, she followed her husband to the USA. Elena worked as a news anchor on the Russian-speaking television channel WMNB Russian-American Broadcasting Company. In the early 2000s, Seropova with her family moved to Germany.

Since 2003, she has been staging and performing her own solo performances, as well as literature and poetry events. In 2011, Elena opened an acting school and, later on, created the theater-studio “St’ART” first for children and youth and, a year after that, a group for adults. Over the years, Elena, in tandem with her husband, director Rostislav Kratzberg, staged 23 performances, which were successfully shown in Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz, and Halle.

My conversation with Elena Seropova took place via Facebook, in Russian.

Dear Elena, if you only knew how exciting it is for me to have this conversation with you! I remember how
see SERAPOVA, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

AGBU Hosts Fundraiser in Five Courses with ‘Chefs for Armenia’

LOS ANGELES — This fall, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and World Central Kitchen (WCK) were working around the clock across seven regions of Armenia to prepare and distribute warm meals and food packages to tens of thousands of forcibly displaced Armenians from Artsakh. Little did they know that, across the world, five celebrity chefs in Los Angeles were huddled in the kitchen of the Rossoblu restaurant to help keep the AGBUxWCK food security operation going strong.

The effort is part of the “Chefs for Armenia” campaign, a new concept in fundraising that pairs fine dining experiences with humanitarian causes. The brand and the model are the brainchild of Armenian-American restaurant marketing and brand developer Alexis Halejian and Chef Vartan Abgaryan. Halejian is also an AGBU program alumna by way of AGBU Camp Nubar in New York State, where she was born and raised before relocating to LA.

On November 6, 115 guests assembled at the toney five-star LA restaurant Rossoblu, where big name chefs associated with celebrated local dining venues gathered together to cook for a cause. This included Vartan Abgaryan of Momed; Armen Aivazyan of Chi Spacca; Armen Martirosyan of Mini Kabob; and the pastry phenomenon Sasha Piligian. Steve and Dina Samson, co-owners of Rossoblu, donated their magnificent dining space and kitchen for each chef to prepare one dish for one of the five courses. The menu was curated as a group collaboration, creating an eclectic menu of Armenian and other international favorites compatible with the discerning palate.

Upon their arrival, guests were treated to an Ararat Brandy Welcome Cocktail created by Tobin Shea, the acclaimed bar director of Redbird | Vibiana, who has visited Armenia as a result of the global popularity of Armenian brandy. He fell in love with the country and its people and said a few words to the audience about his appreciation for Armenia and shared his rarified knowledge of the product. On this occasion, it was paired with a Welcome Bite by Zhegyalov Hatz, a local purveyor of the indigenous Armenian bread staple, stuffed with fresh greens and herbs, found on every Artsakh table.

As for Armenian wines, they were curated by James Saidy, who frequently works with Rossoblu. They were offered for purchase on the spot, by the glass or the bottle. Choices included wines from the top-tier vineyards of Armenia’s Vayot Dzor region, including Keush NV ‘Origins’ Brut Methode Sparkling, Zulal 2020 Voskehat White, Shofer 2020 Areni Red as well as 2018 Areni Reserve Red, all under the Storica portfolio.



From left, Armen Martirosyan (Mini Kabob); Armen Aivazyan (Chi Spacca); Anthony Castro (Redbird | Vibiana); Tobin Shea (Redbird | Vibiana); Vartan Abgaryan (Momed); James Saidy (Rossoblu); Steve Samson (Rossoblu). Not pictured: Dina Samson (Rossoblu), Sasha Piligian

Back in 2020, when the Second Artsakh War was raging on, Halejian and Abgaryan decided that they could use their wide network of industry and community connections to attract restaurateurs, chefs, and a diverse segment of patrons to organize exceptional dinners and curated spirits and wines to raise funds for worthy causes. That was the birth of the concept at Momed in East LA that is now under the “Chefs for Armenia” brand.

According to Halejian, the “Chefs for Armenia” model achieves multiple goals beyond cooking for a cause. She said, “It is essential that we not only raise funds, but also promote awareness about Armenians, Armenia, and Artsakh to our local communities and beyond. Having a host restaurant and multiple enthusiastic guest chefs sup-

port this effort in spreading the word to their audiences is greatly appreciated in helping accomplish this goal.”

The event also brought together a cross-section of Armenians and non-Armenians within the community. “I was thrilled and humbled to see that, in addition to many non-Armenian guests, Armenians of different ages and backgrounds were also represented,” said Halejian. “They came to the table to break bread together, united in their

produced by AGBU, which amplified her report with on-the-ground footage that was a poignant and emotional reminder of what happens to innocent civilians who become targets of ethnic cleansing.

“Thanks to the outpouring of donations to AGBU Global Relief Fund, we have already mobilized major humanitarian aid including the provision of temporary homes, food, medical services, psychosocial support, job search support, and other types of real-time assistance,” Stambolyan reported. “With such a long list of needs to address beyond the food security effort, we must continue to raise funds to support longer term assistance programs that are invaluable to a community in recovery.” Finally, the celebrity chefs and sommeliers made their grand entrance to make their own remarks about the “Chefs for Armenia” concept and how proud they were to have the chance to donate their time and culinary talents to support Armenians on the brink of starvation for the 10 months prior to the forced evacuation.

Halejian and the other stakeholders were truly gratified to see the sold-out turnout, especially on a Monday night. She and Abgaryan also asserted that the concept is easy to replicate across other markets nationwide, and even abroad, because of its universal appeal that easily attracts food lovers from different backgrounds and persuasions to expand their horizons and gain insight into other cultures over and above great cuisine.

“These chef dinners could be organized in other markets with Armenian representation and food aficionados alike,” Abgaryan noted. “More of these smaller-capacity events can add up to additional funds for humanitarian aid as it is needed, plus bring greater awareness of causes that aren’t receiving much media attention on a larger scale.”

Halejian was quick to point out, “We even put together an extensive training guide covering every step of the “Chefs for Armenia” playbook to help other fundraisers succeed from start to finish. We are going to bring attention to these worthy causes one city at a time.”

To organize a local dining experience and fundraiser in your area or to donate to AGBU Global Relief Fund online, go to giving@agbu.org.

Stambolyan also shared a short video

support of helping the thousands of Artsakh Armenians who are struggling right now,” Halejian explained.

AGBU Western Region Executive Director Gohar Stambolyan also updated the guests on the current situation in Armenia after the forced mass exodus of over 100,000 Artsakh Armenians fleeing for their lives across the border to Armenia. She said, “The humanitarian situation in Armenia is growing by the day as the country struggles to respond to the population influx accounting for 3.4 percent of the country’s population. With Armenia’s harsh winter approaching, there is an urgent rush to secure temporary housing and ensure a malnourished population finds strength with access to nutritious food and medical care.”

Chefs in LA Reunite to Help the Displaced from Artsakh

CHEFS, from page 12

“Kristel is my oldest friend in Los Angeles, and when she asked me to do this to support Armenians, it was a no brainer. It’s important. I love literally every single dish on this menu. Kristel says that this is what the Armenian community normally eats at home. That’s the kind of food we make here, so it makes sense for us too,” says Daniel.

