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French Ex-PM Quits Armenian Foreign Investment Fund

PARIS (Azatutyun) — Dominique de Villepin, a former French prime minister, has resigned from the governing board of an underperforming state fund tasked with attracting foreign investment in Armenia following a management overhaul initiated by the country's government.

Villepin joined the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF) two months after it was set up by the government in May 2019. The ANIF said at the time that the appointment is part of its efforts to bring together a “world-class Board of Directors” that will help it achieve its goals. It attracted only one more board member, Italian investment banking consultant Isidoro Lucciola, however.

The fund's track record has also been less than impressive. It claims to have attracted only \$210 million in foreign direct investment in the Armenian economy over the last four-and-a-half years.

Over 95 percent of that money is due to be invested by an Abu Dhabi-based company contracted in 2021 to build Armenia's first big solar power plant. The project appears to have fallen well behind schedule.

In a statement over the weekend, the ANIF announced that the Ministry of Economy appointed three new board members, all of them see FRANCE, page 5



Former Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin



Kapan in the Zangezur Mountains

Iran Reaffirms Its Strong Opposition To ‘Geopolitical Changes’ in Caucasus

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Iran reiterated its strong opposition to “geopolitical changes” in the South Caucasus on Monday, January 8, after a Turkish government minister said that an extraterritorial corridor connecting Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave and Turkey through Armenia should be opened by 2029.

“We are making a lot of efforts to establish peace, stability, and security in the regional countries,” Nasser Kanaani, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, was quoted by the official IRNA news agency as saying. “We emphasize that developing transit cooperation cannot be a basis for geopolitical changes and violation of the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of countries.”



Nasser Kanaani, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson

Kanaani responded to weekend comments by Turkey's Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu about the so-called “Zangezur corridor.” Uraloglu said that Turkey and Azerbaijan are now building their respective sections of the highway and railway that would pass through Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering Iran.

“The whole process of creating this corridor will take five years. So I think that we will complete all work in 2028,” he added, according to Turkish media.

Iran has repeatedly warned against attempts to strip it of the common border and transport links with Armenia. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi reportedly told a visiting Azerbaijani official in October 2023 that the corridor sought by Baku is “resolutely opposed by Iran.”

The Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei likewise made this clear to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan when they met in Tehran in 2022. Erdogan complained about Iran's stance on the issue see CORRIDOR, page 3

ADL Press Strongly Condemns Dishonorable And Disrespectful Attitude of Armenian Government, Demands Apology

In these most sad days in the history of the Armenian people, while calls are being made among the Armenians of the homeland and diaspora to take initiatives that create nationwide harmony and unity, with a heavy heart and deep anger we received the seemingly unbelievable but true news that the directorate of the Republic of Armenia's public official H1 television company, in its letter addressed, at the last moment, to the Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, refused to broadcast the traditional New Year midnight message of the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II.

This is an irresponsible and disrespectful act, which is not only a dishonor to the multimillenary center of faith of the Armenian people, the Mother See and the person who holds its highest post, but also an insult to the millions of faithful of the Armenian Church.

For now, without further comments, we demand that the authorities of the Republic of Armenia, which sponsor the Republic's Public Television Company, provide an immediate and public apology to the Mother See, as well as to the Armenian people, for their unacceptable and insulting behavior.

**Armenian Democratic Liberal
Party Coordinated Press
January 1, 2024**



Genocide Monument Still Stands in Cologne

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

COLOGNE — As the fireworks rang in the New Year 2024, few people thought there was much to celebrate anywhere in the world. But in the German city of Cologne, there was indeed: the memorial stela that honors the victims of the Ottoman genocide against the Armenians was not going to disappear, as had been planned by the city authorities, but would stay put in its place along the Rhine river, not far from a statue of Germany's last emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The good news was reported in the Ar-

menian language edition of Civilnet on December 28, 2023 and confirmed days later by photographs taken at the site. Civilnet cited several news outlets which had incorrectly reported that the monument had been removed but these misleading reports had apparently relied on old press accounts of a City Council order issued earlier, not to any documented facts on the ground. One wire service published a photo of bulldozers removing the monument — a photo referring to earlier events in 2018 and 2022.

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* carried the story of the fight around the monument last summer and again in mid-December. As detailed in those articles, the Remember

Genocide civil society group had initiated the project, and the monument was erected in April 2018. It has been contested by the influential Turkish community ever since; it has been removed, then put up again for a limited period, then removed again. A political fight emerged, with debate in the City Council and Mayor's office. The latest “decision” in December, was to tear it down by the end of 2023. Early in the new year, a dialogue process was to come into being, to discuss a new monument, this time, “commemorating the victims of repression, racism, violence, and human rights violations,” not better identified.

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ARMENIA

Transforming Lives in Armenia's Border Villages with Fruit Trees

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GERMANY

Youngsters Enact The Christmas Story in Germany

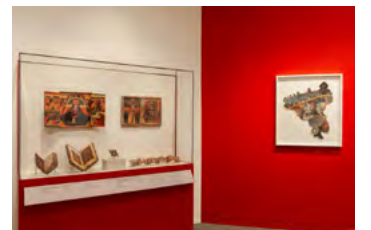
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MARYLAND

Armenian and Ethiopian Art Share Spotlight in Baltimore Exhibit

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Pope Calls for Peace Between Armenia and Azerbaijan

VATICAN (Panorama.am) — In his annual “State of the World” address on January 8 to members of the Diplomatic Corps, Pope Francis reflected on the conflicts ravaging the world and highlighted the responsibility of individuals and nations to foster peace, the Vatican News reported.

He expressed concern about the situation in the South Caucasus and called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to reach a peace deal.

The pope also stressed the need to respect the right of displaced persons to return home.

Armenian Soldier Arrested For Killing Officer

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — An Armenian army soldier has been arrested on suspicion of killing an officer, the Armenian Investigative Committee said on January 9.

Earlier the same day, the Defense Ministry said contract officer Karen Karapetyan had been found shot dead at an outpost at around 6:20 a.m.

The conscript was detained on suspicion of committing murder, the law-enforcement agency said.

Grigoryan Offers Condolences at Iranian Embassy

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Secretary of the Armenian Security Council Armen Grigoryan on Friday, January 5, visited the Iranian Embassy in Yerevan and made a note in Condolence Book opened at the Embassy, wishing a speedy recovery to the victims of the terrorist attack in Kerman.

According to Sputnik Armenia, in an interview with journalists, Grigoryan said that Armenia is in contact with the Islamic Republic of Iran to understand what assistance Armenia could provide to the friendly country.

“The Republic of Armenia condemns any form of terrorism and is ready to help the Islamic Republic of Iran, its government and the people to overcome the difficult situation,” said Grigoryan.

US Denies Russia Hinders Involvement Talks

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State Matthew Miller has denied that Russia is preventing the United States from moving forward on the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process.

Secretary Antony Blinken’s invite for Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers to come to Washington by the end of 2023 didn’t pan out. At the time, Moscow urged foreign governments not to interfere into Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process.

“Russia does not in any way prevent us from conducting the important diplomatic efforts we think are necessary for Armenia and Azerbaijan, and we will continue to pursue them,” Miller told a briefing on January 4 when asked about Russia’s role.

de Waal Anticipates Strong Pressure On Armenia by Azerbaijan This Year

YEREVAN (Jam News) — “In 2024 Armenia will face not only threats from Azerbaijan, but also the threat of losing or breaking off relations with Russia. Undoubtedly, the country will face a lot of problems,” Tom de Waal, a leading analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Development, said.

In an interview this week with Radio Azatutyun (Liberty), he said that this year Armenia will have to make perhaps the most difficult choices and it is a “somewhat dangerous” moment.

The expert also talked about the signing of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty and the issue of the so-called “Zangezur corridor,” which could link Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhichevan through southern Armenia.

According to de Waal, it is a well-known statistic that the majority of peace agreements are violated by the parties within five years after their signing.

In this regard, he believes that the signing of the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is only the beginning of the process.

He went on that the Armenian side wants to get international guarantees for the fulfillment of the clauses of the possible agreement, including the presence of observers on the border, and this, in his opinion, will be a deterrent factor, possibly preventing the use of force by Azerbaijan. But he notes that Baku is resisting these attempts by Yerevan to resolve the issue with the participation of international actors:

“And here we see the tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which says: no, we don’t need any international agreements, we need regional solutions, meaning Turkey, Russia and Iran, excluding the West. This is the main problem.”

Regarding the right of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to return to their

homes, de Waal noted that the majority would not want to return to their homeland and live in Azerbaijan.

“They might want to visit, get their property back, they might want to visit family graves or move those graves to Armenia. But I don’t think anyone is talking about the right to return anytime soon.”

According to him, some international control is needed on the issue of the right of return, and the right of return should apply to everyone:

“This also includes the 1988-1990 displaced persons. It is not so that many will want to return to Baku, Sumgait. But I think that this right should be enshrined at the international level, and it will be part of the future peace agreement.”

Meghri is in the southern region of Armenia, which is an internationally recognized sovereign territory, and de Waal considers the invasion of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces in order to penetrate the corridor to Nakhichevan to be risky. But he immediately notes that anything is possible:

“Azerbaijan is still strong, Armenia is weak. But if you take [the corridor] by force, it means you are behaving like Russia in Ukraine. Besides, if you want to build a railroad and you want international assistance in doing so, you should not occupy [Armenia’s] territory. You cannot force the World Bank and others to cooperate with you in building this railroad.”

The expert says that in trying to force Yerevan to accept its terms, Baku is using a strategy of coercion and the “Russian card.”

“Russia and Azerbaijan have clearly agreed on this issue. And for Armenia it is difficult [to resist] because the Russians are already there, they have border troops there. I expect less of a large-scale invasion [of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces into

Armenian territory]. And more I expect a strong pressure on Armenia to accept it.”

He believes that the task of Armenia’s Western partners is to be able to offer Armenia something in return. He has in mind an “alternative strategy”, according to which the road will be built, but would become not only an Azerbaijani-Russian route, but also an international one.

When asked what to expect in a situation where Armenia’s Syunik region is again in the center of attention of major players, de Waal said: “Who would have thought a few years ago that in the town of Kapan we would see flags of the European Union, Iran, the presence of Russians, and the French would want to open a consulate there? What happened in 1919-20 is repeating itself, Syunik is becoming the center of international competition and diplomacy. And why is this happening? Because it is the most important route for both North-South and East-West directions.”

He recalls that Jugha (Julfra) in Nakhichevan used to be a railroad border point connecting the USSR and Iran. But it has been 30 years since trains have not traveled through this area. According to de Waal, if the railroad running through Syunik is restored, Jugha will once again become a railroad crossing between Russia and Iran: “So Russia and Iran are looking at this region again. For Azerbaijan, it’s a link to Turkey, and for the West, it’s also a new East-West communication route through Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan to Central Asia.”

He emphasizes that this small, 43-kilometer railroad is of interest to everyone, especially against the background of the Russian-Ukrainian war, when all transport routes from east to west were closed.

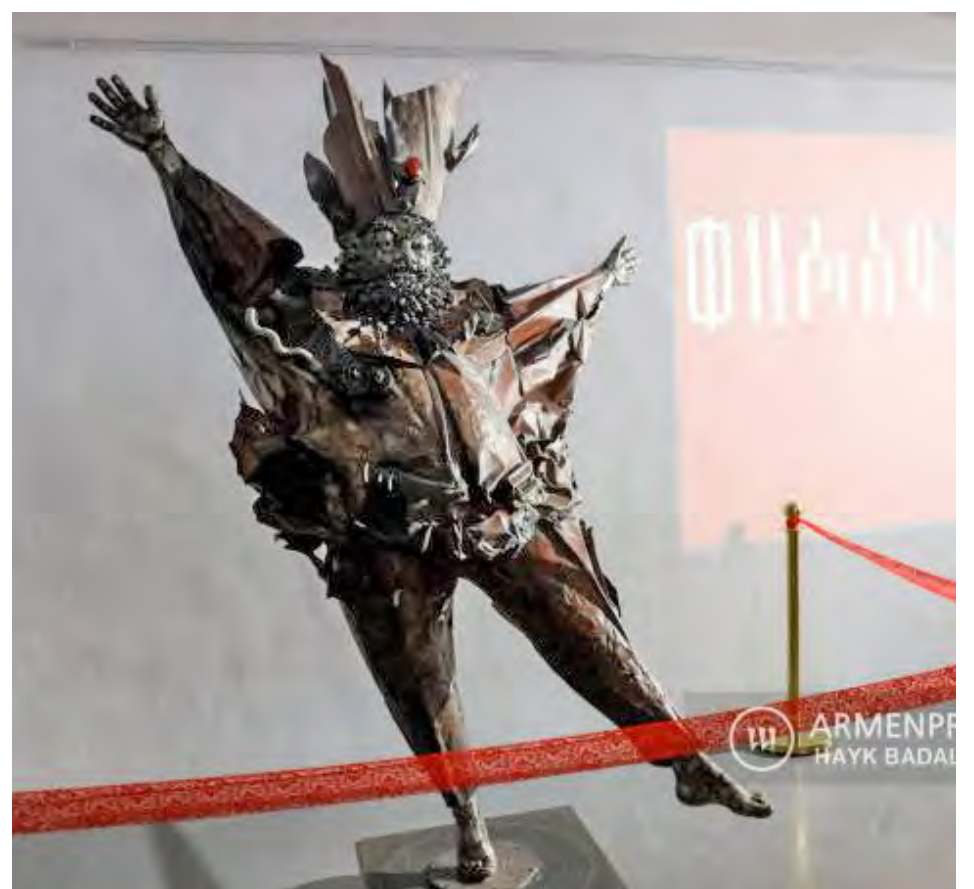
(This story originally appeared on the website www.jam-news.net on January 8.)

Centennial of Paradjanov Marked in Yerevan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Artists and government officials attended the ceremonial inauguration of the Sergey Paradjanov statue in Yerevan as part of a series of celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of birth of the late renowned filmmaker.

The statue was unveiled on January 9 and will soon be installed at the square adjacent to the Cinema House. The square itself will be named “The Color of Pomegranates,” a reference to Paradjanov’s iconic eponymous 1969 film.

The statue was sculpted by Ara Alekyan. Arayik Harutyunyan, the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister’s Office, told reporters at the inauguration in Cinema House that 2023 and 2024 have marked the anniversaries of renowned artists such as Aram Khachaturyan, Sergey Paradjanov, Charles Aznavour and others. “These are people who represent the Armenian nation around the world. The celebrations, confirmed by the government commission, will be organized throughout the whole year. We’ve



The new Paradjanov statue

approved over thirty programs, and we will celebrate the anniversary of birth not only in Yerevan, but in other cities as well, and also abroad, in Georgia and France,” Harutyunyan said.

Minister of Education, Science, Culture

and Sport Zhanna Andreasyan lauded the statue and said that it is a fine embodiment of the late artist. Andreasyan said she hopes that a Walk of Fame will be opened outside the Cinema House in Yerevan and the statue will be moved there.



ARMENIA

Christmas Eve Candlelight Divine Liturgy Celebrated in St. Gayane Monastery

ECHMIADZIN — On January 05, on the Eve of the Feats of the Holy Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ, under the presidency of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; Candlelight Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the St. Gayane Monastery, which was attended by the members of the Brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin; last Artsakh President Samvel Shahramanyan, Armenian statesmen and pilgrim Armenians.

The Celebrant was Bishop Vrtanes Abrahamyan, director of the Artsakh spiritual and cultural heritage office of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin.

Prior to the Divine Liturgy, an Evening Service was held and different Bible passages were read, then four Deacons of Mother See read the Prophecy of Daniel.

During the Divine Liturgy, the Catholicos reflected on the sacrament of the Feast and stated in part: “The miraculous Nativity of Jesus Christ was nothing but the re-proclamation of the divine Light of Lights order. God condescended to restore the broken harmony of creation and halt humanity’s descent back into chaos.