The first appetizers on the menu are pieces of pita with caviar bumps paired with Armenian sparkling wine, “Keush.” Simple vegetable salad spiced with sumac is followed by a *basturma* (cured meat) charcuterie plate and concludes with *mantı*, crispy, spiced, bitesize beef dumplings covered with yogurt sauce and garnished with pomegranate seeds right from Kristel’s backyard highlighting the Armenian flavor combination. The entree is a manaeesh-sourdough spread with za’atar paste served with lebni, cucumber and olives, creating a perfect balance of piquancy and acidity on a hot piece of bread right from the oven.

The dessert tells the story of Armenian migration through the centuries filled with the flavors of the Middle East and Europe.

Armenian Sundae is an orange blossom water ice cream artistically covered with baklava crunches and preserved walnuts, ensuring the right amount of sweetness to awaken all the taste buds during this cultural journey to Armenian history. Bartenders pour wine made from indigenous grapes Areni and Voskehat and mix cocktails with brandy, apricot juice and rose syrup.

“To me it was very important to develop a menu that felt like my heritage. A lot of this is what we eat in my house,” explains Kristel. “I thought of the *sujukh* “pizza” where I incorporate many things that are present on our tables all the time. I thought of *tel-panir* (string cheese) and mozzarella and the fire that touches the crust a little bit; it gets a little burnt. I took my childhood and brought it to Ronan.”

In November, Kristel put together a first dinner with a collaboration with AGBU at Rossoblu restaurant in Los Angeles to raise money for World Central Kitchen, distributing hot meals to the same group of people in Armenia along with Armen Martirosyan from Mini Kabob, Vartan Abgaryan from Momed, Armen Aivazyan from Chi Spacca, Sasha Piligian and host



Kristel Arabian preparing Armenian Sundae

Chef Steve Samson (see coverage in this issue). She is planning to continue the se-

ries of these fundraisers to support Armenians through different non-profits.

Volume II of Vahan Tekeyan's Collected Articles Presented in Yerevan

By Kristine Melkonyan

YEREVAN —The presentation of the second volume of the three-volume collection of the works of Vahan Tekeyan took place at the Tekeyan Center in Yerevan. The author of the book, Varduhi Davtyan, is a candidate of philological sciences and associate professor. Through these volumes, the reader discovers the poet, prose writer, teacher, and public figure Vahan Tekeyan anew as a skilled writer on public issues and editor.

Both volumes of the book were published with the support of the Tekeyan Center Fund. In the second volume, Tekeyan's articles which were written and published in the press in the 1911-1920 period are presented. (the first volume covers the years 1901-1910). This is the first time that articles collected from different periodicals are presented to the reader in separate volumes, in chronological order. These writings reveal the path of struggle of the Armenian people, the search for existence, the efforts made for national salvation, and the evaluation of Armenian and world literary and cultural values.

Tekeyan's vast literary legacy until now had remained scattered among the pages of

and varied content to these newspapers. The compiler of this volume notes that the unsigned editorials which were published on the second page of *Zhoghovurti tzayn*, were subjected to the strict censorship of the time. They were sometimes partially and sometimes completely deleted by the censors and became the subject of debates.

According to the author, Tekeyan's articles are like a dialogue with the reader about the problems of his time. "Broadminded Vahan Tekeyan was more than frank with his reader. He considers the strengthening material and moral relations between the newspaper and the reader to be a 'trade,' a moral trade with the responsibility of returning the power taken from the reader to the reader again, with the 'interest' of exchanging spirit, direction, and idea with sympathy."

The director of the Tekeyan Center, Armen Tsulikyan, emphasized the importance of the three-volume publication and assured that Tekeyan's discourse is surprisingly contemporary, as if it were written today. "The greatness of Vahan Tekeyan and other notables lies in this," he said. Tsulikyan thanked Varduhi Davtyan for bringing the idea to life and for the enormous work, and expressed the hope that all Tekeyan-loving readers will not have to wait long for the third volume.



Varduhi Davtyan with her new book

through the heart and soul of an intellectual aesthete and poet. with soul and heart.

"Vahan Tekeyan was able to create such literature that, like a mirror, revealed the truth to us. His articles are also like that: very modern, brief, but full of meaning," said Avagyan. He considered the publication of the book a great achievement, thanks to which this author's work can be placed alongside those of Hagop Oshagan, Kegham Sevan, Yervand Ter-Khachatryan and other literary critics. They have developed the study of Tekeyan with great merit.

Varduhi Davtyan remembers that Vahan Tekeyan has been in her mind since she was a child, when her devout grandmother was reading the prayer book given to her by a neighbor, in which Tekeyan's poem "The Armenian Church" was also included. The grandmother did not know Tekeyan's work, but she was muttering it like a prayer. Later, already during her student years, she gladly accepted the offer from a lecturer to draw parallels between Tekeyan and poet Vahan Teryan, but this only revealed the poetic world of the great writer.

"That which was hidden in the depths, I

discovered later. You have to be brave because the more you explore, the more it looks like a gold mine: it is constantly opening; it is a torrential river. Tekeyan allowed me to access his extravagant publishing legacy, perhaps to deserve it. Tekeyan is a talisman for me, who seems to be following me from the sky," Davtyan noted. She assured that the wartime periods of history, world events and encyclopedic material are revealed through the personal character and tumultuous life of Vahan Tekeyan.

In the opinion of the editor, Tekeyan offers us his publishing heritage enclosed in two palms with the same extravagance as when he was in front of God's immense weight in his presence. "He continues to be the divine visitor of Armenian literature."

Ruben Mirzakhanyan, president of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia and member of the board of the Tekeyan Center Fund, considered this valuable work a phenomenon not only in literary studies, but also in Armenian national life, especially now, when the preservation and development of national values are of exceptional importance for the future of the nation. Mirzakhanyan mentioned that next year the Vahan Tekeyan international annual award ceremony will be held for the 30th time, in which the participation of this book will be very logical. Mirzakhanyan addressed special words of praise to the director of the Tekeyan Center, Armen Tsulikyan, as a result of whose constant work, the first and second volumes of Davtyan's Tekeyan collection were published. Mirzakhanyan assured those present that the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia will make active efforts to introduce the work to both diaspora Armenian circles and Armenian-speaking readers.

At the presentation of the book, students read from Tekeyan's articles.

Davtyan in her turn is sure that the volume will open a new period of recognition of Tekeyan's prose writing. It will become the material of multilayered studies for philologists, historians, cultural experts and journalists, because Tekeyan's articles are precious documents of elemental times, fateful events, and national and universal life and history.



Varduhi Davtyan with Armen Tsulikyan at far end of table

newspapers and periodicals like *Lusaper, Arev, Zhamanag, Hayrenik, Shirag, Piuzantion, Vostan, Husaper, Zhoghovurti tzayn* of Constantinople and abroad. Tekeyan appeared in the press with signed and sometimes unsigned articles. Through his enthusiasm for writing articles and his productive editorial leadership, he gave a new, fresh

Professor Artsrun Avagyan, a literary scholar, doctor of philological sciences and professor, said in his speech that the three-volume book is a tribute to the great writer Tekeyan's work, life and extensive work, which summarizes the dreams and vicissitudes of Armenians from the end of the previous century until his death, as viewed

Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian Lectures on Early Tradition of Armenian Manuscripts

MANUSCRIPTS, from page 12 find similar passages in the Gospels. Following the canon table are a series of Narrative Miniatures that depict significant events from the Bible. These are followed by images from the Life of Christ Cycle, the Portraits of the Evangelists, and the Gospel text itself. A memorial note by the manuscript's scribe called a colophon signifies the end of the manuscript.

Der Mugrdechian spoke about three early Armenian manuscripts that each follow this unique structure: the Etchmiadzin Gospel, the Queen Mlke Gospel, and the Translator's Gospels. The Etchmiadzin Gospel, dating back to A.D. 989, was executed at the monastery of Noravank in the Siunik province. Its ivory binding depicts a central motif of Mother Mary holding the infant Jesus, with events from Mary's life surrounding the central image. Der Mugrdechian noted the classicizing style of the manuscript, a style that was based on models of Byzantine manuscripts. Upon examination of the Eusebian Letter of the Echmiadzin Gospel, one can see that Armenian manuscripts utilize vibrant colors. The text of the Eusebian Letter is framed by an arch adorned with pomegranate trees and birds, representing eternal life and virtues, respectively. An in-



From left, Sosse Baloian Yanez, Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, and Prof. Hagop Ohanessian (photo Natalie Agazarian)

teresting aspect of this manuscript is that it contains a painting depicting the sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac from the Old Testament, where God rescued Abraham's son and the Covenant between God and Man was established. This artistic choice parallels God sacrificing his own son, Jesus Christ, in the New Testament.

The late Sirarpie Der Nersessian, a pioneer Armenian art historian at Wellesley

College and Dumbarton Oaks, upon further examining the Echmiadzin Gospels, demonstrated that the "Final Four" of the paintings from manuscript actually date back to the late 6th century, much earlier than the manuscript's original date of creation, and prior to the Arab advance into Armenia.

Der Mugrdechian also discussed the Queen Mlke Gospel, a prized possession of King Gagik Artsruni's wife, Mlke, who

ruled in the 10th century. This manuscript is older than the Echmiadzin Gospel and dates back to the mid 9th century. It also utilizes the classicizing style of the Byzantines and contains only one surviving painting, depicting the Ascension of Christ. It is elegantly illuminated and its Eusebian Letter and canon table are lavishly decorated with birds, plants, and Nilotic scenes.

In contrast with the classicizing Echmiadzin and Queen Mlke manuscripts, the 10th c. Translator's Gospel, housed in the Walters Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland, represents a different style, referred to as monastic or provincial, terms that highlight its simplistic look. This style of manuscript painting is the oldest Armenian native style and is unaffected by Byzantine or Syriac techniques.

Sarkis the Priest, the scribe of the Translator's Gospel, uses simpler paint strokes than that of his predecessors.

Der Mugrdechian concluded his presentation by noting the significance of these early manuscript traditions. Not only do they reflect the diversity in Armenian art, but they set the foundation for the later 11th century Armenian miniature painting, a productive period for the creation of illuminated manuscripts.

ARTS & CULTURE

Elena Seropova: 'I Never Forget My Roots'

SERAPOVA, from page 12

startled I was when I first saw your photograph in the Soviet Screen magazine, after which I did not miss a single film with you starring. Your temperament and your versatile beauty allowed you to play a wide range of characters, nationalities but to me you seem to be closer to the romantic roles.

Thank you for your attention and kind words! As for the romantic role, you are right – in the beginning it was like that. Naturally, acting entirely depends entirely on the director's reading of the role, which determines how that will be with the whole film or performance. And I'm sure there is no actress who would not dream of playing Turgenev's heroine. However, as a professional actor, I was eager to try myself in different roles, including characters that fall from the cliché of how people think of me. It is a pity if all directors "sentence" you to play one type of character all your life. That is why I am so grateful for having a chance to try myself in a completely different *emploi*.

Was it that bad to leave Russia while having a successful career as an actress?

It was hard enough. True, my career was just at its inception. I was well aware of the fact that by leaving, I would unwittingly end it and that would be for the sake of my family. But before fate decreed otherwise, we must bear life's offerings. I don't regret it a bit, because without bad there would be no good, without sadness there would be no joy, and without ordinary, sometimes gray everyday routine, we would not appreciate so much the joy that the gifts of fate give us. Everything that we live through is given for a reason.

It is common knowledge that for foreign actors it's almost impossible to break into the American or European film industry. However, there are such films in your filmography. Please tell us about your work abroad.

You are absolutely right: it is not easy. That is why I regard working in all Western film projects as a real gift from heaven and am immensely grateful to fate for this. It was pure happiness for me to work in the Hungarian film "Golden Time" (film studio Mafilm) with a unique director from Hungary, Ilona Katkics, a student of Ivan Piryev, who once graduated from VGIK. She personally travelled to Moscow to find an



Elena Seropova with Robert Duvall actress for the main character.

The script was written based on the work of the 19th century Hungarian classic writer Gyula Krúda. Many wonderful memories are associated with this difficult work, in collaboration with wonderful colleagues – stars of the Hungarian theater and cinema. Wise Ilona did everything to enrich the soul of a third-year student from the then USSR with the cultural "baggage" that we were deprived of behind the Iron Curtain of those times, even though Hungary was still under the socialist's dictatorship. What inspiration I received then, and how it helped in my work in the film! In the American

film "Stalin," produced by the Hollywood studio Warner Entertainment and commissioned by one of the largest commercial channels HBO, I had the opportunity to play a small historical role (which entailed certain responsibilities), the role of Nino Beria, in a stellar collaboration with Robert Duvall (Stalin), Julia Ormond (Nadezhda Alliluyeva), Roshan Seth (Lavrentiy Beria), Maximilian Shell and other talented actors. This film subsequently received an Emmy Award, as well as an honorary Golden Globe Award in three categories. Then there were two more American-made films in which I played the leading female roles... All that was an amazing experience and good memories for me to keep in my heart.

You were born into the family of a famous musician and philologist-poet. I believe you grew up in a unique creative atmosphere, didn't you?

My dad, George Seropov, was born and raised in Tbilisi. After graduating from music school with a violin class, he became enamored with the saxophone and independently mastered it to perfection. He became interested in jazz, admiring the great American musicians, who were his real, albeit absentee, "hearing" teachers. He was talented not only in music, but also in drawing, passed the competition and entered the Georgian Academy of Arts, which was almost impossible for an Armenian in those days. However, the time came when it was faced with the choice between fine arts and music. Music won. In Moscow, dad worked for many years in the large jazz orchestra of the MosConcert with famous musicians of that time, then in the orchestra of the old Moscow Circus on Tsvetnoy Boulevard, under Yuri Nikulin.