The Armenian people were one of the first to meet the divine true Light, because they still carried the memory and traces of the pre-created light in their subconscious sphere. Therefore, we called the spiritual renewal brought by Christ enlightenment, we called the apostles of our nation and the official first patriarch enlighteners, and we began to consider ourselves the Sons of Light.”

The Celebrant urged the faithful to look back on their past years and try to shed light on the darkness of their inner concerns and uncertainty.

In his sermon, Abrahamyan also referred to the loss of Artsakh.

“Artsakh, which has been fighting for its independence for decades, was completely depopulated for the first time in history. Exhausted as a result of the nine-month blockade implemented by Azerbaijan and the humanitarian crisis, our people showed heroic resistance on the battlefield



Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II lights candles for the faithful.

as well, unfortunately, the forces were unequal, and Artsakh was alone,” noted the Bishop, recording the pain in his heart that this year tens of thousands of Armenians from Artsakh will for the first time celebrate Christmas and New Year’s holidays

away from their cherished homes.

In this regard, Abrahamyan told the faithful to wrap their brothers and sisters in Artsakh with love and warmth, so that they start believing in their bright future again, and he urged the people of Artsakh

to be filled with divine hope and optimism, to live and create in Mother Armenia, because only in this way can they stay awake and realize their hope of return.

Abrahamyan also expressed his filial love and sincere gratitude to His Holiness for the sake of the faithful people of Artsakh, despite many difficulties, for always supporting Artsakh and Artsakh Armenians with unfailing dedication.

At the conclusion, Abrahamyan raised a prayer to God for the steadfastness of the Armenian country and statehood, for the peace of the souls of the brave martyrs, for the speedy return of the missing and captured Armenians, as well as for the Armenian soldiers guarding the border at the moment.

The catholicos ascended the Holy Alter and lit a candle, so that the faithful have the opportunity to light their own candles, and take the light to their home symbolizing the light of the revealed Son of God. Then, the Brotherhood of the Mother See gathered in the Pontifical Residence, where under the presidency of the catholicos, a Christmas Home-Blessing Service was offered.

Growing Hope: Transforming Lives in Armenia’s Border Villages with Fruit Trees

YEREVAN — This fall, Armenia Tree Project (ATP) orchestrated a remarkable initiative that not only distributed 10,982 fruit trees to over 1,200 families, but also sowed the seeds of hope in border villages of Gegharkunik and Syunik regions. This heartwarming endeavor, which spanned communities like Sotk, Areguni, Pambak, Daranak, Akner, Khot, Karahunj, Hartashen and Shurnukh, has unfolded into a tale of resilience and rejuvenation for the residents of these villages.

Residents, whose lives have been marred by the echoes of Azeri UAV attacks and the devastating bombings that rocked Sotk in September 2022, were overjoyed to receive these life-changing gifts. The distribution of apricot, black currant, apple, pear, plum, peach, and cherry trees brought not just big smiles, but tangible hope to these brave individuals, leaving them with bushels of saplings that signify a promising future.

Sotk, a village that has borne the brunt of conflict, is emblematic of the challenges faced by these border communities. In the aftermath of the repeated bombings, were 150 of the 250 houses were severely damaged, ATP stepped in with a vision for growth and restoration. Sevak Khachatryan, the Administrative Head of Sotk, expressed profound impact of ATP’s intervention, stating, “Artsakh played a vital role in Gegharkunik’s cultural identity and economy, including imports and exports of agricultural goods. Before the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh, our village and the region of Gegharkunik had developed lively trade with Artsakh, exporting wheat, potato, and barley and importing fruits and nuts. Since we don’t have this opportunity anymore, we are trying to grow some of the formerly imported foods.”

ATP’s distribution of seven trees each, including apple, pear, and black currant, to over 150 families in Sotk is not just a

gesture of generosity but a lifeline for a community heavily dependent on agriculture for sustenance and economic stability. These trees, carefully chosen for the climactic zone of Gegharkunik, represent a beacon of hope, promising nourishment and economic opportunities within just a couple of years.

fore would be impossible in Gegharkunik. So, as our collaboration with Armenia Tree Project continues, we would like to try growing apricots, peaches, plums and cherries as well.”

The program is beloved by ATP staff and beneficiaries alike. The trees for the program come from our “Betty” fruit tree



Villager in Syunik Receives Fruit Trees from ATP

With proper care, the trees will start to bear fruit in as little as two years. The villagers are eagerly anticipating establishing new orchards with the trees. Once they mature, the trees can also act as donor or parent trees to graft additional fruit trees. This way, villagers will be able to propagate more trees for their orchards and backyards in the years to come.

As climate change brings warmer temperatures to the region, however, ATP and the villagers work together to adapt. Sevak remarked, “The only positive thing that we can harvest from this global warming is to grow varieties of fruit trees that be-

nursery in the Chiva village, located in the Vayots Dzor region. The nursery has been a cornerstone of this effort, producing roughly 50,000 trees annually, the majority of which are fruit trees that are distributed to villages and used for community planting sites.

As ATP looks ahead, the organization aims to enhance its impact by providing a greater quantity and diversity of trees to rural and border villages in the coming years. This program captures resilience, growth, and hope, which stand as testaments to the transformative power of community-led initiatives.

Iran Reaffirms Its Strong Opposition to ‘Geopolitical Changes’ in Caucasus

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after visiting Baku a year later. He claimed that unlike Tehran, Yerevan does not object to the idea of the “Zangezur corridor.” The Armenian government has rejected the Azerbaijani and Turkish demands on numerous occasions.

A senior Azerbaijani official, Hikmet Hajiyev, said last October that the corridor “has lost its attractiveness for us” and that Baku is now planning to “do this with Iran instead.” But he appeared to backtrack on that statement in a newspaper interview published last week. Hajiyev said that the planned construction of a new road and railway connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan via Iran does not mean that Azerbaijan has abandoned the idea of “Zangezur corridor.”

Hajiyev confirmed that Baku wants to make sure that people and cargoes traveling to and from Nakhichevan are not checked by Armenian border guards or customs officers. He claimed that this would not violate Armenia’s territorial integrity.



INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan Captured 17 Armenians after September Aggression

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — There are 23 Armenian captives, including 17 persons captured after Azerbaijan's September aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh, still being held in Baku, head of the Investigative Committee Argishti Kyaramyan said on the Public Television of Armenia on January 5.

Kyaramyan added that eight of these 17 individuals are former representatives of the military-political leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh, including three former presidents.

According to him, the Investigative Committee also possesses evidence about the forced disappearance of 32 people as a result of the 44-day war in 2020. He said the information has been submitted to international structures. Regarding 22 of them there is a decision of the European Court of Human Rights on the application of interim measures, but Azerbaijan denies the fact of the disappearance of said people.

Greek Foreign Minister Arrives in Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, George Gerapetritis, arrived in Armenia on an official visit on January 9.

The Greek Foreign Minister will pay a visit to the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial to commemorate the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

Afterwards Gerapetritis is scheduled to meet with his Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan. A joint press conference of the foreign ministers of Armenia and Greece is planned to take place after their meeting.

Louis Bono Holds Regular Talks to Support Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process – Embassy

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Louis Bono, the U.S. State Department's senior adviser on Caucasus negotiations, regularly talks with the parties to support the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the press secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan told APA.

The embassy official reminded that Bono often visits the region to discuss U.S. support for the peace process and ways to achieve a lasting and dignified peace.

"Mr. Bono regularly holds talks with several key stakeholders in Armenia and Azerbaijan to support the peace process. We are ready to help any process that brings peace and stability to the peoples of the South Caucasus," the press secretary stressed.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with Bono in Yerevan on January 8.

"During the meeting, the interlocutors discussed regional security issues, including the normalization process of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan," the Armenian Foreign Ministry said.

Lemkin Institute Condemns Attack On Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention has strongly condemned the recent brutal attack on the Armenian Quarter in East Jerusalem by armed mobs associated with an Israeli-Australian businessman Danny Rubenstein. It reiterates the call to protect the cultural heritage of the Armenian Quarter and respect the will of its residents, who continue to resist the forcible development of their land.

The most recent incidence of violence occurred on December 28, 2023, when an armed mob of about thirty people associated with Rubenstein attacked the historical area called Goveroun Bartz (the "Cows' Garden"), injuring several Armenians, including a priest and students of the Theological Seminary. According to the local activists, two Armenian residents were arrested by Israeli police while none of the attackers were apprehended. This incident, together with others, occurred after a controversial land development deal was canceled by the Armenian Patriarchate in November. The deal, originally signed by the Armenian Patriarchate in July 2021, would have granted Danny Rubenstein's company, XANA,

rights to build a luxury hotel on the property, destroying many historic buildings in the area. The deal was canceled after the Patriarchate faced pressure from the local Armenian community, the greater Armenian Diaspora, and Palestinian authorities. Since November, XANA has sought to claim the Cows' Garden by use of force.

Prior to the attacks in the Armenian Quarter, there were other incidents in which Israeli extremists harassed Jerusalemite Armenians. For instance, on January 29, 2023, an Armenian restaurant in the Christian Quarter of East Jerusalem was attacked. Continuing harassment and attacks on Jerusalemite Armenians together with coercive and possibly illegal construction in the Cows' Garden pose an existential threat to the oldest Armenian Diaspora community in the world. This threat is very alarming, especially after the tragic fate of the 4000 year-old Armenian community in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), where, in September, Azerbaijan forcibly displaced more than 100,000 Artsakh Armenians — the entire Artsakh population — from their ancestral home to Armenia.

"In the context of the violent climate against Christians in Israel fueled by Prime Minister Netanyahu's far-right government and the ongoing genocide against Palestinians unfolding in Gaza and the West Bank, attacks on the Armenian Quarter can be also viewed as another attempt by Israeli extremists to create a homogenized Jewish ethnostate in Palestinian territories. It is crucial for international organizations and the UN to keep an eye on the tense situation in the Armenian Quarter and protect the 1600-year-old neighborhood and its inhabitants from violence and elimination," the Lemkin Institute said.

The Lemkin Institute stressed that such events contribute to an environment conducive to mass atrocities and genocide; recognizing and responding to these warning signs promptly is essential for preventing further escalation against Armenians. Moreover, it expressed full support for the resistance of Jerusalemite Armenians and calls on relevant authorities to ensure the safety and territorial integrity of the Armenian Quarter and the rest of East Jerusalem by all necessary means.

Azerbaijan Names Former Oil Exec to Lead Climate Talks

By Sibü Arasu

BAKU (AP) — Azerbaijan's ecology minister has been named to lead the United Nations' annual climate talks later this year, prompting concern from some climate activists over his former ties to the state oil company in a major oil-producing nation.

Mukhtar Babayev's appointment was announced on X (Twitter) on January 5 by the United Arab Emirates, which hosted the climate talks that just ended in December, and confirmed Friday by the United Nations. Officials in Azerbaijan did not immediately respond to messages seeking to confirm the appointment.

Babayev, 56, has been his country's minister for ecology and natural resources since 2018. Before that, he worked at Azerbaijan's state oil company for more than two decades.

Similar concerns dogged Sultan al-Jaber, the head of the UAE's national oil company, as he presided over the talks in Dubai known as COP28. The COP president is responsible for running talks and getting nearly 200 countries to agree on a deal to help limit global warming, and skeptics questioned whether al-Jaber would be willing to confront the fossil fuels causing climate change.

The conference ultimately resulted in a final agreement that for the first time mentioned fossil fuels as the cause of climate change and acknowledged the need to transition away from them, but it had no concrete requirements to do so.

Oil and natural gas bring in around 90% of Azerbaijan's export revenues and finance around 60% of the government budget, according to the International Energy Agency. Climate activists said the country needs to look past its own fossil fuel interests if it's going to host successful talks.

Mohamad Adow of climate think tank Power Shift Africa said it's "concerning to be once again having the world's climate negotiations coordinated by a petrostate that has a big interest in oil and gas production." But he was hopeful that cli-

mate negotiators could be successful in Azerbaijan's capital Baku as "the COP in Dubai resulted in an outcome more positive than many expected."

"He's got a huge job to do," said Adow. "He needs to start working on getting rich countries to deliver serious, long-term finance that will tackle the climate crisis."

Harjeet Singh, global engagement director for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, said that "with another petrostate hosting the climate conference, our concerns multiply."

Babayev "must transcend the vested interests of the powerful fossil fuel industry that is primarily responsible for the climate crisis," Singh said.

Melanie Robinson, global director for the climate program at World Resources Institute, didn't comment directly on Babayev but said "stakes will be high"

in Azerbaijan, where nations will tackle issues including how to finance climate change adaptation and mitigation around the world, particularly in poorer countries.

"As with all presidencies, the world will be looking to Azerbaijan to fairly facilitate the most ambitious outcome possible," she said.

The United Nations moves the talks around the world with different regions taking turns. They're typically announced two years in advance, but the decision to hold 2024 talks in Azerbaijan came just 11 months before the negotiations are supposed to start.

That was due to a longtime standoff between Eastern European nations, the region designated to host in 2024. A prisoner swap between Azerbaijan and Armenia in early December led to Armenia supporting Azerbaijan's COP29 bid.

Miller Says He Hopes Israeli Govt. Does not Escalate Tensions

WASHINGTON (Panorama.am) — The US does not want to see the Government of Israel take any steps that would escalate tensions, US Department of State Spokesperson Matthew Miller said, asked to comment on the situation in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem.

At a press briefing on January 4, Miller was asked to respond to the concerns expressed by top authorities in the Armenian Quarter that the Israeli Government was using the conflict in Gaza to push out a lot of Armenian Christians from the Armenian Quarter.

"No specific response to that. But as we have said on a number of occasions, we do not want to see the Government of Israel take any steps that would escalate tensions," Miller responded.

Several priests, students of the Armenian Theological Academy and indigenous Armenians were seriously injured in a massive attack on the Armenian community on December 28.

Over 30 armed provocateurs in ski-masks with lethal and less-than-lethal weaponry including powerful nerve-agents that incapacitated dozens of clergy broke into the grounds of the Cow's Garden and began their vicious assault.

The Armenian Patriarchate called on the Israeli Government and Police to start an investigation against Danny Rothman (Rubenstein) and George Warwar (Hadad) for organizing their continuous criminal attacks on the Armenian Patriarchate and Community.



INTERNATIONAL

Youngsters Enact the Christmas Story in Germany

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WIESBADEN — The lights go down, the hall is hushed. A grey-haired woman begins to tell a story to her grandchildren, a story 2000 years old. It is the story of the Nativity, portrayed in dramatic form by a group of Armenian children in Germany, on January 7. An angel appears to Mary to announce the joyous future event, then a herald comes forth with Herod's menacing decree. The curtain opens: no room at the inn. Mary and Joseph must move on to a stable in Bethlehem, where three shepherds, guided by an angel, will find them. And then, the three Magi, the kings from afar.

The story unfolds on a stage in a Wiesbaden community center, home to the Demokratisches Volks- und Kulturzentrum (DVK), an Armenian club which orga-



Santa Claus and Mrs. Santa, Armen Stepanian and Meri Papinyan

nizes cultural activities in theatre, music, and sports, to promote Armenian-German understanding and integration. Founded in 1976 in Wiesbaden, the association has continued to grow, recently welcoming Armenian refugees from Ukraine into the community.

The Nativity play is the most recent event in a project initiated by the DVK in October 2021, called the KOMITAS Educational Institution (Կոմիտաս հայկական կրթօջախ). As Chairman of the DVK Karen Gharslyan explains, "Children in the diaspora tend to forget Armenian and, if we continue at this pace, there will be a generation of Armenians in the diaspora who cannot speak Armenian." This entails the risk of loss of "our language, our culture, and paves the way for total alienation." Setting up KOMITAS was "our contribution to solving this problem." The program offers instruction in the Armenian language, literature, and history and organizes cultural events like the Nativity play. Teaching aids and books for classroom instruction are provided by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of the Republic of Armenia.