The conductors of the orchestra were Vladimir Mikhailov and Georgy Garanyan. My mother, Lyubov Seropova (Zhukova), also had a musical education in piano, like my younger sister, who graduated from the Music School at the Moscow Conservatory. And the spirit of musical culture, the creative atmosphere really reigned in our house, where musicians often got together, some from the artistic world - friends of my father, our family. Dad himself was a jubilant man, and regardless of fatigue and mood, he always brought this joy of life with him, along with his constant humor, jokes, extraordinary stories and his unique kind laughter.

Your father (may he rest in peace!) was a prominent representative of Soviet jazz music. Where were his ancestors from?

Unfortunately, I don't know much about ancestors from my father's family, only that they once lived in Turkey. The notorious period of persecution of Armenians in Turkey, the genocide of 1915-16, also affected my dad's grandparents, who were then forced to flee Turkey with their five children and, through Simferopol, ended up in Tbilisi. My grandmother, Elena Amayakovna, was a simple and unusually kind woman with an innate sense of intelligence and decency. Unfortunately, she passed away when I was only eight years old. Some of our relatives on my father's side still live in Georgia, and the others live in Armenia.



Elena Seropova

Besides the love of art and beautiful eyes, did your father pass on to you some of his Armenian heritage?

Of course: he conveyed to me a love for his roots, for the history of Armenia. I remember with what interest, while still a child, I read about the ancient state of Urartu, then about the Hellenistic era in Armenia, which then enriched the national culture (for me, for example, it was an interesting fact that the tragedies of Euripides were staged in the Artashat Theater with the participation of Greek and Armenian actors; this really in-



Elena Seropova and her father George Seropov

spired me when I played the Hellenic Greek Thais of Athens in a movie), about Armenia during the adoption of Christianity and the Middle Ages, monuments of its architecture and culture, including the development of fresco painting and art in general in later times ... Dad took us to relatives in Yerevan and Kirovakan, to the beautiful Lake Sevan... it's simply impossible to forget these beauties! I think the main thing that my father passed on to me was love and benevolent respect for honest people, regardless of nationality, hospitality characteristic of the Caucasian people, family values... and also a special feeling of pleasure from the sound of the Armenian duduk. In my solo performances "Faith, Hope, Love... And Dream," a live duduk sounded as a symbol of the eternal wisdom of this wonderful land and its people. The performance was attended by a wonderful man, a graduate of the jazz department of the music and theater school of the Leipzig Conservatory, a participant in International Jazz Festivals, a young and very talented musician and composer Artyom Sargsyan. In our evening he played the

tenor saxophone, flute and duduk. Artyom wrote wonderful music for our play "The Little Prince," and in another play "View from Above" he successfully presented himself as an actor.

It was interesting that in "The Trip to Wiesbaden," probably the last successful Soviet film-melodrama, the roles of children of an Italian family were played by you and young Arthur Vardanyan, both with Armenian roots.

Italians and Armenians are very close in appearance and temperament. This is probably why both me and Arthur were in demand in this film, an adaptation of Turgenev's "The Waters of Spring" directed by Evgeny Gerasimov. I would also like to say that in 1993 I was very lucky to work with the talented Armenian director and screenwriter, Emmy Award winner, Boris Hayrapetyan, in his film "The Killer," where, in addition to other wonderful partners, I had the honor of working with Armen Borisovich Dzhigarkhanyan, an amazing actor, a unique personality, a wise and infinitely kind person, with whom me and my family were then connected through years of friendship, which I still value very much.

What Elena Seropova is doing now in Germany and will we see her one day in the homeland of her father's ancestors?

Now I'm doing the same thing I've always done – acting and teaching. My life is a constant movement. It's not for nothing that one of my recent performances in Leipzig was called "On the Road." And wherever this road leads us, we bring there the cultural heritage that our great masters left us, and we share with our studio members, viewers, and listeners whom we love, appreciate. My firm conviction: spirituality, culture, art – this is what brings peace and love, awakens human souls from everyday routine and negativity. At the moment we are in Georgia, but life is unpredictable. You know, I have a lot of different blood: Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish. I am a person of the world. And professionally, I performed a Gypsy, a Hungarian, an Italian, an Azerbaijani, a Tajik, a Greek, a Spanish, a Georgian, a German, a Ukrainian, a Russian, an American and even an alien in the cinema and theater, but, unfortunately, I did not get a chance to play an Armenian. Traveling, living and working all over the world, I never forget my roots; this is what is giving me strength and motivation in life and inescapable warmth to my soul. I certainly hope to visit the homeland of my father's ancestors again someday.

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian

(Photo courtesy <https://silkroadrecipes.com/barazek-sesame-seed-cookies/>)



Sesame-Pistachio Cookies (Barazek)

(Portions of the following story were originally published in the *Los Angeles Times* by food writer Charles Perry on April 18, 2007)

The other day, a co-worker brought in some mysterious cookies from an Armenian bakery, a little sheepish about having polished off about a third of them on the way. They were tan domes with a tight spiral pattern on top, making them look a bit like snail shells lying on their sides. The pastry had a distinctive taste, more wholesome than cookie dough, followed by a little blast of richness from that spiral, which turned out to be a filling of sesame tahini. It tasted like peanut butter without peanut butter's funky edge.

In other words, these were cookies we could eat a lot of, and we proceeded to do so. But not before I saved one or two to explore their mystery. When you cut one in half, the interior turned out to be curving lines of pastry alternating with darker caverns of sesame filling, vaguely like the pattern of layers in a halved onion. Whatever it was, the pastry was definitely not cookie dough. I had to know what was going on here.

This plunged me into the vortex of the 70-odd Armenian bakeries in the L.A. area. Some were bread bakeries, but a lot were filled with case after case of French patisserie and syrup-soaked baklavas – dangerous places to wander around in. Only a couple of pastry shops made these tahini cookies. But how did this innocent cookie end up in these glittering palaces of seduction anyway? It turned out that this “cookie” is considered to be a bread – not a pastry – because it's made with yeast-risen dough. It happens to be a clever variation on Middle Eastern tahini bread (in Arabic, khubz tahini; in Armenian, tahinov hats), which is usually made as a pita-size flatbread. Some Armenian bakeries, such as Taron in east Hollywood, make this big, flat variety, but Maral's Pastry in Van Nuys and Sarkis Pastry in Glendale make the dome-cookie version.

An elusive recipe:

To us, it was no contest: The dome shape is better. It's a more convenient size and easier to eat, and the balance of flavors is better. But we wanted to know: How do you make these irresistible treats? The only recipe I could find was in an obscure cookbook published 25 years ago in Saudi Arabia, and it didn't give the exact result we wanted, even after tweaking it nine ways. So I asked some Armenian bakers, but they were reluctant to give out their recipes. One told me, “You ask about my business. You ask too many questions, my friend.”