The effort has been most successful. The 40 or so children and youngsters active in the project, including several from Ukraine, displayed an admirable mastery of Armenian, both in acting and singing. Their delivery was clearly articulated, and their stage interaction convincing. Dressed

in beautiful costumes amid an imposing set, they presented an artistic tableau on stage. (They even coped with the technical challenge of sharing microphones.) And they had rehearsed their curtain calls very well. The audience (standing room only) was enthusiastic.

Following a pause, the very young children mounted the stage, and took turns

to recite, then joined together in singing Christmas songs, and saying the "Hayr Mer" or the Lord's Prayer. Santa Claus and Mrs. Santa appeared with a bag full of gifts and bountiful humor. To conclude the event, Shushan Tumanyan, who co-chairs the Armenian Cultural Society in Hessen (AKV), offered a lesson in Armenian folk dancing.



Mane Gharslyan as Grandmother

Genocide Monument Still Stands in Cologne

MONUMENT, from page 1

Happily, CIVILNET announced the survival of the document. Tessa Hofmann, the co-founder and chairwoman of the human rights groups Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), which has been a leading force in the campaign for the monument, posted the CIVILNET update on her Facebook page, and congratulations came streaming in. On New Year's Eve, Remember Genocide posted the story, this time with a fresh photo of the memorial, in which a copy of that day's issue of the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* was visibly placed at the foot of the stele, thus documenting the date.

Hofmann, when asked to explain the reason behind the surprising development, said she thought the Cologne Mayor Henriette Reker "wanted to give in to pressure from Turkish nationalists and argued that the erection of the memorial had not been agreed with the administration. But apparently," she continued, "the protest of the numerous 'monument defenders' was strong enough to prevent the dismantling announced for the end of 2023." Hofmann also recalled her appeal to Reker last spring, in which she reminded her "that it was also the Turkish people from Cologne, such as the author Dogan Akhanli, who sadly died in 2021, who initiated this memorial." Reker, she concluded, "must therefore decide which Turkish citizens of Cologne she will listen to."



Angel Luisa Simonyan with shepherds, Artjom Manukyan, Erik Haik Lalayan, and Artur Hovsepian

French Ex-PM Quits Armenian Investment Fund

FRANCE, from page 1

Armenian government officials, who promptly voted to fire the fund's executive director, David Papazian. One of those officials, Deputy Economy Minister Ani Ispirian, also replaced Villepin as chairman.

The statement gave no reason for these moves. It said that both Villepin, who had served as France's prime minister from 2005-2007, and Lucciola resigned as board members "after this decision of the Ministry of Economy." The two foreign members of ANIF's Investment Committee, Khaled Helioui and Michael Thompson, also tendered their resignations.

The Ministry of Economy has not yet commented on these personnel changes or the future of ANIF's operations.

The current Armenian government has attracted few large-scale Western investments despite claiming to have eliminated "systemic" corruption and created a level playing field for all businesses.

It has also helped to effectively disrupt a multimillion-dollar gold mining project launched by a British-American company, Lydian International, a decade ago. The company invested \$370 million in the massive Amulsar gold deposit and planned to start mining operations there in late 2018.

Those plans were thwarted after several dozen environmental protesters started blocking all roads leading to Amulsar following the 2018 "velvet revolution" in the country. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government did not revoke Lydian's mining licenses. But it also refrained from us-

ing force to end the blockade.

Lydian filed for bankruptcy protection in Canada in late 2019 before being restructured. Its new owners and Pashinyan's government reached an agreement in February 2023 to revive the project. They said the company needs to raise \$250 million for finishing the construction of mining and smelting facilities at Amulsar and installing other equipment there.

In 2022, the government controversially rejected a \$300 million bid by a consortium of French companies to build a big ski resort on the slopes of Armenia's highest mountain, Aragats. It approved instead a more modest project proposed by an obscure Russian-Armenian businessman for the same location. The project has not yet been implemented.



Community News

NAASR to Host Online Talk by Gregory Aftandilian On 'Recreating Kharpert in Massachusetts'

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host an online panel talk by Gregory Aftandilian, "Recreating Kharpert in Massachusetts," on Thursday, January 25, at 7:30 p.m. Eastern / 4:30 pm Pacific.

There is a special connection between Armenian Americans of Massachusetts and the Ottoman province of Mamuret ul-Aziz, which the Armenians called Kharpert. Kharpert Armenians began arriving in Massachusetts, particularly in the Worcester area, beginning in the mid-19th



Dr. Gregory Aftandilian

century, though the bulk of the immigration resulted from the Hamidian massacres (1894-1896) and later the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The survivors of these calamities faced the fact that there were no homes or homeland to go back to. To ease such dislocations, the survivors settled in Armenian communities in America where their fellow provincial compatriots had already laid down roots. Social life among this generation was largely confined to people from their own province.

Gregory Aftandilian will consider how provincial identities from the former Ottoman Empire were so strong and durable for at least two generations in America, despite assimilation trends. Having lost everything in their homeland—family members, homes, farms and businesses—they did their best to recreate Kharpert in Massachusetts as a coping mechanism for the trauma they endured in addition to helping them adjust to a strange new land and society.

Gregory Aftandilian is senior professorial lecturer at American University in Washington, DC, where he teaches courses on US foreign policy and Middle East politics. He spent over twenty years in U.S. Government service where he was a foreign policy advisor to Congressman Chris Van Hollen, professional staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and foreign policy adviser

see KHARPERT, page 7



Two members of the Grigoryan family at Zhangyalov Hats Bistro

Economic Sustainability Program for Armenian Families Supported by Knights of Vartan

YEREVAN — The Knights of Vartan has initiated a comprehensive Economic Sustainability Program for Artsakh refugees, along with support for local Armenian families in communities where Artsakh refugees reside.

In October 2023, the organization launched a humanitarian project to provide immediate assistance to relocated Artsakh refugee families. This initiative included funding for urgent needs such as housing, food, heaters, washing machines, and other household appliances during the initial months for over 200 Artsakh families dispersed throughout Armenia.

Beginning in 2024, the Knights of Vartan will launch its Economic Sustainability Program to create job growth and provide sustainable economic activity in local communities in Armenia. The essential need for refugee families is to help them return to work, rebuild their lives, and help them generate sufficient income to sustain their expenses and thrive in their homeland. This program is designed to empower families by providing the tools and resources they need for long-term self-sustainability.

The financial burden of housing rent, family expenses, and the initiation of economic projects is overwhelmingly high for Artsakh families. Recognizing this challenge, the Knights of Vartan stepped in to provide crucial support.

The Knights of Vartan remain dedicated to empowering Artsakh families to ensure that they overcome the economic hurdles and build sustainable futures in Armenia. "While the immediate help we provided in 2023 addressed a pressing need, empowering individuals with the means to sustain themselves creates a lasting impact. This program focuses on long-term solutions, fostering independence and resilience among the Armenian people," said Hunan Arshakian, Grand

see SUPPORT, page 7



Karmen Gabrielyan at work

Man Charged with Murder in Road Rage Shooting of Boy, 4

By Marlene Lenthang

LOS ANGELES (NBC news) — A California man has been charged with murder in a road rage shooting in which he opened fire on a family driving to buy groceries, killing a 4-year-old boy in the back seat, prosecutors said.

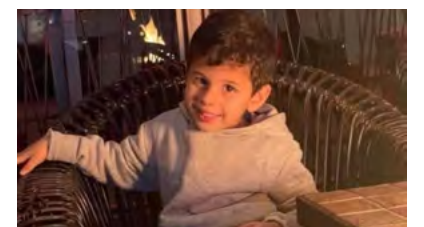
Byron Burkhardt, 29, was charged with one count of murder, two counts of attempted murder, one count of shooting at an occupied vehicle and five counts of possession of a firearm by a felon, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced Tuesday, December 19.

The shooting happened Friday, December 15, when Burkhardt was driving with his girlfriend and allegedly cut off the victims' vehicle while driving on part of Sierra Highway in Lancaster, in northern Los Angeles County, prosecutors said.

Inside that car was a mother, father and their 4-year-old son, identified by the Los Angeles County medical examiner as Gor Adamyan.

Burkhardt allegedly "engaged in aggressive driving maneuvers and road rage," prosecutors said.

An online fundraiser to support the family said Burkhardt allegedly cut off the Adamyan family's vehicle, initiated a pursuit through streets, then pulled up and started shooting.



Gor Adamyan

He fired eight shots into the car, the district attorney's office said.

Gor was struck once in the back seat. His parents were not hit in the barrage of bullets, according to officials.

The child was taken to a nearby hospital, where he died, prosecutors said.

Gor's family's car had a camera that allegedly captured Burkhardt's vehicle license plate during the shooting, the DA's news release said.

District Attorney George Gascón called the shooting a "senseless act of road rage," adding, "A family is facing unimaginable pain during what should be a joyous time this holiday season."

Burkhardt is being held on \$2 million bond and will be arraigned January 22.

If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office spokesperson Dana Boldt said on December 20: "Like anyone charged with a crime, Mr. Burkhardt is presumed innocent and entitled to a vigorous defense."

"We are sensitive to the intense public interest this matter has generated, but caution everyone against a rush to judgment until all the facts are established in a court of law," Boldt added.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Economic Sustainability Program for Armenian Families

SUPPORT, from page 6

Commander of the Knights of Vartan. “The program demonstrates the biblical proverb, Give a man a fish, and He will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and He will eat for a lifetime,” he added.

In December 2023, two beneficiaries, the Gabrielyan family, and the Grigoryan family, were the first two applicants approved under the program. Karmen Gabrielyan, along with his wife and two children, had to flee Taghavard, Artsakh on September 19, 2023, finding refuge in Nor Hajn near Abovyan town. This marked the second time in two years that the Gabrielyan family lost their home, livelihood, and all their possessions, navigating the challenges of survival as refugees.

In 2022, the Knights of Vartan provided tools for Karmen to work in Artsakh. Unfortunately, these had to be left behind during the recent escape due to space constraints. Once again, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan stepped in, offering financial support for Karmen to acquire additional tools essential for continuing his work. This assistance reflects the ongoing commitment of Knights and Daughters of Vartan to empower individuals like Karmen, enabling them to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.



Members of the Grigoryan family at Zhangyalov Hats Bistro

In his heartfelt application, Karmen expressed, “I need tools to work so that I can feed my family.”

On December 24, 2023, Karmen received funding for new replacement equipment through the Knights of Vartan Economic Sustainability Program for Artsakh

refugees. The same day, Karmen successfully purchased 29 tools essential for his work. Now equipped with new tools, he is in the process of rebuilding his life once again. Karmen’s expertise spans electrical work, plumbing, carpentry, flooring, tiling, and home-building construction. He, despite the setbacks, commutes daily to work at various construction sites in Yerevan to earn income.

With these upgraded tools and equipment, Karmen anticipates securing employment and delivering better-quality work on construction sites in and around Yerevan. The positive impact of the Knights of Vartan’s assistance extends beyond providing tools; it contributes to the broader goal of fostering economic sustainability and community integration for Artsakh refugees like Karmen.

The Grigoryan family wanted to use their experience and culinary skills to start a bakery business to make a living and rebuild their lives. Although Yerevan boasts numerous Zhangyalov Hats bistros, most are concentrated in the city center, with few extending to the suburbs. Recognizing this gap, the Grigoryan family, refugees from Artsakh, identified an opportunity to offer authentic and delicious Zhangyalov Hats

from Artsakh. Situated in the 9th Massive, an area towards the outskirts of Yerevan characterized by tall apartment buildings and supermarkets, there was a noticeable absence of cafes and bistros.

Seeing the potential in this underserved location, the Grigoryan family developed a simple business plan and proposal. In this family-run business, each member, from the student grandchild to the 75-year-old grandma, contributes to its success. Grandma takes the lead in cooking and ensuring the highest quality.

Gayane, the mother of the family, shared, “I wasn’t sure what to do after enduring all these hardships, but this project from the Knights of Vartan truly saved us. It provided us with a meaningful endeavor to stay busy with, to create and share, and, of course, to earn income for our family.”

The family leased and promptly renovated the bistro area, investing their efforts, while the equipment was acquired through funding from the Knights of Vartan. Now, the entire family is working hard to operate the establishment, addressing challenges step by step. The daughters created a Facebook page for the bistro, showcasing the offerings, while the grandma introduced delectable new bites that are also available for delivery.

The Knights of Vartan extends a helping hand to compatriots through economic projects like these, by enabling them to rebuild their lives. The resilience and collaborative spirit of communities are essential in overcoming challenges and building brighter futures. The journey of refugee families like the Grigoryan family and Gabrielyan family serves as a testament to the perseverance, diligence, and tenacity of Armenians who, compelled by the need to escape genocide and persecution, have bravely embarked on the arduous task of rebuilding their lives in Armenia.

The Knights and Daughters of Vartan are continuing to raise funds to support this economic recovery program. To learn more about the program, how to donate, and stay current on the economic recovery efforts through their website, <http://kofv.org>.

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



Zhangyalov Hats; The first test

NAASR to Host Online Talk on ‘Recreating Kharper in Massachusetts’

KHARPERT, from page 6

to Senator Paul Sarbanes, and foreign policy fellow to Senator Edward Kennedy. Prior to these Congressional positions, he served as a Middle East analyst in the State Department

Aftandilian is the author of the book *Armenia: Vision of a Republic. The Independence Lobby in America, 1918-1927* and numerous articles on Armenian-American history. He holds a B.A. in History from Dartmouth College, an M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Chicago, and an M.Sc. in International Relations from the London School of Economics. He served on NAASR’s Board of Directors from 2005-2019.

The webinar will be accessible live on Zoom at the NAASR website (registration required) and on NAASR’s YouTube Channel.

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

Wisconsin’s St. John the Baptist Armenian Church Marks Feast of Nativity

By David Luhrssen

MILWAUKEE — St. John the Baptist Armenian Church celebrated the Feast of the Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord (“Armenian Christmas”) on January 7, in keeping with the community’s longstanding custom of observing the holiday on the Sunday closest to January 6.

In his Nativity homily, St. John’s parish priest, Rev. Guregh Hambarzumyan, spoke of the mystery of the Incarnation: Why did God become human? One answer is that through his birth in Bethlehem, Jesus, the Son of God, lowered Himself to enable humanity to raise ourselves by His example. After the Nativity, God was no longer an abstraction or a distant lawgiver, but a person who could speak to us directly in language we can understand.

Following the Badarak, Hambarzumyan, assisted by the parish’s longtime visiting pastor, Rev. Fr. Nareg Keutelian, performed the Blessing of the Water with Vladimir Babakhanov, age 8, as godfather of the ceremony.

As has been the custom for many decades, the members of St. John and friends gathered in the church hall following the

distribution of holy water for a potluck meal, a community celebration of sharing. During the luncheon, Michael Aram Vartanian (MAV) Scholarship Committee chairman Dr. Gary Seabrook announced the awarding of scholarships to Leo Dadian and Angelina Weitzer. Since the

1960s, the Vartanian Fund, an endowment managed by an independent Scholarship committee at St. John, has provided scholarships for college and college-bound students who have contributed to Wisconsin’s Armenian community through volunteer work.



Fr. Guregh Hambarzumyan, center, and other celebrants on January 7



OBITUARY

In Memoriam: Christmas Tree Shops (1970-2023)

By **Brittany Jasnoff**

BOSTON (*Boston Magazine*) — Looking back on 2023, we remember the loved ones we lost: pivotal Boston political figure, Mel King; Red Sox pitcher Tim Wakefield; Frances Sternhagen, the Tony-winning actress who, crucially to our regional identity, played Cliff Clavin's mother on Cheers. But also this year, we lost another towering New England figure: the Christmas Tree Shops. A Cape Cod original, the discount chain lived a long life as a steadfast companion to grandmas, bargain hunters, and Sagamore Bridge adventurers everywhere. Here, we pay tribute to a dearly departed friend.