Uh-oh. I should have foreseen this – it's a Middle Eastern tradition, as I already knew: When I traveled around Syria in 1980, I naively asked bakers in every town from Damascus to Aleppo about the local pastries, and their answers were always incomprehensible. Finally, my driver took me aside and darkly told me, “Not even to their own sons, not till they're on their death beds, will they tell their secrets.”

Well, I understood. It's a bakery-eat-bakery world out there, and a pastry chef

doesn't want to give up his edge. Still, that bread-cookie remained outside our grasp. Finally, Hovsep Sarkozian of Maral's took pity on us and spelled it out. The secret seemed to be (as we should have known): This is a cross between a bread and a cookie, so it needs sugar and oil in the dough. Once it rises, you shape it and bake it right away without the sort of rests and additional rises that bread dough usually gets. To tell the truth, even the versions that hadn't been exactly what we wanted – the ones with loose spirals or dough that was too puffy or the ones that didn't brown up enough – were quite good.

So finally the quest was over. Not that I'm going to stop going to Armenian bakeries, mind you. Man does not live by tahini bread alone.

INGREDIENTS:

7 tablespoons butter, melted, cooled
6 tablespoons plus 1 1/4 teaspoons sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon cider vinegar
1 3/4 cup flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 egg white
3/4 teaspoon white vinegar
1/2 cup pistachios, chopped
1/2 cup untoasted sesame seeds

PREPARATION:

In a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or with a hand-held mixer, cream butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the egg, vanilla and cider vinegar. Stir in the flour, baking powder and salt. Mix until combined. Turn out the dough, form into a ball, wrap with plastic film; refrigerate for 30 minutes.

In a bowl, mix the egg white, white vinegar and 1 tablespoon water and set aside. Place the chopped pistachios and sesame seeds in a wide dish or pie pan and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Divide dough in half; keep half reserved until ready to use. Measure 1 rounded teaspoon of dough, roll into a ball and flatten to form it into a 2-inch (by 1/8-inch) circle. Lightly press one side of each cookie into the pistachios; turn the cookie over, brush the other side with egg wash and dip it in the sesame seeds to coat the other side. Place the cookies on a cookie sheet and bake pistachio-side down until the sesame seeds are lightly toasted and golden, 15 to 18 minutes.

From “Seductive Flavors of the Levant” by Nada Saleh. At Armenian bakeries you also find these crisp wafers exploding with sesame flavor.

For this story, see: <https://www.latimes.com/recipe/sesame-pistachio-cookies-barazek>

Yield: About 4 1/2 dozen cookies

“Barazek or barazeq (in Arabic *barāzeq*) is a classic Syrian-Palestinian cookie whose main ingredient is sesame (also called *simsim* and *baksum* in Arabic) and often also contains pieces of pistachio. Barazek is a typically Syrian culinary specialty, rooted in Damascus, the country's capital. These cookies are popular in Homs or in Aleppo, a city located in the north-west of Syria and famous for its production of tasty pistachios. Although the barazek is originally a Syrian pastry, the recipe has spread widely throughout the Middle East, including Lebanon and Jordan. It is now common to find the famous sesame biscuits throughout the Levantine area (Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and Syria) and beyond. It is one of the more traditional Palestinian desserts and it is easy to find stalls selling barazek on the streets of Jerusalem. Make it as big or as small as you want, crunchy or chewy depends on the thickness you form them, so these cookies can easily be tailored to your liking. For many Syrians, barazek is a sweet treat synonymous with exchange, conviviality and community spirit. They can be enjoyed throughout the year, accompanied by a cup of mint tea, black tea (preferably full-bodied) or Armenian coffee.”

Sesame seed is one of the oldest oilseed crops known, domesticated well over 3,000 years ago. *Sesamum* has many other species, most being wild and native to sub-Saharan Africa. Bob's Red Mill adds: “The most apparent difference between these two seeds is their color. Black sesame seeds have a deeper color and almost always have the hull on. White sesame seeds have their hulls removed and reveal the inner white part of the seed. Removing the hull not only changes the color it also changes the nutritional value.”

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COMMENTARY

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

THE ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK PROGRAMS

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

DECEMBER 10 — Sunday at 7 p.m. Holy Trinity Armenian Church will host Erevan Choral Society for the annual Christmas Concert. This year's concert—honoring the 850th anniversary of St. Nersess Shnorhali, and supporting humanitarian efforts for families of Artsakh—will feature soloists Rubik Mailian and Astghik Martirosyan, who will join the chorale under Maestro Konstantin Petrossian. The public is warmly invited to attend this complimentary concert.

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

DECEMBER 17 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church presents the Meghedi Children's Vocal Ensemble under the patronage of the Most Reverend Mikael

Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the USA and Canada. 4 p.m. 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Join us for an enchanting afternoon, as we celebrate Christmas with songs and ply, unfolding the beautiful message of the nativity. A Christmas bake sale to follow. Free admission. 617-489-2280, email holycrossbostonma@gmail.com.

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

RHODE ISLAND

DECEMBER 8 — The Cultural Committee of the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church presents "Silent Night, Holy Night" Christmas Concert featuring Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island Soloists, The Junior Choir Friday, December 8, 2023, at 7 p.m. Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson St., Providence. Refreshments following concert Donations greatly appreciated.

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

Memorial Concert Dedicated to Fr. Nersess Jebejian in Providence

PROVIDENCE — The Cultural Committee of the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Church of Providence, RI, organized a special concert titled "Sird Im Sasanee" [My Heart Is Trembling] of Armenian spiritual and classical music, dedicated to the memory of archpriest Fr. Nersess Jebejian, on November 17. Less than a month earlier, on October 27, the anniversary of his death was marked. Fr. Jebejian lived in Rhode Island in recent years and took part in the life of the community and church.



Fr. Nersess Jebejian

The young singer Mari Megrđichian, a soprano, performed songs by Komitas and other composers amazingly. Possessing a crystalline voice, she captivated the audience.

The winner of many international competitions, violinist Armen Ghazaryan, performed masterfully the works of Komitas, and other Armenian composers. The success of the concert was, of course, contributed to by the

famous pianist-organist Levon Hovsepyan, who conducted the entire concert at a high artistic level.

Maestro Konstantin Petrossian, cultural director of the Church, cordially congratulated and thanked all participants in the concert, wishing them new creative success. The pastor of the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Church, Fr. Shnorh Souin, and the pastor of the Armenian Church of Our Saviour in Worcester, MA, Rev. Fr. Tadeos Barseghyan, held a prayer in memory of Fr. Nersess Jebejian.

The concert dedicated to his memory was attended by singers Asatur Baljyan, Mari Megrđichian, violinist Armen Ghazaryan and pianist Levon Hovsepyan, who presented an excellent program. Baritone Asatur Baljyan, an opera singer, inspiredly performed a number of Armenian chants and songs by Armenian composers. Possessing a beautiful voice, and masterful delivery, he left a wonderful impression when he performed for the first time in Rhode Island.



Violinist Armen Ghazaryan



Soprano Mari Megrđichian



Baritone Asatur Baljyan



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

STAFF WRITER

Harry Kezelian III

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald Papsian, 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.