It was only about a week ago that the loss of the Christmas Tree Shops really hit me. I was standing in my basement, surrounded by the amorphous, teetering piles of my kids' holiday gifts, when I realized I needed a few things. Wrapping paper (preferably character-themed). Tape — the good kind, not the dollar store kind that barely stays on the roll. Gift bags, crisp ones that didn't look like they'd been reused 100 times. I had some supplies left over from last year, but I knew it wouldn't be nearly enough to get me through the season.

I realized I could easily go to my local supermarket, drug store, or Target for any of those items. But the only place I could think of — the only place I really wanted to go — was the Christmas Tree Shops. And I couldn't. Because in August, the Middleborough-based chain shuttered all its stores in Massachusetts and across the country (at the time, 49 in total per *USA Today*) after filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, leaving a gigantic-Christmas-bow-sized hole in the hearts of bargain shoppers everywhere.

Of course, the Christmas Tree Shops were about way more than Christmas. The first

location opened as the "Christmas Tree Gift Shop" in Yarmouth Port; in 1970, Charles and Doreen Bilezikian took over and expanded the business, renaming it the Christmas Tree Shops and adding everything from toys to vacation sundries to penny candy. (The store's new name was plural because three buildings comprised the original location.) From there, the Cape Cod staple grew to multiple locations across the state before Bed Bath and Beyond purchased it



The flagship Christmas Tree Shops location in Sagamore, Massachusetts, nestled right off the Sagamore Bridge, with its own windmill. / Photo by John Tlumacki/The Boston Globe via Getty Images

in 2003. (The chain was ultimately sold to Sudbury-based Handil Holdings before its untimely demise.)

For the two decades I've lived in Massachusetts, the chain has been a repository of every knickknack I've ever needed, and many I definitely didn't. I still remember my first visit to the Christmas Tree Shops, back in the early 2000s. I was in Cape Cod, renting a house with my family for the week. The quirky, thatched-roof building with an adjacent windmill caught our atten-

tion just as we were about to cross the Sagamore Bridge, and when we went in to check it out, our minds were promptly blown by the random assortment of, well, stuff (some might use a crasser word). I left with a flip-flop name keychain and a wooden cutting board. The cutting board is still in my cabinet today; the keychain, regrettably, now lives in a landfill somewhere.

Some purchases were smarter than others. I still remember the day I scored an expen-

way. "I can't remember what I bought," one woman told Boston.com before the stores closed, "but I do remember the experience.... It was like walking into a closet full of surprise treasures." Another opined, "I hated to move out of Massachusetts for Florida because I had to leave them behind.... I think most of my house in the mid-'80s was decorated by the Christmas Tree Shops!"

The last time I went to the Shrewsbury location, it was just a few days from closing. Walking in, the normally overflowing shelves were mostly bare. It was remarkable to see a place that used to be packed with so many decorations, home goods, and life necessities feel so, well, empty. My kids darted through the space freely, unburdened by merchandise or other shoppers. In one corner of the store, my husband spotted a cooler that could be converted into a table. It was 50 percent off. "Do we need this for anything?" he asked.

Normally, I might have stopped to think about that for a second. But this time there was barely any hesitation. "I don't think so," I said, shaking my head. Without all of the other thousands of products jockeying for my attention, the desire to buy something had all but disappeared.

On the way out, I did grab one last souvenir from one of my favorite stores: a mini decorative pumpkin engraved with our family's initial. We could put this out for Halloween, I thought to myself as the cashier rang me up for 60 cents. After all, you can never have enough small ceramic gourds.

(Brittany Jasnoff is the executive editor of *Boston* magazine. She can't remember what she did with that pumpkin. This article originally appeared in *Boston* magazine on December 21.)

OBITUARY

Toros Moushigian

Devoted to Family, Knights of Vartan

WATERTOWN — Toros Moushigian of Watertown died peacefully at his home surrounded by his family on January 4, 2024.

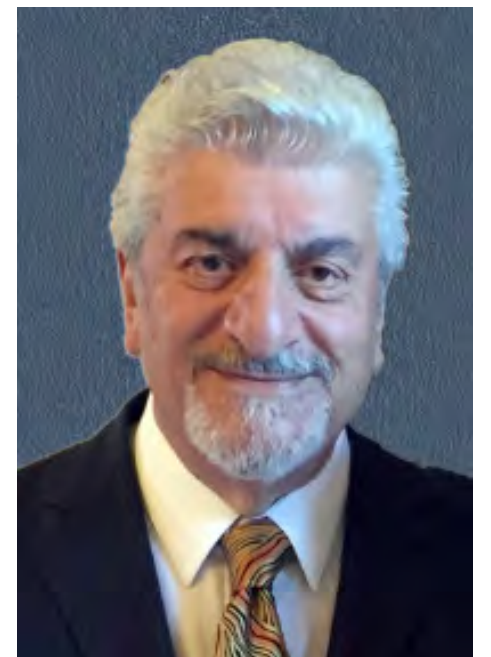
He was the husband of Zavarte (Gladys Andonian) for 37 years, and father of Ani and her husband Joey O'Neil.

Toros was born on October 13, 1944 in Jaffa, Palestine to Ardzive and Arshalous (Mahserejian). He was the elder brother of Varkes (Vinney), Hovannes (John) and Boghos (Paul); Toros also leaves his never forgotten daughters, whom he prayed for each night, Lisa, Tanya and Anjell, along with four grandchildren. He was also the brother-in-law of Kaspar Andonian and his wife Jayne and Garbis Andonian. He also leaves his niece Elana and her husband Justin, and nephews Alex Moushigian, Aram and Armen Andonian, grand-niece and grand-nephew Zoe and Westly, as well as his many cousins and extended family in LA whom he loved very deeply.

Toros was also a member of the Knights of Vartan and leaves behind his many brothers.

Toros spent more than 50 years in the transportation and hospitality industries, and for 15 years grew his business along with his wife Zavarte. His favorite things in life were gardening, cheering (defending) Tom Brady on the Patriots and cooking for the people he loved. Toros would cook for almost anyone for almost any occasion. If he heard that a friend or family member was sick, he would make and deliver something homemade.

The funeral service was held on Thursday, January 11, at St. James Armenian



Church, Watertown. Interment followed at Ridgelaun Cemetery in Watertown.

In lieu of flowers, a memorial gift can be made to:

- St. James Armenian Church in Watertown.
- KOV Ararat Lodge #1; Memo – Artsakh Economic Relief, PO Box 400, Belmont, MA 02478
- Dana-Farber Cancer Institute P.O. Box 849168, Boston, MA 02284. Please write checks payable to "Dana-Farber" and include "in memory of Toros Moushigian" in the memo line.

Arrangements were made by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home in Watertown.

Telephone (617) 924-7400

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ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR



COMMUNITY NEWS

'These Are Human Beings': Douglass Project Comes to Mass., Bringing Community Leaders and Inmates Together

By Ivy Scott

NORTH BILLERICA, Mass. (*Boston Globe*) — Chris hadn't always been much of a talker, particularly around people he didn't know, and especially in jail.

But sitting opposite a local police chief and a former town manager in the gym of the Middlesex County Jail, he decided to take the risk of opening up, and watched their faces fix on his, smiling and without judgment.

"I've always been an introverted person, but I talked and listened to a town manager and a police officer for 35 minutes and nobody was better than anybody," he said. "They ain't better than I am, I ain't better than they are, we're all the same."

This fall, Chris was one of 23 people to participate in the Massachusetts launch of the Frederick Douglass Project for Justice, an initiative to destigmatize incarceration already active in seven other states around the country. The Project, founded by Georgetown law professor Marc Howard in 2019, brings business, political, and religious leaders together with roughly a dozen inmates for weeks of candid conversation, focused not on criminal justice reform or public policy, but just about life.

Douglass, a prominent 19th-century abolitionist, escaped from slavery in Maryland and went on to advocate fiercely for the rights of freed slaves. A longtime Massachusetts resident, Douglass made it his mission to dismantle stereotypes that Black Americans were intellectually inferior to whites, and incapable of contributing to society outside of forced labor.

"Frederick Douglass was the most photographed man of his era. He had his photo taken over 160 times ... [because he] felt that it was important for people to see a free Black man, and to see a success," Middlesex Sheriff Peter Koutoujian told the group about the inspiration behind the project.

Howard, who led the session, added that the project's focus was for community members to humanize inmates, since the majority of the country's incarcerated population is expected to return home.

"These people ... are not monsters, they're not the mugshots you saw on the news," Howard said. "They're human beings who make mistakes, who are paying a steep price, but who are almost certainly coming home. And we want them to succeed."

Koutoujian said he selected the 13 participating inmates with the goal of representing a "diverse mixture of charge classifications, men and women, with different experiences and crimes," ranging from inmates serving several months at the jail for drunk driving to men awaiting trial for murder. He hoped this diversity would allow residents to cultivate empathy for a variety of incarcerated persons while giving inmates from various backgrounds exposure to the local community.

The three-hour event, scheduled to be held once a month until the end of next year, features a large-group introduction, a casual dinner, followed by several smaller breakout groups and a time of reflection at the end. While the visitors are different each session, Howard said the goal is for the inmates to remain the same, maximizing their opportunity to connect with a wide range of residents on different topics pre-release.

"These are meant to be humanizing questions," Howard said, handing out slips of paper with a short list of discussion prompts. "We don't care about your crime or your time, we just want to know who you are."

The *Globe* is not identifying the charges of any of the individuals at the request of the sheriff's office, which alongside the Douglass Project aims to focus on the inmates' humanity, not their criminal history.

Starting in a circle, folding chairs facing one another, inmates and visitors alike shared only their first names and the towns they grew up in, along with "one thing you're interested in that would surprise most people."

Several said music, one person said tattoos; former Arlington town manager and Massachusetts Municipal Association Executive Director Adam Chapdelaine drew oohs and ahs when he mentioned he makes his own maple syrup. As people spoke, Millie the emotional support dog sniffed her way around the circle, setting the room at ease.

On his turn, Chris hesitated a moment before saying, "I used to not have too many interests ... [but] today, I really enjoy life and everything that's coming at me." And politics, he added: "I love politics."

True to his word, after grabbing his sandwich and a bag of chips from a table near the front of the room, Chris inched his chair over to Chapdelaine's corner of the gym.

"You don't have to answer, but can I ask you a question? You know what I'm gonna ask, don't you?" he said. "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?"

Chapdelaine laughed and after a brief pause, said he was a Democrat. Immediately, Chris's face lit up: "Me, too!"

As they swapped policy ideas, the pair were joined by Billerica police Chief Roy Frost and another inmate, Mario, whose maroon jumpsuit signaled his role as a mentor for some of the younger inmates in

the jail. The smaller group was given three new discussion prompts, but Howard encouraged participants to go where the conversation led them — and for this group, it quickly turned to inmates' dreams for the future.

"I'm interested in building and leaving a legacy for my children ... and especially a business for my son to take over," said Mario, who grew up in Dorchester and said he ran a trucking business prior to his arrest. "I worked all my life," he added, and

give to teenagers and young adults struggling to make good choices today. Neither inmate minced words, stressing the importance of honest conversation and helping kids find constructive outlets for their energy and free time.

"It's important to get to kids when they're really young. Let them know how hard life is," Chris said, gesturing to the high walls around him. "Getting in here is easy, but once you're in, you can't just get out."

As the night wrapped up, Howard called



Louis L. Reed, executive justice fellow (left), and Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian spoke to participants as they took part in the national Frederick Douglass program inside the Middlesex House of Correction and Jail. (JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF)

it's only through the jail's partnership with Merrimack College that he's been able to take his first college classes, which range from a Survey of American Music to Intro to Christianity.

Chris, who grew up in South Boston, said he had a different experience.

"I've spent most of my life in prison, never had a job in my life before this," he said, balancing his sandwich on one knee of his green jumpsuit, which indicated his participation in the jail's work release program for inmates who have already been sentenced, and are preparing to return to the community.

"Not everyone who comes to jail is bad beyond the point of redemption," he said. "Give us the tools to at least start the change, and many of us will. And this place helps us do that."

For more than five months, Chris has maintained steady employment at a family-style restaurant in Woburn. He proudly shared that he's saving up to support his transition back home once he's released, and "just broke \$10,000 with my most recent paycheck!"

Frost, the police chief, then asked both incarcerated men what advice they would

the full group back into a circle to share reflections. Several business owners voiced interest in hiring the inmates they met, while one inmate joked of his interaction with Frost that "this was probably the longest conversation I've had with a cop in my life!"

For his part, Frost said he marveled at the wisdom of Chris, Mario, and the other inmates, "guys who have had these experiences but are now so mature." He added: "Now I'm wondering, how do I get their message out in a more efficient way?"

This, Koutoujian said, was exactly the reaction he'd hoped the project would generate in Massachusetts: community leaders who felt encouraged to set an example of empathy in their neighborhoods, and inmates who felt empowered to prepare for the world to which they would soon return.

"This is not a castle on a hill, we're a part of a community, and if we don't participate in that community, then we've failed and society will pay for that," he said. "Today, we look into each other's eyes and see each other's humanity."

(This story appeared in the *Boston Globe* on December 27. Ivy Scott can be reached at ivy.scott@globe.com.)

Christmas Greetings

Dr. Ruben Boyajian, Effingham, IL \$200
Peter Balakian, Hamilton, NY \$200
Carl Bazarian, Amelia Island, FL \$200
Gerard Libaridian, Cambridge, MA \$100

Annual Donation To *The Mirror-Spectator*

Aranco Oil Company, Inc. of Concord, NH donates \$5000 to the Armenian Mirror_Spectator, in memory of Isabelle Aranosian Hodgson, Gladys Aranosian Hayes and Margaret Aranosian Gattis.

The following donations were made to the Tekeyan Cultural Association's Art-sakh Refugee Aid Program, in memory of Loosia S. Stepanians, who passed away in November. (Stepanians was the mother of Alin K. Gregorian, the *Mirror-Spectator's* editor.)

Evelyn Petrossian, Belmont, MA \$300
Genia Yeghiazarians, North Andover, MA \$300
Alexan and Hilda Khachaturian, Belmont, MA \$300
Aram and Knarik Arkun, Lynnfield, MA \$200
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Anna Nazarian, Burlington, MA \$100
Laura Boghosian, Whitinsville, MA \$50



COMMUNITY NEWS

An Armenian Architect Built Three Top Hotels near the White House

By Haykaram Nahapetyan
Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

WASHINGTON — There are three top-tier hotels near the White House built by an Armenian-American architect. What are now St. Regis and Sofitel, as well as Hay Adams, along with several buildings on Connecticut Avenue, one of the key streets of the Nation’s capital, and numerous constructions in the English Village area as well as Northern Virginia, are attributed to Mihran Mesrobian (1889-1975).

Mesrobian implemented the significant part of his projects while working for developer Harry Wardman. “It was very important for Wardman socially to be near the White



Entrance of the St. Regis Hotel

House to show these hotels were the best in Washington,” noted the granddaughter of the architect, lecturer at the University of Maryland Dr. Caroline Hickman-Mesrobian, telling the story of the hotels located in the vicinity of the presidential office. Wardman and Mesrobian completed St. Regis (known initially as the Carlton Hotel) in 1926, Hay Adams in 1928, and Sofitel (originally Shoreham Hotel) in 1929.

English-born Harry Wardman (1872-1938) was one of the key real-estate developers of the District of Columbia in the early 20th century. Mesrobian worked for him soon after settling in Washington in 1921. After living for 31 years in Turkey and rebuilding the Dolmabahce Palace of the Sultans (once built by the Balian Armenian architects), Mesrobian chose to move to the United States. Caroline says that before leaving Constantinople/Istanbul, Mesrobian traveled back to Afyon, where his parents lived, and reclaimed some compensation for some of the lands his family had lost during the Genocide. This was when Turkey’s west was

under Allied control following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. As Mesrobian received Armenian identification documents during the short period of the independence of the Armenian Republic (1918-1920), he



Mihran Mesrobian



Aram Bakshian, right, meeting US President Ronald Reagan

was able to make his way to the United States because America was helping the suffering Armenians during and for some period after World War I.

About one century later, in 2016, when visiting Wash-



Mihran Mesrobian's Armenian passport



Dupont Circle building by Mihran Mesrobian



COMMUNITY NEWS

ington, Turkish President Recep Erdogan stayed at the St. Regis hotel. The Turkish leader lived in a building designed by an Armenian architect, who, despite his significant record of services to Ottoman Turkey, had to flee due to persecution.

The late Aram Bakshian, speechwriter for three Republican Presidents, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan, used to call Mihran Mesrobian 'uncle Mihran.' "Actually, he was a great uncle as he was married to my grandmother's sister. Her name was Zabel," said Aram Bakshian when the author met him last time about two years ago.

Bakshian passed away in 2022. As someone interested in Mesrobian's life and professional work, I had met Bakshian to learn more about the prominent architect for my research and media projects a few months before his demise.



An old telephone box dedicated to Mihran Mesrobian and Harry Wardman in Washington

Per Bakshian, Mesrobian chose to settle in Washington because he had relatives here (Bakshian's grandparents had settled in the District of Columbia in the late 19th century) to help in the beginning. "Plus, Washington is a city with lots of hotels and government buildings that provide opportunities for interesting work for an architect. And Uncle Mihran, having been a palace architect, was experienced in doing large, serious projects," noted Bakshian.

Soon after settling down, Mesrobian became Wardman's chief architect. Together, they worked on numerous projects, including the aforementioned hotels and the Cathedral Mansions Apartment Building. They both remodeled and rebuilt what is now the Marriot Wardman Hotel. Caroline Hickman Mesrobian says Hay Adams, however, is her favorite one as she believes "this is the most elegant building designed by Mesrobian." She teaches American Architecture at the University of Maryland and has written extensively about her grandfather and the Armenian history of the historic city of Afyon.

Among the archive documents related to Mesrobian that

Erdoğan'ın kaldığı otelin mimarı, ailesi 1915'te sürgüne gönderilen bir Ermeni

Misrobian Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Çanakkale, Suriye ve Filistin cephelelerinde savaştı



Turkish media reporting about President Recep Tayyip Erdogan staying at St. Regis, designed by Mesrobian



St. Mary Apostolic Church of Washington D.C.

Caroline has preserved is the design of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic church. In 1954, the community purchased an unfinished structure that currently serves as the lower level of the St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church. "Because this was already in place, he had a rectangular that he had to work with," noted Caroline, pointing to the sketches and blueprints by Mesrobian.

Mesrobian also designed his mansion near the D.C. line in Montgomery County, Maryland. In 2017, the County Council voted to approve the historic designation for the

Mihran Mesrobian house. This, as well as the old telephone box dedicated to Mesrobian at the corner of 29th St NW and Cortland Place NW, are the results of successful efforts by the Mesrobian family. The box contains information about Mesrobian and Wardman and a photograph depicting these two notable professionals and friends.

Per Aram Bakshian, one of the last projects "Uncle Mihran" worked on was one of the US Congress parking garages. As Bakshian remembers, "They needed something imaginative for the parking areas. It had to have several layers of parking above ground. And he designed an interesting façade. He broke it up, [made it] less monotonous. It wasn't just a bleak wall. That was one of his late works, towards the end of his career." Nowadays, this place serves as the parking garage of the Rayburn building of the US Capitol. The office of the historian of Congress noticed that they had no record of it. A company from Pennsylvania designed the building, and, as the office of the historian noted, "If Mesrobian worked for this firm or any of the firms for any of the Congressional buildings, his name wouldn't necessarily be in our records."

Mesrobian's involvement in constructing the US Capitol's site still needs to be explored and put on record.

This year marks his 135th birthyear. See mirrorspectator.com for an accompanying video.



Marriott Wardman Park Tower on a sunny summer day, view from the east



Arts & Culture

Artak Harutyunyan

The Circus Multi-Talent

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / MOSCOW OBLAST — Artak Harutyunyan (born 1972, Hoktember village, Armenia) is a multi-hyphenated circus artist: clown, tightrope walker, juggler, magician and musical eccentric.

As a teenager, he participated in all community groups in the town of Metsamor (theatre, youth technicians, chess, acrobatics, football, boxing), and at the same time studied violin at a music school. He studied at the Leonid Yengibaryan Studio of the State Circus of Armenia (artistic director: Sos Petrosyan) and the Moscow State College for Circus and Variety Arts. He has been a professional on stage since 1989, participated in many circus and variety festivals, became a laureate of international competitions. In 2001-2007 he worked in Japan; in 2012-2014 and 2022-2023 he was invited to work in the legendary circus of Yuri Nikulin.

Since 2008, Artak has been the director of the Wonderful People production center. From 2010 to 2015 he was the artistic director of the World of Fantasy cultural center in Yegorevsk, near Moscow, and since 2015 – the artistic director of the circus studio Arena of Miracles in the cultural centers of Korobovo and Serednik, in Moscow Oblast. He directed “Color of Fairy Tale Heroes,” “The New Adventures of Father Frost and Snow White,” “The Wolf and the Seven Owls,” “Funny Boys” and other performances. Through his efforts, the Sandachok folk ensemble and the Wild Clover vocal and instrumental ensemble were created. He also performed regularly in the Yerevan circus.



Artak, your biography and current activities are so rich and diverse that it is impossible to cover everything within the limits of one interview. Let's start with general questions about the circus. You have worked in different countries. What is the attitude towards the circus in various countries?

Circus is a unique art whose history begins before our era. I do not know whose phrase “Bread and circus” is, but that factor is still alive all over the see TALENT, page 13



Healing Scrolls at the Walters Art Museum

Armenian and Ethiopian Art Share Spotlight in Baltimore Exhibit

By Nora Hamerman

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BALTIMORE — A new exhibit at Baltimore's Walters Art Museum, titled “Ethiopia at the Crossroads,” is not only a delight for the eye and mind,

but it also sheds light on a little-known relationship between the two oldest nations to have embraced Christianity, some 1,700 years ago. The show, which will also travel to the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem, Mass. and the Toledo Art Museum in Ohio, reveals that Armenia and Ethiopia enjoyed close ties over the centuries that are visible in the two countries' art.

One of the thrills of the Baltimore exhibit is a chance to see the Gospel decorated by Armenia's most celebrated medieval book illuminator, Toros Roslin, who was active in the mid 1200s at the monastery of Hromkla, in Cilicia, now southern Turkey. This precious possession of the Walters Museum was not loaned to “Armenia!” — the exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum five years ago — but now you can see it side by side with an Ethiopian Gospel book at the Walters show.

The *Toros Roslin Gospel of 1262* (MS W.539) is not only the most lavishly decorated among the signed works of Roslin, but the only complete one in the United States. The manuscript was kept in the ancient trading hub of Sivas (Sepastia, formerly part of Armenia Minor, now Turkey) since the 17th century where it remained until the Armenian genocide in 1919. Ten years later it was purchased by American rail magnate Henry Walters in Paris. Walters, founder of the Walters Art Museum, had long been interested in Armenian art, but his passion was rekindled by the tragic events of the previous decade.

In the first gallery of the exhibit, titled “Ethiopia at the Crossroads” (the name invokes Ethiopia's unique geographical position between Africa, Asia and Europe) there is a modern painting by Skunder Boghossian, an Ethiopian-Armenian painter and art teacher who worked mainly in the United States and was one of the first Black artists from the African continent to gain international attention and acclaim.

Armenia adopted Christianity in 301 CE, followed by Ethiopia in the 320s, about a decade after the Emperor Constantine legalized Christian worship in the Roman Empire in 313. The relationship between the two countries, despite their distance in geography, began very early. Not only do the Armenian and Ethiopian alphabets show some visual similarities, but some scholars think that when Armenian script was codified in 406, a few characters were borrowed from Ethiopic.

see EXHIBIT, page 15

Armenian Music Documentary ‘We Thrive’ to Be Shown at Izmir Festival

“We Thrive,” the award-winning documentary on Armenian-American musicians and the healing powers of music will be screened at IZDOC International Documentary Festival in Izmir, Turkey at the French Culture Center on January 25 -28, 2024. The film's producers are honored that the progressive festival organizers are willing to screen this Armenian American documentary.

“We Thrive” is a feature length documentary that demonstrates all of us can go beyond the struggles and tragedies of our lives, and the often tragic history of our ancestors, and “thrive” via music.

Filmmakers Lisa Hagopian and Eric Harabadian of vision 561 Productions LLC produced this feature film spotlighting an eclectic mix of musicians who share a common bond. The film features Eliza Thom-



A screenshot from “We Thrive”

asian Neals, Ara Topouzian, Hachig Kazarian, Stevie “Soul” Ansara, Kim Kashkashian, Chuck al- Kazian, Kim Naccashian, Dan Yessian, Sean Blackman, Tanya Venom, Tia Mayhem and Vaughn Masropian.

Armenian-American history is a tale of genocide, struggle, survival and, ultimately, renewal. These aspects are touched on in detail through a contemporary lens that sheds light on the Armenian community at large and on a more personal scale, with stories from the subjects in the film.

“We Thrive” is told through conversations, archival footage, photographs and live performances. It is a unique and captivating mix of traditional Armenian music, world beat, rock, blues and classical.

“We Thrive” won best documentary at the Golden Door Film Festival in New Jersey and the Independent Spirit Award from the Detroit Trinity International Film Festival. The film was nominated in the category of best documentary at the Glendale International Film Festival in “California and “Best Music Documentary” and Lisa Hagopian was nominated for “Best Directress” by Film Threat Magazine's “Award This!” competition.

An Armenian-American production of this nature being screened in Turkey is a significant accomplishment and honor. View the We Thrive Official Trailer.

For more information contact harab1@comcast.net or www.facebook.com/wethrivemovie .



ARTS & CULTURE

Artak Harutyunyan: The Circus Multi-Talent

TALENT, from page 12

world. Over the centuries, the circus has undergone changes in its genres, but the interest in it among the peoples has not decreased. As for which country has a stationary circus building and whose audience likes to visit the circus, I would say the first is Russia, then Kazakhstan, where there are four stationary circus buildings. There are a few of them in Europe, America and other countries.

If you can surprise everywhere with amazing tricks, then making the audience laugh is the most difficult thing. Have you felt that the sense of humor is different among different peoples?

I will say the following: it depends on a person's sense of humor, and children's attention and logic towards absurd stagecraft. In my practice, there has never been a case where the audience did not laugh, although I do not like mimes. The main thing for me is to be natural, eccentric.

Many people, including me, are against training animals in the circus. What is your opinion?

The sad thing is that the "circus without animals" phenomenon is managed and well financed by a group of producers and political operatives. To be honest, today's circus has become just a business. If during the Soviet regime it was art, now it is business. Almost all producers are interested in having a low-cost circus program. And wild and exotic animals are a very expensive pleasure in the circus, the costs are enormous. Here is the truth. Meanwhile, they do not present the situation correctly to the people, they write that animals are being beaten and killed in a circus, so that they can train them. To be honest, unfortunately, people are crueler to each other.

What memorable event will you tell from your career?

I perform in the circus as a musical eccentric, almost 80 percent of my circus acts are related to musical instruments. I have professional knowledge of 12 instruments. As a child, I attended a music school, learned to play the violin and piano, mastered the saxophone at the Moscow circus school, over the years I also learned to play the clarinet, harmonica, bells, duduk, zurna, shvi (Armenian fipple flute), zhaleika (Slavic wind instrument), trobophone (sewer pipe instrument), xylophone. There have been many interesting and fairy-tale moments to tell, it will take a long time, I will rather write them down in my memoirs when I retire (laughs).

One of the funniest incidents happened in Japan, in the fairy tale park "Tokyo Disney Sea." In Japanese, I played the role of a merchant who offers his goods to the audience at astronomical prices, loaded on a camel. It is clear that no audience would do business with me, because it was about millions of dollars. The entire performance should not be more or less than 20 minutes, that is the order, and the Japanese love punctuality. At approximately the 7-10th minute of the show, I put my camel up for auction and bid 100,000 dollars. And suddenly a spectator rose his hand and wanted to buy the camel. I said that I only take cash dollars. He agreed. I did not believe that he will really give cash and I asked to show me his dollars. A second later, his two bodyguards opened the bag and showed the bundles of dollars. Here I made an unexpected improvisation, saying that the camel is not for sale, he is my relative, my friend. All this took only 13-15 minutes, and I finished the number ahead of time. After the speech, our Japanese bosses warned me this incident should be the first and the last, and they also admitted that they

had set it up on purpose to see if I would take the money or not.

In your opinion, what is the future of the circus?

In my opinion, it is in traditional circus, in which there are only magicians, clowns, acrobats and other artists who perform without technological and other decorative luxuries, whose faces are bright and without masks. As about today's circus, if I present it through the eyes of a modern director, then Chinese circus actors show the most complicated tricks and work unified, but without clowns. I cannot help but remember the Canadian "Cirque du Soleil," which revolutionized the entire circus format, and many people want to be like it. In my opinion, the demand for new circus pays a lot of attention to effect technologies, 5D, 8D and other synthetic components, and the saddest thing is that some circus genres are losing their existence. One of them, perhaps the most important one, is the clown, who

the circus. Before opening the academy, I invited people of different positions and their families to a free show I organized, which included musical eccentricities and clown performances. After the concert, out of 70 people in the hall, 25 parents with their children remained. The director of the circus, Hiroshi-san, offered me to teach all genres of the circus: magic, acrobatics, balancing, original genres and musical eccentricities. Working with children taught me a lot. Japanese children are more resistant and persistent; they will not rest until they do what is required of them. If something failed, they cried. Seeing their concern, I changed the assignment so that they would feel good and not lose their enthusiasm. After Japan, I also taught for 12 years in the World of Fantasy and Arena of Miracles circus studios near Moscow, and I can say that Russian children do not have this endurance and discipline. There are talented people, but they are lazy. However, I found

of the time when the world will buy Armenian products, that "made in Armenia" will apply to various fields and, why not, to the circus as well. All over the world, we have many talented Armenian actors of different genres of circus, but there was no one who could organize an Armenian circus collective. Many states are now investing a lot of money in circus programs, it is one of the state's treasures. Did you know that in Soviet times, the most profitable arts in terms of bringing currency were ballet and circus? That is a fact! Our Armenian circus collective was considered one of the best, where legendary artists Stepan Isahakyan, Leonid Yengibaryan, Nazee Shirai, Vagharshak Arzumanyan, clowns Harutyunyan and Minerevyan, jugglers Hakobyan couple worked, among other respectable personalities. I cannot help but mention my talented colleagues Vilen Melikjanyan, Anton Pilosyan, Eduard Hakobyan, Martiros Keshchyan, who have also upheld the



Artak Harutyunyan in costume

connects the circus program from one act to another. To tell you the truth, I do not like the word "clown" because politicians express everything negative with that innocent name, while the clown instills only good with his friendly performances (I am not talking about animators and fake clowns, whose faces you cannot look at, they put so much makeup that at night people do not sleep because of fear). I mean professional actors: yes, nowadays there are good circus comedians, but no one talks about them. If in Soviet times, they often made films about clowns as publicity for good and kind, now the clown has become a shadow.

Artak, I learned about you for the first time when I was collecting data about Armenians in Japan. Is the circus academy you founded in Japan still operating?

I created my first pedagogical skills in Japan, in the city of Shin-Urayasu, Chiba Prefecture, at the "Mare" cultural center. By the way, there have been educators in my family tree since my paternal grandmother, and I wanted to transfer my knowledge to Japanese children through

an individual approach for them as well. In Japan, the circus academy existed for two years and three months, during which time the children learned different circus genres and most importantly, to be confident and believe in their abilities. After my contract ended, I could not find a sponsor and a replacement, so unfortunately, I dissolved the circus academy and returned to Armenia, from where my activity in the Yerevan circus began again.