Is Armenia Changing Its Foreign Political Vector?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

During the last months, this has become one of the most discussed issues both in Armenia and foreign think tanks and political circles dealing with the region. In this article, I am not going to discuss whether Armenia should change its foreign policy vector, but to try to raise some questions, to understand the possibilities, problems and perspectives of such a shift.

In general, changing the foreign policy vector is an extremely complex process that has dozens of internal and external components. On the ground, it means changing the established balance of power, which implies a significant change in the rules of conduct of both regional and global players.

One of the most important prerequisites for changing the foreign political vector is the internal political processes of the state, public sentiments and political demands of the opposition. It is also important to know how much the elite of the state is afraid of the loss of power, how many red lines have been crossed in internal political processes and how much influence the geopolitical centers can have on the internal political affairs.

What is different that has led to a change in vectors? Just a decade ago there were two geopolitical centers in the world, Russia and the US. Today we have to deal with a new pole, which is definitely China. It is no coincidence that during the meeting between the presidents of China and the US, Xi Jinping directly stated that the world is big enough and the two can compete in that world. This was a record of two extremely important realities.

First, China offers to share the world with the US, given the new realities, and second, China and the US seem to accept that Russia no longer has the capabilities it once had and is no longer a global player to be reckoned with. However, it is obvious that today Armenia does not want to turn its foreign political vector towards China, but looks cautiously towards the

collective West.

There are some internal and external factors that should be taken into account when preparing for a change in the vector of foreign policy by any state. First, in the case of Armenia, the government should have a real desire to change the vector, and not inject a fake agenda before the public. Second, the West should be willing to accept Armenia into its family, including NATO or the EU and be ready to provide Armenia with a security umbrella. How long is the waiting line? Third, Russia should allow Armenia to change vectors (or not be able to prevent it by any available instrument). Fourth, it should be understood that in the case of a change of vector, Armenia will become an ally of the US, which will lead to serious contradictions not only with Russia but also with Iran.

The next factor is a clear assessment of the momentum and geopolitical realities. It is obvious that Armenia is seeking a new guarantor of its security as Armenia cannot survive without support of a global or regional player.

Another important thing to think about is the price that states typically pay for

vector change or vector selection. For example, Georgia and Ukraine have been waiting for decades to join NATO and the EU. Both states have paid a certain price to achieve this goal. In Armenia's case, the question is whether the loss of Artsakh was the price we paid or there is still a price to pay because Nagorno Karabakh was not recognized by the international community. These are just some of the questions we need to find answers to properly assess the opportunities and challenges to protect the country from other types of disasters.

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

JUST A DECADE AGO THERE WERE TWO
GEOPOLITICAL CENTERS IN THE WORLD, RUSSIA
AND THE US. TODAY WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH A
NEW POLE, WHICH IS DEFINITELY CHINA.

Did Azerbaijan Target Christians for Its Dictator's Personal Profit?

By Michael Rubin

Just five days after Yuri Kim, the acting assistant secretary of state, told a Senate committee that the United States would not tolerate any military action against the Christian community in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan's dictator ordered his army to attack. Thus ended one of the world's oldest Christian communities, as Azerbaijani forces pushed the region's 120,000 men, women, and children into flight.

Certainly, dictators from Beijing to Baku interpret President Joe Biden's weakness and confusion as a green light for aggression. Diplomacy has no credibility when red lines are ephemeral. While the State Department may believe in the power of dialogue, viewing conflict only through the lens of honest disagreement often leads to failure. Ideology matters. There is ample evidence that racism colors Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's attitude toward Armenians. Now, it appears greed does as well.

Here, the case of Gubad Ibadoghlu, an Azerbaijani academic, is instructive. Arrested on Aliyev's orders last summer, Ibadoghlu languishes in prison, denied basic medical care to treat both his diabetes and heart condition. Ibadoghlu was no gadfly oppositionist; rather, he was a careful researcher whose writings hint at why Aliyev has been desperate to silence him.

Ibadoghlu runs the Economic Research Center, a think tank he established to study macroeconomic policy and good governance. Ibadoghlu's reports document how Aliyev seized prime agricultural land in Nagorno-Karabakh for personal benefit. While Aliyev complains about mines for propaganda purposes, this is cynical. He has forced the U.S.-funded HALO Trust to cease its own mine-clearing operations and instead demands donors channel all demining money through him. He has then directed his own deminers to clear only land his interests would farm, leaving ordinary Azerbaijanis unaided.

His goal is monopoly. Ibadoghlu documents how the Azerbaijani government does not allow other farmers to work in Karabakh. As he reveals, "All the companies that rent land in Karabakh either belong to the President's family ... or to high-ranking officials." Aliyev's propaganda that he liberated Karabakh for ordinary Azerbaijanis is simply false.

Personal enrichment also guides construction. As President Recep Tayyip Erdogan did in Turkey, Aliyev profits double, first by channeling billions of dollars into his own construction companies and then by forcing those seeking to win Azerbaijani contracts to pay exorbitant rent. Aliyev and his propagandists may repeat, "Karabakh is Azerbaijan" as a mantra, but Azerbaijan has never before fully controlled the region.

This historical reality is the reason why the Azerbaijani leader has such difficulty getting Azerbaijanis to live in Karabakh.

While Azerbaijan and its proxies sponsor lavish trips to show reconstruction to gullible Westerners, the reconstruction Azerbaijan shows off, contracts awarded to Turkish and Azerbaijani companies with close ties to the ruling regimes of both countries, represent corruption as they build empty shells to launder money.

Corruption comes in many forms. Many dictators are not satisfied with \$100 million or \$1 billion but want more. They might address Nagorno-Karabakh in terms of sovereignty, but the devil is in the details. A desire to profit colored the decision to go to war and drive the oldest Christian populations on Earth off their land. This just makes Washington's silence more shameful.

One day, Armenians will return, and Turks and Azerbaijanis will reclaim the money their rulers have stolen. Until that time, the shame is on those who facilitate such schemes, not only in Ankara and Baku but also in Washington, London, and Jerusalem.

(Michael Rubin (@mrubin1971) is a contributor to the *Washington Examiner's* Beltway Confidential blog. He is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. This article first appeared in the *Washington Examiner*.)

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Azerbaijan Plans Takeover of Armenia to Create ‘Western Azerbaijan’

While Armenians are dealing with the dispossession of Artsakh and trying to cope with its tragic consequences, Azerbaijan is escalating its demands by launching a campaign claiming that the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia is supposedly ‘Western Azerbaijan.’ No sensible person in the world would take such an outrageous lie seriously, simply because Azerbaijan was founded a little over a century ago, while Armenia has been in existence for thousands of years. Even Coca Cola is older than Azerbaijan!

After establishing the ‘Western Azerbaijan Committee’ with the blessing of Pres. Aliyev, Azerbaijan has embarked on a worldwide campaign to disseminate its ridiculous scheme around the world and at the United Nations. Those Armenians who are concerned about Azerbaijan’s expansionist plans over the Syunik province of Armenia or the so-called Zangezur Corridor should be more alarmed about Azerbaijan’s enormous appetite to take over all of the Republic of Armenia, after occupying Artsakh.