Armenia's circus traditions are rich, but the traditional circus building does not operate. Ten years ago it was reported that the government invested 107.9 million drams (\$264,680) in the building of the Yerevan circus, then it blew up the dome in order to build a new, more comfortable and modern building on the spot. Today we have a restored circus building, but circus performances rarely take place in the tent. There are some rumors that the stationary circus will be opened this summer.

That will be a miracle! And our circus can become an Armenian brand. We dream

honor of the Armenian circus artist. Bright and good memory to those who are not in this world, and may God give health and strength to those who are alive.

Do you follow the circus life of Armenia?

Of course, I follow the development of our Armenian circus; I am very happy to see Naira Petrosyan's students on different stages. The Vardanyan brothers offered me to work in their program, which they presented last autumn in the traveling circus you remember: unfortunately, I have contracts until the end of next January, so I could not come to Armenia.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish our Armenian people peace, wisdom, and the most important thing, that common sense should be the priority for them, not emotional outbursts. "We are few, but they call us Armenians," and all of us should be able to see the love between the Lord and ourselves. That's all, I hope the time will come, and the good will come later. Thank you, dear Artsvi, for the good questions and your interest! Health and all the best to everyone!



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Dinner at Omar Khayyam's Armenian Grape Leaves (Sarma)

Shake Antaramian, 85, a former employee at Sloat Garden Center in San Francisco makes this traditional Armenian recipe for her family, and says it is one of their favorite dishes. Born in Baghdad, Shake enjoys a variety of Middle Eastern dishes from her family's past, and particularly likes this recipe adapted from Dinner at Omar Khayyam's, the classic 1944 cookbook by renowned San Francisco restaurateur, chef, author, and philanthropist, George Mardikian, America's first celebrity chef.

Shake came to the United States over 60 years ago, and studied medicine and chemistry at the University of Nebraska, Kent State University, and UC Berkeley Medical School. She settled in Marin County north of San Francisco, married, and had two children. She worked at Sloat Garden Center well into her 80s.



First lady Eleanor Roosevelt was among the many dignitaries who visited chef George Mardikian's San Francisco restaurant, Omar Khayyam's. Roosevelt regularly dropped in with wounded service people, who ate for free. Archival / San Francisco Chronicle

tastes in the United States. He eventually bought Clinton's Cafeteria and built it into a world-famous restaurant, Omar Khayyam's, where he hosted many notable people including President Dwight Eisenhower and former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Mardikian stood at the helm of Omar Khayyam's in downtown San Francisco from 1938 to 1980.

Mardikian married Nazenig Arakelian on June 1, 1930. Alongside his wife, he opened a popular Fresno lunch counter called Omar Khayyam's in 1932, named after the famous Persian poet.

He opened his second restaurant (Omar Khayyam's) in San Francisco in 1938. He moved his restaurant to two large buildings in Fresno, and then to San Francisco in the old Coffee Dan's building. As he frequently said, his dream was to teach Americans how to eat well. He opened a chain of sandwich shops, called Chestnut Tree, in 1940.

Mardikian was significant in popularizing Armenian cuisine and

The menu's traditional shish kebab and bulgur pilaf were the main attraction for a large clientele largely unfamiliar with such food.

"George Mardikian donated his services as caterer for the United Nations Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco in 1945, that led to the establishment of the United Nations. After World War II, with thousands of Armenian refugees scattered over a devastated Europe, it was an Armenian grass roots organization, the American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA), that rescued and resettled compatriots in need. Starting in 1947, a handful of organizers led by George Mardikian and Suren Saroyan, a San Francisco attorney, founded ANCHA and mobilized a large segment of the Armenian community to raise travel funds, lobby the U.S. government, send food and clothes to over 3,500 Armenians in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Europe, and ultimately provide shelter to compatriots in distress.

"In Dinner at Omar Khayyam's, Mardikian reveals the culinary secrets which had made his establishment so famous. The recipes are for Armenian food, prepared in the Armenian fashion, but seasoned to the American palate. The dishes described are exotic and different, but thrifty, healthful, and easy, even for amateur chefs, to prepare. His food is sophisticated enough for parties, but economical and well balanced enough to serve to the whole family."

Mardikian didn't just appeal to tastes - he made them, too. When he promoted the "Omar's Delight" cocktail to help his friend sell more Southern Comfort, the restaurant accounted for more sales of the liquor than the rest of San Francisco combined, according to a 1951 San Francisco Chronicle story.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup olive oil
- 5 cups onions, chopped
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 1 cup fresh parsley chopped finely (Shake adds chopped cilantro and mint leaves)
- 1/2 cup currants (optional)
- 1/2-3/4 cup pine nuts
- 1/2 cup tomato sauce (Shake uses fresh tomatoes, peeled and seeded)
- 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice, to taste
- 2 1/2 cups water
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon salt, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 16-oz. jar grape leaves in brine (about 50 to 75 leaves, such as Orlando brand), rinsed OR fresh grape leaves
- Thinly sliced fresh lemons and parsley as garnish

Note: Shake says, "Please remember when using fresh grape leaves, it's important to blanch the leaves briefly in heavily salted boiling water before stuffing."

PREPARATION:

Pour olive oil in a large pot, and cook the onions until tender, stirring. Add the rice, currants, pine nuts, tomato sauce, lemon juice, and spices, stir, and bring to a low boil. Turn heat to low, cover, and cook for 15-20 minutes, stirring. Add the parsley and stir. Remove the pot from the stove and allow to cool completely.

If using fresh grape leaves, not jarred: Add 1 teaspoon of salt to two quarts water and bring it to a boil. Immerse grape leaves (a few at a time) in the hot water for 30 seconds or until the leaves change color. Take grape leaves out of the boiling water and allow to cool.

When ready to assemble: Place 1-2 teaspoons of rice stuffing on each grape leaf and roll it up like a package. Arrange them side by side into a large pot or casserole lined by three or four layers of torn grape leaves (in order to prevent the grape leaves from burning).

Add the 2 1/2 cups of water over the grape leaves. Place a crockery plate over the top of the grape leaves, and bake in a preheated 350°F oven until water has almost absorbed, for about an hour (or a little longer).

Check if rice is fully cooked, and remove pot or casserole from oven; allow grape leaves to cool completely. Cover and refrigerate overnight in the same pan. Serve grape leaves on a platter and garnish with fresh lemon slices and parsley. Drizzle with olive oil, if desired.

Jarred grape leaves may be purchased at Middle Eastern markets and grocery stores or online at Amazon.

For this recipe, go to: <https://sloatgardens.com/recipes/recipe-dolmas/>

Sloat Garden Center began in 1958, and is a premier garden center in Northern California. Sloat Garden Center has become the largest independent pottery importer in the U.S., with strong ties to many other independent garden chains that purchase their pottery through Sloat. For information, go to: <https://plants.sloatgardens.com/#>

Dinner at Omar Khayyam's: This indispensable cookbook by George Mardikian, an Armenian-American restaurateur, chef and author, was originally published in 1944 and has provided generations of Americans with basic Armenian recipes. It has been reprinted several times which is a testament of the cookbook's great popularity. For decades George Mardikian was the chef owner of the celebrated San Francisco restaurant, Omar Khayyam's. The original foreword was by William Saroyan. Available at Sophe Books. To order, go to: <https://sophenebooks.com/products/dinner-at-omar-khayyams>

For George Mardikian's Famous Chicken Tchakhokbelli recipe, see: <https://mirrorspectator.com/2022/06/09/george-mardikians-famous-chicken-tchakhokbelli/>



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Burbank Dog Is Hero of a Children's Book

By Liz Ohanesian

BURBANK, Calif. (*Orange County Register*) — Inside Burbank's Republik Coffee, Lucy jumps on her hind legs as if she's about to greet me with a hug. We've never met before, but the 8-year-old poodle mix is incredibly friendly.

Lucy's human, Tenny Minassian, tells me later outside, "She just loves going out and meeting people and seeing other dogs." Sure enough, Lucy has spent much of this interview greeting passersby, both human and canine.

In 2015, this rescued puppy charmed Minassian and her family. Since then, Minassian and Lucy have been on plenty of adventures together, meeting new people and animals in the process. One of those adventures inspired Minassian to write her first children's book, *Lucy Goes to the Gentle Barn*.



The children's book "Lucy Goes to the Gentle Barn," written by Tenny Minassian with illustrations by Agavny Vardanyan, is based on the author's visit to the Santa Clarita animal sanctuary The Gentle Barn with Lucy, her poodle mix rescue dog. (Images courtesy of Tenny Minassian)

"I just started thinking about how much she has in common with kids and their experiences, especially young kids," Minassian says. For example, she notes, Lucy is not a fan of visits to the veterinarian, a situation that might be similar to how children feel about doctor's appointments. "So, I started thinking of all these ideas that I could write about her."

At The Gentle Barn in Santa Clarita, humans and animals connect through activities like cow hug therapy and horse grooming. Minassian visited the animal sanctuary with her father and Lucy back in 2017.

In *Lucy Goes to the Gentle Barn*, with illustrations by Agavny Vardanyan, the small dog learns to be brave when encountering much larger animals. She befriends a cow who shares her name and smooches a horse — and Minassian shows me a photo of the moment when the dog and horse did so in real life. "She had a good time; I wanted to start there," says Minassian. "I reached out to the Gentle Barn and they were OK with it."

Ellie Laks, founder of The Gentle Barn, is a fan of the book — and Lucy.

"At The Gentle Barn, we have guests from all over the world, young and old. Some cry, some connect to animals, some feel part of a greater animal-loving community, and some are brought to tears," says Laks via email. "I love that Lucy gets to come to The Gentle Barn and meet new friends from tiny chickens, goats with golden eyes, pigs rolling over for belly rubs, giant cows, and even large horses. ... It's a wonderful way for people to experience The Gentle Barn through the eyes of an adorable puppy named Lucy. I recommend the book to everyone."

Two years before the trip to The Gentle Barn, Minassian had just returned to Southern California from graduate school at San Francisco State. "I told my parents, When I move back we're getting a dog," recalls Minassian, who had never had a dog before Lucy. Her family is from Iran — Minassian was born there as well — where having a dog as a pet isn't as common as it is in the U.S.

"My mom was really scared of dogs," she says.

But it was Minassian's mother who picked out Lucy from the Southern California Pomeranian Rescue. Minassian recalls her mom's reaction when the folks at the rescue first brought Lucy to stay with the family for a trial period.

"She just scooped Lucy up and was in love with her," says Minassian. "It was adorable. She had never touched a dog in her life."

Now Lucy is part of the family. She responds to commands in English and Armenian, the language Minassian's parents use with her. She's traveled with them to Las Vegas and even on a trip to Armenia in 2019, which might be the subject of future books that Minassian plans to write. "I have a whole series that I want to do on that," she says.

Minassian laughs when she thinks back on the Armenian trip. "We took Aeroflot. Not a good idea," she says of the Russian airline. "They were not really on board with emotional support animals."

At the time of the trip with Lucy, Minassian says



Tenny Minassian

the places she visited in Armenia weren't particularly dog-friendly either. She recalls restaurants with outdoor seating weren't pleased with the little pooch hanging around. Finding an Air B&B was a challenge and they had to regularly confirm with ride-share drivers that bringing a dog on board was okay, she says.

"It was a whole culture shock for us," says Minassian. Still, it was an exciting trip, even if Lucy couldn't go inside the churches and nearly had to watch from below as Minassian rode the 3.5-mile aerial tramway, Wings of Tatev (but was ultimately allowed to go, too).

Back home, Minassian and Lucy explore bookstores, vegan restaurants and coffee shops together, scenes from which sometimes pop up on the Instagram account @lucy2therescue. They'll go to poetry readings, participate in the Best Friends Animal Society Walk and dress up for Halloween.

"She hates that," Minassian says of the Halloween costumes, "but she does it and we're matching."

Lucy has even reunited with one of her canine siblings, thanks to the dog DNA platform Embark. "As soon as her sister did it, they came up as a match," says Minassian. "They had the same exact walk. It's adorable."

The little dog has been a big life-changer. As Minassian dealt with depression a few years back, Lucy became her emotional support dog. And as a result of their bond, Minassian adopted a vegan lifestyle.

"I started questioning why I eat some animals and not others," says Minassian, who made a career change, too.

After working in marketing, PR and social media, Minassian took a plant-based culinary course and a nutrition certificate and became a vegan coach, helping others adjust to the diet. She has also been at work on a vegan cookbook with her mom, focusing on plant-based Iranian-Armenian dishes.

But it wasn't just Minassian whose life Lucy changed.

"She's really changed my whole family," she says. "Nobody wanted a dog. Everybody loves her now."

After our short visit, it was easy to see why.

The Gentle Barn is open Sundays to the public, as well as for private tours, field trips and special events. For tickets and more information, visit gentlebarn.org

Armenian and Ethiopian Art Share Spotlight in Baltimore Exhibit

EXHIBIT, from page 12

The exhibition catalogue explains the Armenian trade routes into Africa were far earlier and more extensive than previously believed, beginning as early as the fourth century CE. Another way that artistic and theological ideas were exchanged was the fact that Ethiopian and Armenian clerics lived side by side caring for holy sites in places like Jerusalem. Manuscripts, textiles, and small devotional and liturgical objects went back and forth.

In Jerusalem, the Ethiopian and Armenian artists shared an early emphasis

on the symbolism of the cross. Indeed, the very earliest signs of Ethiopia's new Christian faith in the fourth century are coins minted under the first Christian Emperor which at first show a crescent moon, and then are suddenly marked with crosses. (Crucifixes, showing the body of the Crucified Christ on the cross, came much later, under Western influence.)

Two kinds of religious artifacts make the relationship between Ethiopia and Armenia especially clear: One is the canon tables in Gospel books; the other is Healing Scrolls.

Canon tables were a system of dividing the Four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, before the modern system of chapters and verses came along in the 13th and 16th centuries. The tables showed the concordances among the different accounts side-by-side. The canon tables of Toros Roslin and the Ethiopic example in the exhibit both show colorful birds surmounting the arched frames of the tables and strikingly similar geometric designs decorating the columns.

Healing Scrolls were a form a private devotion to heal the sick and ward off evil spirits. As curator Christine Sciacca

explains, the scrolls from Ethiopia were usually the same height as the person invoking the spiritual power of the scrolls, whereas the Armenian scrolls were often very long. In both cases the invocation of magical powers in the scrolls was frowned upon by religious authorities, but the inclusion of pictures of beloved saints (especially St. Sarkis, one of the most popular Armenian saints) and scenes from the life of Jesus made them acceptable.

The exhibit, which opened on December 3, 2023, will go through March 3, 2024.

ARTS & CULTURE

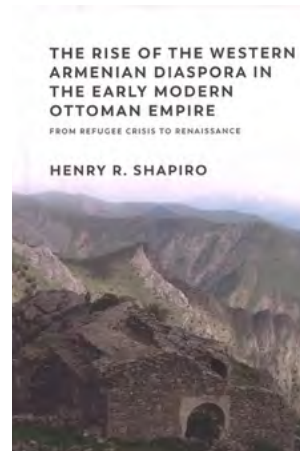
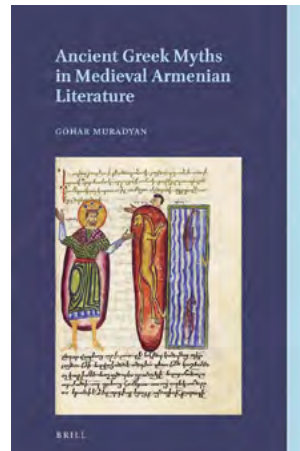
NAASR Announces Winners of 2023 Dr. Sona Aronian Armenian Studies Book Prizes

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) is pleased to announce the 2023 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prizes for Excellence in Armenian Studies, jointly awarded to Dr. Vartan Matiossian for *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide: Language, History and ‘Medz Yeghern’* (I. B. Tauris, 2022) and Dr. Henry Shapiro for *The Rise of the Western Armenian Diaspora in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022); and to Dr. Gohar Muradyan for the English-language translation *Ancient Greek Myths in Medieval Armenian Literature* (Brill, 2022), a translation of Հին հունական առասպելների արձագանքները հայ վիճնադարյան մատենագրության մեջ (2014). The 2023 awards are for books with a 2022 publication date.

NAASR’s Aronian Book Prizes were established in 2014 by the late Dr. Aronian and Dr. Geoffrey Gibbs, to be awarded annually to outstanding scholarly works in the English language in the field of Armenian Studies and translations from Armenian into English.

“In a year with numerous ground-breaking scholarly works, it is a pleasure to recognize these three that cover such a wide range of topics with admirable scholarly rigor,” commented NAASR’s Director of Academic Affairs Marc Mamigonian.

Vartan Matiossian’s *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide* explores the



genealogy of the concept of ‘Medz Yeghern’ (‘Great Crime’), an Armenian term for the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. The work draws upon extensive research based on Armenian sources, neglected in much of the current historiography, as well as other European languages in order to trace the development of the concepts pertaining to mass killing and genocide of Armenians from the ancient to the modern periods. In so doing, it makes important original contributions to our knowledge of the language used to refer to the Armenian Genocide — and the uses and abuses of language.

Matiossian, a scholar of Armenian history, literature and language, is the executive director of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church and book review editor for *Armenian Review*.

Matiossian commented that “I am deeply

grateful to NAASR for bestowing this truly humbling honor upon a book that was not born from my main lines of research, but from an intrinsic wish to show how knowledge of the Armenian language and Armenian sources truly matters when it comes to the Medz Yeghern, the Great Crime of genocide against the Armenians, and the everlasting attempts at its denial. I hope that my incursion into genocide scholarship and the adjacent territories of language, history, and politics may serve as a corrective and a reminder in these sad times when words are being twisted and perverted to the point of being unrecognizable.”

Dr. Henry Shapiro is an Ottoman historian at the Ibn Haldun University in Istanbul, Turkey. *The Rise of the Western Armenian Diaspora in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, based on his 2018 Princeton doc-

toral thesis, traces how Armenian migrants changed the demographic and cultural landscape of Istanbul and Western Anatolia in the course of the 17th century and adds a great deal to our knowledge of a hitherto understudied but crucial chapter in Armenian (and not only in Armenian) history.

Reached by email, Shapiro remarked, “I am truly honored to have won the Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies. It takes many years to write a book, and appreciation of this kind is very valuable and motivating. Moreover, I am grateful to NAASR for having supported research for my monograph. Now I feel all the more motivated to work on the next one!”

Dr. Gohar Muradyan is a philologist and translator. She is a senior researcher and head of the Department for the Study of Translated Literature at the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts / Matenadaran in Yerevan. *Ancient Greek Myths in Medieval Armenian Literature* brings together all the known references to ancient Greek myths in medieval Armenian literature. Alongside the original Armenian passages and, when extant, their Greek originals, Muradyan provides annotated English translations.

When informed of the prize, Muradyan replied that “I am delighted to be awarded this prize and I thank you heartily.”

Authors or publishers wishing to submit books for consideration may contact NAASR Director of Academic Affairs Marc A. Mamigonian at marc@naasr.org.

Digital Archive of Armenian Music Now Accessible Via Armenian Museum of America Website

By Jesse Kenas Collins

WATERTOWN — Over the past year, the Armenian Museum of America’s Sound Archive program has taken a giant step forward. Each month, the Museum posts a handful of songs digitized and restored from its collection of 78 rpm records on its website along with a historical writeup about the artists.

Along with more conventional musical recordings, some of the recordings touch on Armenian cultural, political, and educational history, as well as the history of recording technologies. The program is sponsored by a generous grant from the SJS Charitable Trust.

The museum hosted musicologist Ian Nagoski to its galleries to weave the story of the influential but largely forgotten soprano Zabelle Panosian, who was born in Bardizag and emigrated to Boston in 1907. Ian’s talk drew from his recently published book, *Zabelle Panosian: I Am Servant of Your Voice*, co-authored with Harout Arakelian and Harry Kezelian.

In November, the museum welcomed the world-renowned composer and musician Ara Dinkjian. Speaking to a packed house, Dinkjian discussed the early history of some of the first recordings of Armenian music through the 1940’s. The presentation built on his book and CD compilation, “Armenians in America on 78 rpm.”

“As we approach our fourth year presenting the Sound Archive at the Armenian Museum of America, we are proud to make this content available to people around the world,” says Executive Director Jason Sohigian. “For half a century now, the Museum’s collection of 78 rpm records has grown thanks to generous donors who have been entrusting us with their personal collections.”

“This music was almost lost to history at least twice in the past 100 years alone,” adds Sohigian. “First as a result of the Armenian Genocide, and then when audio technology

has changed from records to other media in the 21st century. The Museum is now at the forefront of preserving and sharing these treasured archives of Armenian history and culture.”

The Sound Archive explores the museum’s extensive collection of recordings including some that serve as more than entertainment, anchored by a series of articles about moments of cultural and political history. In one segment, listeners can eavesdrop on a party at the home of the writer Hamasdegh (Hampartzoum Gelenian) on the night of June 10, 1939. The commemorative disc opens with an introduction by none other than William Saroyan.

A second article covers an NBC San Francisco radio broadcast from June 24, 1945, highlighting the Armenian National Chorus as well as advocacy work about the Armenian Question from celebrity chef George Gardikian and attorney Souren Saroyan of the Armenian National Committee.

Most of the posts focus on the most influential Armenian artists recording during the 78 rpm era. The Museum highlighted two post-war music icons, The Gomidas Band, a group at the frontier of kef style, and Guy Chookoorian, an artist and musical comic with a character and approach all his own.

Writing, research, and audio digitization is undertaken by this author along with Harout Arakelian and Harry Kezelian. To explore the archive of digitized recordings and articles dating back to 2021, visit: www.armenianmuseum.org/sound-archive.

Jesse Kenas Collins is a digitization specialist responsible for the transfer of analog recordings to digital files for the Armenian Museum of America. Jesse is a museum professional and music preservationist with more than a decade of experience working in collections care, exhibitions production, and audio digitization. Jesse’s preservation work and research into the music of the Middle East extends into his work with the restoration of historical musical instruments.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

FEBRUARY 10 — Poon Paregentan (“Great Carnival”) Dinner-Dance. Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford, MA. A terrific family evening of great food, music and dancing. Featuring the fabulous Ani Ensemble – Joe Kouyoumjian, Oud; Dave Anisbigian, guitar and vocals; Art Chingris, Dumbeg; and Ara Jeknavorian, clarinet. Also featuring the latest dance tunes from Armenia and America Pop music. Adults: \$35. Students: \$15. Children under 6: free. Paid reservation must be made by February 7 either on the church website, or by contacting Corie Horan, coriehoran@gmail.com, 978-967-6423.

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

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

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.



COMMENTARY

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**MIRROR
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EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

CONTRIBUTORS

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

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-
Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian,
Michelle Mkhlian
YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott
BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
PARIS: Jean Eckian
SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian
Demirjian
CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA
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www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com
For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

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Armenia-Artsakh-Diaspora: Facing Great Challenges in the Next Era

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian

Under different and normal conditions, it would be a commonplace effort to devote time at the start of a new year to examine in an impartial and unflinching fashion the events of the past year, both accomplishments and failures – the latter which of course we would not want to see repeated.

This time, however, the situation is much more serious. The informed part of the entire world-wide Armenian population, whether in Armenia, forcibly removed from Artsakh, or in the diaspora, at this point faces a much more urgent and weighty obligation of self-examination. Indeed, the stormy year we just completed, and especially its disastrous last months, shook our entire nation to its roots.

For a self-aware Armenian, it is not a year that has ended, but an entire era of the most bitter circumstances. That era began on the eve of the Genocide and continued for a whole century. During its course, the scattered remnants of the Armenian nation passed through the most serious milestones of the struggle for survival. During the seven decades of Soviet rule, thanks to the forcibly created internal peace, the country of Armenia was revived and it entered the ranks of civilized and advanced countries. During those seventy years, despite the difficult conditions created by a harsh regime, our people living in Armenia created art, science and culture worthy of national pride, and an intellectual manpower at the highest world level in all these fields, which gave reasons for pride to all Armenians around the world, including even those who were against the ruling regime. In those days, the demands of the Armenian people for our so-called “confiscated internal lands” turned into a nationwide movement of righteous protest. When suddenly, completely independent of our limited means, the opportunity arose to finally make Armenia politically independent, Armenians all over the world believed that the ideal moment had arrived to make their homeland even more prosperous. Indeed, the independent Republic of Artsakh was created by the heroic Artsakh movement, while many in Armenian diasporan circles believed that the homeland which would become a true lasting, and even eternal, anchor for Armenians, had been created.

While all this took place in the homeland, to the honor of the Armenian diaspora, that multimillion homeless community born from the Genocide, not having any means of security, instead of simply being pulverized and dissolving in the world’s huge ocean of alienation, succeeded, on the contrary, in accomplishing the impossible. In the course of the abovementioned many decades, numerous exceptionally prosperous diasporan communities were established, each with church, cultural and national political party structures. This is an incredible miracle. It is necessary to underline here that during those decades, the foundation and spiritual strength of this wonderful development was the bright reality I noted above, of a homeland’s existence and the profound confidence in the diaspora concerning its future.

Today, however, the Armenian world has been deeply shaken. After living through the last nationwide disaster period, it is now obvious that the condition of the Armenians, who were previously considered to have been in a “national revival,” contains serious structural cracks and weaknesses, to the point of being fatal. It is certainly as the result of these main weaknesses, which have been combined and further complicated, that in the last short period of time, Armenians have reached their current state, crushed, pitiful and stunned.

Indeed, while Armenia was in its current state of defenseless impotence, a merciless international military-political-diplomatic steamroller simply crushed and passed right over it!

The most alarming and dangerous concern of today is that the entire Armenian community is not only stunned, but it is also actually in a particularly confused state.

I will summarize the general situation as follows.

Unbelievably, Artsakh was emptied of its over one hundred thousand population, which had lived there for countless centuries, within a few hours. Armenia itself is insecure, bleeding on its borders, under the paw of the archenemy. On the one hand, with completely uncertain steps, it makes hesitant efforts for survival, while on the other hand, powerless, it watches the outflow of the despairing people which weakens it. The diasporan Armenians are helpless spectators watching this sad reality, in a collectively disorganized state.

At this dramatic point, all of us, dear compatriots, should undertake a serious self-examination. With a deep, bold and sincere approach, we should search for and find the main reasons behind our impoverished state today. Then, we should have the courage to implement the necessary and basic measures of reorganization, which can once again lead the Armenians around the world to re-

covery in the coming months and years and decades. The desired new renaissance must stand on practical, diplomatic, strategic and economic stable anchors.

The biggest question is how we should undertake this urgent titanic collective work. I am offering an open invitation to all Armenians, so that our intellectuals in various fields feel morally obligated and free to offer answers to this difficult issue.

Political scientists, diplomats, economists, sociologists, military scientists, and military experts all must participate in this vital work that requires nationwide participation. This enumeration of various fields in itself shows that such a large-scale work requires first of all having today’s working regime in Armenia as the main participant and organizer. For this purpose, the latter should create an organizing body that inspires confidence: in other words, with the participation of Armenian and diasporan residents, create a professional National Strategy Department or Ministry.

Therefore, we have no choice but to wait for this milestone and expect that soon we will start hearing responses to this challenge.

However, I will take the initiative in very broad lines to list and describe the deep weaknesses and cracks in our current national structures, which, in my opinion, were the main reasons why our country was so weak in the past period in the international arena, and was unable to show any real resistance to the terrible plots against it.

The first and greatest failure was a shameful diplomatic and military unpreparedness, and as its consequence, the loss of Artsakh. While thirty years ago, that inseparable part of centuries-old historical Armenia regained its independence, today it has been completely lost.

It is equally reprehensible, unbelievable and shameful that on the eve of that loss, until today, no significant Armenian plan is visible on the horizon to undertake an appropriate counterattack and try to regain control of what I consider to be incalculable human, cultural and national wealth. In the course of a few hours, it was destroyed and today it is in the predatory hands of the enemy.

The authorities of today are responsible for the loss of Artsakh as much as the so-called “former ones” of the past three decades. Our nation has reason to be deeply concerned, especially when its current leader is the one who first calmly announced to the world that “Artsakh is Armenia and that’s it,” and then barely a few months later, without blinking an eye, admits that “Artsakh is Azerbaijan and that’s it.”

Another and equally great unforgivable failure is that Armenia, exceptionally advanced during the Soviet regime in the fields of scientific and military productivity, as well as in the areas of military weapons production, after three decades of independence and under the leadership of various governments, fell to such a weak level that it first suffered a shameful defeat in the 44-day war, and after a few years, having resorted to no correctional measures, this time not only lost Artsakh completely, but also lost important parts of Armenia itself. Today, in an impoverished state, Armenia, as the only means of its security, is trying to rely on a document called a “Peace Treaty,” knowing full well that such a piece of paper has zero value for its hostile neighbor. Indeed, the enemy negotiating with Armenia face-to-face at the same time publicly and with impunity characterizes centuries-old Armenia as “Western Azerbaijan.”

Without strong military preparation, any such document is definitely worthless.

The next great national failure is the incompetent state of the Armenian world and especially Armenia in the field of international information. During the past thirty years, it has appeared continuously incompetent in convincingly creating public opinion regarding its rights and fair demands. Armenians around the world, and especially Armenia, do not have a single news network of international level and capacity. Among the joint priorities of Armenia and the Armenian world is the importance of filling this great lack. Indeed, in the course of the passing years, in addition to the tragic physical losses, it was an even more bitter psychological experience for us when the misinformed international press continuously called the Armenians of Artsakh, who are the real owners of their country, “separatists” who supposedly were terrorists who dismembered “poor Azerbaijan.” The diaspora has great untapped potential, especially concerning the creation of an international pro-Armenian press.

The list of these failures can certainly be extended much longer, but as the last of the major failures that are important on this occasion, I will mention the pitiful collective inability of the diaspora itself, because despite the great potential it contained, it remained in the position of a powerless spectator while its homeland was clearly being cut into pieces in the international circus. Though
see CHALLENGES, page 18



COMMENTARY

The Will to Engage

By Vahan Zanoian

“One need not destroy one’s enemy. One need only destroy his will to engage.”

— Sun Tzu, 544-496 BC, Chinese General and military strategist, author of *The Art of War*.

Second only to the thousands of lives that were lost, the costliest casualty of the 2020 44-day war for Armenia has been the will to fight for a just cause — both in the government and in a significant segment of the general public. There is a symbiotic relationship entrenched between a war-weary, disillusioned and demoralized public and a populist government convinced that the only way forward for Armenia is to reach a peace agreement with its enemies even at the cost of conceding Artsakh and an apparent readiness to make further political and territorial concessions, even if they threaten the viability of the Armenian state. In the absence of a strategic *national* vision and purpose, the two reinforce and sustain each other.

This dynamic largely explains the survival of the present government in face of the cataclysmic losses of the 2020 war and the subsequent loss of Artsakh. The government’s peace rhetoric is what the public wants to hear. This, combined with its recently intensified public visibility and anti-corruption campaign, the absence of a credible opposition, and the vivid memory of the chronic monopolization and abuse of political power by successive governments since Independence, will likely sustain the symbiotic relationship for a while; but that dynamic is not sustainable in the longer term.