Here are four actions Azerbaijan has taken at the UN in recent months:

1) Azerbaijan’s Ambassador to the UN Yashar Aliyev circulated to all members of the General Assembly and Security Council a letter by the ‘Western Azerbaijan Committee’ on January 17, 2023, stating that “All Azerbaijanis expelled from the territory of nowadays Armenia and their descendants have the right to return to their homeland.”

2) A second letter was submitted by Azerbaijan to the UN on February 22, 2023, accusing Armenians of carrying out acts of “violence, genocide, massacres and other crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights. This process was particularly violent and cruel in 1905–1906, 1918–1921, 1948–1953 and 1987–1991.” The letter added that “in nowadays Armenia, Azerbaijani historical and cultural heritage, including mosques and graveyards, were massively destroyed, toponyms were changed and systematic racial discrimination was carried out against Azerbaijanis.”

Moreover, Azerbaijan demanded that the UN take the following steps for the settlement of Azerbaijanis in Armenia:

– Obtaining a legally binding international agreement with appropriate verification and guarantee mechanisms ensuring the voluntary return of Azerbaijanis expelled from the territory of nowadays Armenia to their homeland in safety and dignity;

– Securing the return process with appropriate security, humanitarian and socio-economic assistance programs;

– Establishing international monitoring, accountability, security, intervention and other necessary activities to prevent the recurrence of expulsion, discrimination and harm to the returned population;

– Ensuring sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees through

the implementation of reconstruction and reconciliation measures under international supervision.”

Azerbaijan’s UN Ambassador demanded that Azerbaijanis who return to Armenia “have unimpeded communication with the Republic of Azerbaijan.” This is a very alarming suggestion which means that the Republic of Azerbaijan wants to have a road under its control within the territory of Armenia. The letter added that Azerbaijanis returning to Armenia should not be dispersed throughout the country, but kept together as a group and their safety and rights ensured. Even more alarming is the demand that Azerbaijanis be able to “use the Azerbaijani language in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the [Armenian] Government.” Azerbaijan added the following ridiculous demand: “Azerbaijanis shall be entitled to form local security forces and take an appropriate role in courts” of Armenia. This actually means that Armenia will be an appendix to Azerbaijan rather than a sovereign republic.

Furthermore, to ensure the safety of Azerbaijanis returning to Armenia, Azerbaijan “considers it necessary to deploy an international security mission with an appropriate mandate and comprising the forces of countries trusted by Western Azerbaijanis in the areas to which they will be returning.” In other words, Azerbaijan wants to station foreign troops on Armenia’s territory, which is completely unacceptable. Azerbaijan also stated that “The Government of Armenia shall ensure the return of property and community lands belonging to Azerbaijanis and pay compensation for property damage and losses caused by preventing the use of property.” Those who make such insane demands are living in a make-believe world.

3) The ‘Western Azerbaijan Committee’ delivered a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in April 2023, requesting him “to send a special UN mission to Armenia for launching the process of safe and dignified return of Azerbaijanis expelled from this country.”

4) The ‘Western Azerbaijan Committee’ submitted a report in October 2023 to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. According to the Azeri media, the UN Committee “demanded that Armenia address the issues raised by the Western Azerbaijan Committee.” If there is any truth in this claim, I hope that Armenia’s UN Representative responded to Azerbaijan’s allegations and exposed the Azeri lies.

This is the vindictive enemy with whom Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan naively believes he can sign a ‘Peace Treaty.’ This unnecessary ‘Peace Treaty’ will actually undermine Armenia’s interests. Azerbaijan is already demanding that the rights of “Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia” be included in such a treaty, thus providing the ground for future aggression and occupation by Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani letter to the UN in fact includes such an alarming provision: “the [Azerbaijani] Community will aspire to include the creation of conditions for the return of Western Azerbaijanis to their homeland as an obligation of Armenia in the peace treaty to be concluded between Azerbaijan and Armenia.”

The only way to end this nonsense is for Armenia to stop the slippery slope of making endless concessions to Azerbaijan and reject all of its unacceptable demands.

Azerbaijani Leadership May Transform the Concept of ‘Western Azerbaijan’ into the Next Shushi

By Benjamin Poghosyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The most asked question after the military takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan perhaps is this: Why is there no peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan? The status and future of Nagorno Karabakh have been the cornerstones of the conflict since the late 1980s. The sides’ positions were too far away from each other to give any hope for compromise. Armenians were sure that Nagorno-Karabakh could not be part of Azerbaijan, as Armenians could not live under Azerbaijani jurisdiction. Azerbaijanis were sure that Nagorno-Karabakh should be part of Azerbaijan.

The situation changed only in October 2022, when the Armenian prime minister signed a statement in Prague and recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. It seemed that the radical change in Armenia’s position would finally open the way for Armenia – Azerbaijan normalization. Armenia would accept that Nagorno-Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan would provide security guarantees for the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. However, only the first part of the equation was actual. Armenia recognized Nagorno Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan and even dropped any demand for autonomy. On the other hand, Azerbaijan imposed a blockade on Nagorno Karabakh and, in September 2023, launched a military offensive, forcing the entire Armenian population of the region to leave their homeland.

Nevertheless, as more than one hundred thousand Armenians were entering Armenia, many in the international community hoped the era of peace would finally arrive, and their logic was clear. The issue of Nagorno Karabakh

and the future of Armenians were the main obstacles to Armenia – Azerbaijan normalization. As the Nagorno Karabakh Republic was destroyed, nothing might prevent Armenia and Azerbaijan from signing a peace agreement. It will then pave the way for normalizing Armenia–Turkey relations and the South Caucasus’s geopolitics will be changed.

Everyone started to speak about an Armenia – Azerbaijan peace treaty by the end of 2023. It evoked a sense of déjà vu, as in autumn 2022, there were intense discussions about the possibility of signing the Armenia – Azerbaijan peace agreement by the end of 2022. However, in late September 2023, many were sure that nothing could prevent peace this time. However, October – November 2023 has changed everything. In early December 2023, no one spoke about a peace agreement by the end of 2023; even more, no one knew when and where Armenia – Azerbaijan negotiations might resume.

There is confusion in the West as people seek to understand what is going on. On the surface, the reason behind these developments is Azerbaijan’s rejection of the Western negotiation platforms. Suddenly, Azerbaijan understood that the EU and the US, as outside players, bring only chaos and instability to the South Caucasus. Simultaneously, Azerbaijan hints that the signature of a peace agreement in the West will irritate Russia and Iran, and Azerbaijan has no wish to worsen its relations with these powerful states, which will have significant influence in the region in the foreseeable future. Azerbaijan now offers to resume negotiations in Moscow or have direct talks, without any mediators, either in Georgia or near the Armenia – Azerbaijan border.

Armenia avoids the Russian platform, as Armenia–Rus-

sia relations are rapidly deteriorating, and Armenia does not want direct negotiations. Armenia needs guarantors which will prevent any violation of the peace agreement by Azerbaijan.

However, the differences about location are only the tip of the iceberg. The core reason for the sudden collapse of the negotiation process is that Azerbaijan is not interested in any peace agreement with Armenia, even one that will satisfy all its demands on enclaves and corridors. Since President Aliyev inherited power from his father in 2003, he used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, particularly the idea of bringing back Shushi, as a unifying idea to rally the Azerbaijani population around himself. The strategy was straightforward – there were many problems in Azerbaijan, from enormous inequality and rampant corruption to the lack of fundamental freedoms. However, society was asked to forget about them and rally behind the leader who promised to raise the Azerbaijani flag in Shushi. This promise seemed like a fantasy in 2003, but most of society accepted this deal.

Then, after 17 years, Azerbaijani troops entered Shushi. They raised a flag there, and in 2023, all Armenians were forced to leave Nagorno Karabakh. President Ilham Aliyev received a military parade in Stepanakert on the 20th anniversary of his first election as president. President Aliyev seems to have realized his promises and will forever be perceived as a national hero in Azerbaijan, securing his and his family’s position as rulers of Azerbaijan for decades.

However, as always, the medal has two sides. Many, if not all, in Azerbaijan perceive President Aliyev as a national hero. However, after the deal reached back in 2003 see AZERBAIJAN, page 20



Wings of Tatev Recognized as ‘World’s Leading Cable Car Ride’

YEREVAN — The Wings of Tatev project has won one of the most prestigious international awards in the field of tourism — the World Travel Awards. The Armenian cable car is recognized as the best in the world, beating competitors from Bolivia, Brazil, Vietnam, Canada, New Zealand, the USA and South Africa. On December 1, the 30th award ceremony for the esteemed World Travel Awards winners took place in Dubai. According to the results of an open vote, Wings of Tatev won 1st place in the “World’s Leading Cable Car Ride” nomination. David Vardanyan, the son of Ruben Vardanyan, the founder of the Wings of Tatev project, received the honorary award at the ceremony. The World Travel Awards is often called the “Travel Oscar.” It was established in 1993 and since then has served as a benchmark for excellence in the travel and hospitality industry. This marks the second time that “Wings of Tatev” has been recognized as the “World’s Leading Cable Car Ride” globally; the first award was granted to Armenia in 2021.

“My father, Ruben Vardanyan, dedicated his whole life to helping people. He imple-



Wings of Tatev cable car

mented many large charitable, social, educational, and infrastructure projects that changed the quality of life of people in Armenia but also around the world. A strik-

ing example of this is the construction of the Wings of Tatev, the longest cable car in the world leading to the wonderful medieval monastery complex of Tatev. This had a great impact both on the development of the region, making it attractive from a tourist point of view, and on the quality of life for the local population. He should

al recognition for the second time is a great honor for our entire team. Our mission is to introduce Tatev to people and provide them with an exceptional experience. This award strengthens Armenia’s status as a leading tourist destination and plays an important role in promoting the country as a whole and Tatev in particular in the international tourism arena,” commented Mariia Butenko, the director of Impulse Business Management, which operates the cable car.

Over 13 years of operation, Wings of Tatev has welcomed more than 1 million visitors. Every 5th guest of the country includes a cable car in their route, thanks to which the tourist flow to the Syunik region has increased 17 times compared to 2010.

Wings of Tatev not only reveals previously inaccessible parts of Armenia to travelers but also elevates the country’s recognition. It was included in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest passenger cable car in the world (5752 meters). Another notable achievement is the shortest construction period for such a large-scale engineering structure (10 months). The construction of Wings of Tatev was carried out by the Austrian-Swiss company Doppelmayr/Garaventa, a leader in the field of ropeway construction. Every year, the Wings of Tatev is successfully tested for compliance with international safety standards.



President Biden Praises Annie Totah

DENVER (whitehouse.gov) — Tamara Totah-Pichache and her husband Kenneth Pichache hosted a campaign reception in their home in Denver for US President Joe Biden during the evening of November 28. The first part of the transcript of the speech of the president follows. Tamara’s mother, referred to in the speech, is Annie Simonian Totah, an Armenian-American philanthropist and trustee of the Armenian Assembly of America.

“The President: Well, hello, hello, hello. Please, everybody have a seat. My lord, this is a big crowd. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And I want to thank Tamara and Ken for welcoming me into your home. I mean that sincerely. Thank you. You know, I hope she’s not embarrassed by saying this, but Tamara’s mom has been a big help to me for a long while. She’s from Rockville, Maryland, and I — when I was a senator and beyond that, she did a lot of fundraising for me. Because — and she was a great supporter of mine when I introduced the Armenian Genocide legislation that made a lot of our friends in Turkey very angry, but it was the right thing to do. And your mom does a great job. And as I said, maybe after this, we can call her. Although, it’s going to be kind of late. Anyway. (Laughter.)”



David Vardanyan accepts the award

have been the one receiving this award but as many of you know, he and dozens of Armenians are illegally detained by the Azerbaijani authorities for political reasons and currently held in a Baku prison. I hope that he will soon be able to receive the next awards himself,” said David Vardanyan.

“Receiving such prestigious internation-

The Wings of Tatev project is part of the Tatev Revival program, initiated by Ruben Vardanyan and Veronika Zonabend. The cable car is a non-profit project, and all its proceeds are directed towards the restoration of the Tatev Monastery and community development. The cable car is managed by Impulse Business Management.

Azerbaijani Leadership May Transform the Concept Of ‘Western Azerbaijan’ into the Next Shushi

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is fulfilled, sooner or later, people will start asking questions about inequality, rampant corruption, lack of fundamental freedoms, and other problems ravaging Azerbaijan.

To prevent these developments, President Aliyev needs a new unifying idea that will rally the population behind him, as the idea of raising the Azerbaijani flag in Shushi did in 2003, and which will make Azerbaijani society tolerate the multifaceted problems of current Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani leadership decided the new idea would be the vision of “Western Azerbaijan.” Currently, the idea lacks clarity — does it mean raising Azerbaijani flags in Armenian cities, including Yerevan, or it envisages the “peaceful return of Azerbaijanis into Armenia,” where they will live as Armenian citizens?

However, despite the lack of clarity on

details, the grand scheme is there — Azerbaijani society should rally behind President Aliyev and his family in the next 20 years to realize another national dream, as they did in 2003 and realized their dreams of having Azerbaijani flags in Shushi and other cities of Nagorno Karabakh. Moreover, in this context, the peace agreement with Armenia will only hinder the process. Even the best peace agreement for Azerbaijan, which will give Azerbaijan so-called enclaves, establish direct land access with them, and create the “Zangezur corridor,” will kill “the dream of Western Azerbaijan.” Thus, Azerbaijan, or at least the current leadership, does not need a peace agreement with Armenia; even more, a peace agreement with Armenia may create significant problems for the leadership to secure its position for the next 20 years.