What makes the current situation particularly worrisome is the fact that Armenia’s “will to engage,” to use Sun Tzu’s terminology (which connotes the will to confront and resist enemy aggression), seems to have gone missing in a cacophony of “justifications” which have implications and consequences far beyond what they’re meant to rationalize — namely, the prevailing public apathy and certain popular policies of the government. These justifications include arguments such as the call for realism, expediency, the importance of peace with Armenia’s neighbors and probably the deadliest of all, the deliberate and systematic belittlement and degradation of the nation’s collective memory and heritage, its history, national values, cultural identity, traditional values, war heroes and even the symbols held sacred by the Armenian nation for millennia.

The will to engage fades naturally once all that was deemed worthy of fighting for becomes marginalized. In this environment, even patriotism is made to look passé, an outdated burden.

Azerbaijan continues to do its share to mute Armenia’s will to confront its hostility — the systematic destruction of Armenian heritage in occupied territories, the constant threats and claims that Armenia is Western Azerbaijan, the military drills with Turkey at Armenia’s borders, the ongoing shipment of arms from Israel, the sporadic sniper fire across the border killing Armenian servicemen several kilometers inside the Armenian border with impunity, the refusal to honor international demands and court orders, the refusal to give any encouraging response to Armenia’s peace initiatives, are, at least in part, intended to scare and intimidate, with the hope of keeping the will for struggle and retaliation in Armenia under perpetual sedation. Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev’s militaristic speeches belie his apoplectic mindset about what he calls Armenian “revanchism,” which he strives to bury once and for all.

But while the Azerbaijani strategy is clear and explicable, even if not defensible by international norms of conduct, the consequences of the Armenian strategy, whether intended or unintended, are more worrisome and more difficult to understand.

To be clear, this is *not* a call for warmongering. Nor it is a reckless nationalistic

cry for revenge. It is a call to *prepare* for war, a war which is already upon Armenia, whether it wants it or not. The country *is* in a state of war when over 215 sq kms of its sovereign territory remain occupied, including strategically important military positions, when 120,000 of its citizens and compatriots were forcefully expelled from their historic homeland in Artsakh, when Azerbaijan defiantly still illegally holds a large number Armenian political prisoners and prisoners of war, and when it still has territorial demands based on highly debatable Soviet era maps, which it backs by constant threats of imminent war.

Armenia’s pursuit of a peace agenda with the obvious lack of the will to resist aggression amplifies its vulnerability. Pleading peace from a brutal dictator who has the passion and political need to show further conquests is not sound strategy. Rather than compel Azerbaijan to the negotiating table, it boosts Aliyev’s appetite for more territorial and political concessions, especially when Azerbaijan, supported militarily and diplomatically by Turkey and Israel, has not yet experienced binding global checks on its use of force to achieve territorial and political objectives. Thus, it should not come as a surprise when Azerbaijan moves the goalposts for a peace agreement.

“Preparing for war” means taking the necessary steps, *including many unpopular ones*, to become so ready for the next war that one wins it before it even starts. For Armenia, that is the only way to have a just and viable peace.

Here’s a partial list of what that entails:

Devoting the lion’s share of national resources to defense; this may require the unpopular step of diverting some funds from civilian infrastructure projects to military projects.

Strengthening national, civil, and territorial defense capabilities to fit the next generation of technological warfare.

Raising the morale of the armed forces by every means — organizational improvements, modernization, advanced training, attention to pressing needs, improving the conditions of border posts.

Unifying, preparing, and mobilizing the population, both psychologically and physically, for probable enemy aggression.

None of these measures are being taken, at least not to a degree called for in a country which is in a state of war.

As part of the justification process, a dangerous mindset that seems to have seeped into official Yerevan thinking is that history is not a reliable guide to building a future and that one cannot draw lessons from history, because history can often provide conflicting lessons. This mindset provides a pretext to ignore some invaluable lessons of history. While it is true that history is not an exact science, there are nonetheless irrefutable lessons of direct and immediate relevance to Armenia’s condition today, that can be drawn which are not subject to the vagaries of different interpretations of historical facts. It would be a grave mistake to dismiss them based on broad generalizations about the lack of adequate analytical rigor in historical records.

These lessons are so obvious and so simple that there should not be the need to even mention them. And yet many of the mistakes of the Armenian government stem from ignoring them. They include:

It is next to impossible for any country to secure its borders solely by signing a peace treaty with its enemies. The opposite is true — i.e., once a country secures its borders by its own strength, it can have peace. Security can provide peace. Peace cannot provide security.

The stronger of two enemies, especially one with expansionist ambitions, will not agree to peace, or sign any document which limits its options to use force. Even if it does, it will not honor its terms, while its enemy remains weak and vulnerable. This is a timeless and universal lesson of immediate relevance to Armenia today.

Making unilateral and unconditional concessions to an uncompromising enemy never pays off. Recognition of Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan was probably the most critical strategic mistake, which could have been avoided if this lesson had been understood.

Widely recognized values — human rights, democracy, right of self-determination, etc. — have no bearing on actual foreign policy formulation of nations who advocate them. What drives the process is national and State interests. “Values,” if they fit an already adopted policy, may be brought in as a further justification and to gain moral credit. But they do not determine policy. The silence of the West in the face of the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh is a good example. And even beyond Artsakh, this is probably

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over the years, many communities and organizations with huge human, intellectual and material capacity were created in the Armenian diaspora, on the other hand, in practice, their collective capacity and therefore national strategic usefulness proved to be little more than nothing. The reason for this unbelievably poor result as a collective is undoubtedly its basically uncoordinated and therefore disorganized state. It is certain that the church, benevolent, cultural, educational, professional and other dozens of often large-capacity organizations, over time, instead of gradually strengthening each other in a cooperative way, on the contrary, have become separate and uncoordinated units. Each of them tries to justify itself with its special activity without even trying to compare itself with other organizations operating in its neighborhood. This situation is simply a waste of manpower, material and other resources.

At the cost of repeating his past proposals, the author sees an urgent demand to create a logical and workable structure with an initiative from the homeland and with the participation of the most important members of the diaspora that

would create the possibility of coordinated activity. Indeed, it is completely self-deception to keep repeating that “While Azerbaijan is rich in its oil, Armenia is rich in its diaspora.” Various psychological obstacles must be overcome in order for such an important initiative to succeed.

It is really worth accomplishing this work. It is a condition for success that the initiative starts with the authorities of the Republic, but it is equally important that the patriarchs of the Armenian Church, as well as the heads of charitable, cultural and political organizations bring their blessing or unstinting cooperation.

In conclusion, and returning to the title of this article, which is a nationwide challenge, so that Armenia, Artsakh and the diaspora — the Armenian national collective — can honorably emerge from its current stunned and confused state, it is necessary that the current government of Armenia, the leadership of the various intellectual and political currents operating there, the supreme authorities of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the heads of the most important structures in the diaspora, can all show the ability and maturity commensurate with the positions they hold.

It is the future of our nation that will give a fair and strict assessment of the contribution that each of the abovementioned will bring to this extremely important national mission.

(The author, aside from his professional background as a scientist, is one of the longtime leaders of the diasporan Armenians. He is currently the president of the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada. For more than ten years, he has been the chairman of the Central Committee of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party. He has been Armenian General Benevolent Union vice president for ten years. He is the founder and now the honorary chairman of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese of Canada of the Armenian Church. In addition to the many honorary titles awarded to him in connection with the above, he received the title of Member of the Order of Canada, the highest civilian state honor, of Canada, a few years ago.

The above article has been translated from the original Armenian text which appeared in *Baikar*.)



COMMENTARY

Tectonic Movements In the South Caucasus

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent months, American activity in the regulation of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations has been clearly visible. Washington is trying to use all the tools at its disposal to help to sign a peace treaty between the parties. It can be argued that this is the most active phase of American diplomacy in this part of the world since 1992 and the momentum is in favor of the US. A geopolitical environment has been created in the South Caucasus which seems to be the one for which Washington has waited almost three decades.

First of all, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has changed the shape it has exhibited for the last 30 years, erasing the balance of powers in the region. The Armenian government now expresses its willingness to normalize relations with Turkey, meeting all Turkish preconditions. The same can be said about Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Russia, once a powerful regional player, focuses all its diplomatic and political resources on the Ukrainian war, and does not have enough power to deal with the South Caucasus region and the challenges it faces there. All this means that a historic opportunity has opened for the United States to significantly reduce Russia's role in the South Caucasus, and Washington's activity should be viewed in this particular light.

At the same time, it is necessary to act as quickly as possible, taking into account other factors such as the strengthening and growing role of China not only in the world, but in the South Caucasus itself. The improvement and strategizing of Sino-Georgian relations was approached rather coldly in Washington, which realizes that China is becoming a major competitor from the Middle East to the South Caucasus. And if we take into account the settlement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, respectively a longtime ally and a longtime enemy of Washington, through the mediation of China, then Washington has reason to worry.

Undoubtedly significant changes have been taking place in the region since the 2020 Artsakh war and the Ukrainian war. The decrease of Russian influence in Armenia, the increase of Turkish influence and Ankara's more active involvement in the South Caucasus after the war of 2020 are forming new realities. The regulation of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Armenia should also be considered in this logical chain. In the near future, the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations between Armenia and Pakistan is very possible.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani peace agreement, as mentioned, is on the political agenda of Washington and is one of the most important priorities of American policy towards the South Caucasus, along with the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, the establishment of diplomatic ties and opening borders. It is true that Armenia continues to be a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member and a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), but it is obvious that along with the reduction of Russian influence, the importance of these organizations for Armenia will also be reduced, particularly in terms of the CSTO.

Obviously, the EAEU is an economic organization and Armenia joined it out of economic interests. On the other hand, although in the logic of the new political architecture of the region the CSTO is not of vital importance for Armenia, Yerevan is not in a hurry to withdraw from that organization. According to the charter of the CSTO, member states shall inform the organization of such an intention at least 6 months before leaving it, and Armenia has not made such a statement yet. As for the EAEU, most likely, Armenia will not leave this structure until it has similar alternative markets.

Of course the Russian political elite totally understands these developments and scenarios, knowing very well the intentions of Washington's policy. However, as long as the Ukrainian war continues, Moscow does not have many opportunities to strengthen its position in this region. Whether Moscow will agree to lose the South Caucasus, calculating that in return it can get what it needs in Ukraine, is still difficult to say. At the same time, it is really difficult to say how long this window of opportunity will remain open for Washington's diplomacy. The future of Ukraine depends not only on Russia and Ukraine, but also on American internal political processes towards Ukraine, in particular the provision of aid, the possible return of Trump to power, etc. One thing is for sure. The tectonic movements taking place in the South Caucasus will be very difficult to stop. Regardless of how long these movements last, the region will never be the same again.

(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.)

How to Ensure the Security of Armenians Who Will Travel via Azerbaijan

By Benyamin Poghosyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

As Armenia and Azerbaijan continue negotiations to sign a peace agreement, the restoration of communications between the two countries has become one of the hot topics in the talks. It has multiple dimensions, including issues related to passport and customs control modalities while crossing Armenian and Azerbaijani borders and the safety of passengers and cargo that will pass via Armenia and Azerbaijan.

After the military takeover of Nagorno Karabakh in September 2023, Azerbaijan dropped its demands for an extraterritorial corridor via Armenia to connect with the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic. However, it continued to demand a passport and customs control-free regime for Azerbaijani citizens and goods that will pass via Armenia to reach Nakhijevan and vice versa. Azerbaijan also demands the involvement of third countries to ensure the security of Azerbaijani passengers and cargo, arguing that Armenia cannot provide the necessary guarantees. Azerbaijan brought these topics into center stage, discussing them during conferences, workshops, and webinars focused on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

Meanwhile, surprisingly, the security of Armenian passengers and cargo that will pass via Azerbaijan to reach Iran and Russia is not discussed much. This situation is bizarre, given multiple heinous crimes against the Armenian civilian population committed by Azerbaijan, which have been widely condemned by the international community. These include incidents during the 4-day war in April 2016, the 2020 Second Nagorno Karabakh war, the 2021-2022 Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia proper, the nine-month blockade of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh to the point of near-starvation, and the September 2023 military takeover of Nagorno Karabakh. During just the 24-hour Azerbaijani military attack on Nagorno Karabakh on September 19, 2023, at least 25 Armenian civilians were killed, among them five children. Dozens of civilians were wounded, including ten children, and five civilians are still missing.

Multiple war crimes against Armenians, coupled with strong anti-Armenian hate propaganda, which is, unfortunately, still widespread in Azerbaijan, are clear indications that Armenian passengers and cargo will not be able to pass through Azerbaijan to reach Iran, Russia, or other parts of Armenia without special security guarantees provided by third countries. It means that even if Armenia and Azerbaijan reach an agreement on the restoration of communication without precise modalities for security guarantees for Armenian cargo and passengers, the agreement will not be implemented in real life, as Armenians will refuse to travel via Azerbaijan and put the life of their families under the direct threat of physical abuse.

Given that the usage of Azerbaijani territory to reach Russia from Armenia either by highways or railways is a difficult task due to the complicated geographical terrain — it simply does not make sense to travel from Yerevan to Baku by railway via Nakhijevan and southern Azerbaijan and then travel an additional two hundred kilometers to reach the Azerbaijan-Russia border; the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic would likely become the central hub for Armenian cargo and passengers to reach Iran and also the southern part of Armenia by highway and railway, circumventing the mountainous road which currently connects capital Yerevan with the Syunik region. In this context, the discussions should start at an expert level on possible ways to ensure the safety of Armenians who may travel through Nakhijevan.

Azerbaijan, given its recent behavior and ongoing rhetoric against Armenians, cannot provide realistic guarantees to Armenian cargo and passengers. The involvement of a third country or international organization is the only way to stabilize the situation and pave the way for the restoration of communications. Given the geo-

graphical location of Nakhijevan, as well as geopolitical developments of the South Caucasus, Iran, Russia, and the EU are candidates to be involved in de-conflicting this process. Russia mediated the signature of four Armenia-Azerbaijan joint statements in 2020-2022, and Moscow has friendly relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite the recent increase in hostile rhetoric between Armenia and Russia, Yerevan continues its membership in Russian-led organizations, and the Russian military base and border troops are located in Armenia. In its turn, Azerbaijan signed a declaration on allied interaction with Russia in February 2022. Azerbaijan serves as a transit country for Russia to reach Iran, and Azerbaijan buys Russian natural gas.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia established a trilateral commission on the restoration of communications in early 2021, chaired by deputy prime ministers, which reached some progress. The trilateral commission may be an efficient venue to start discussions on securing the safety of Armenian passengers and cargo traveling via Nakhijevan.

Iran is another option for providing security guarantees for Armenians who will travel via Nakhijevan. Most Armenians who will use Nakhijevan's territory will travel to Iran via highways or railways, and the same applies to cargo. Iran has friendly relations with Armenia, and despite tensions with Azerbaijan in recent years, Azerbaijan and Iran continue their cooperation on various issues, including the possibility of updating the infrastructure, which has been used to connect Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan in the last 30 years. Armenia may initiate trilateral Armenia-Azerbaijan-Iran talks on Iran's role in ensuring the safety of Armenian passengers and cargo traveling via Nakhijevan.

The EU is another candidate which may play a role in this issue. Armenia and Azerbaijan are members of the EU's Eastern Partnership Initiative; Azerbaijan and the EU have significantly expanded their economic cooperation since the launch of the "Southern Gas Corridor," and active discussions are underway to export electricity from Azerbaijan to the EU via the Black Sea. Azerbaijan and the EU are discussing the possibilities of increasing the capacities of the "Middle Corridor," which connects China with Europe via Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Meanwhile, in the last two years, Armenia has increased its cooperation with the EU, including deploying the EU observer mission in Armenia and the EU's decision to start the visa liberalization process with Armenia. Since December 2021, the EU has served as a platform for Armenia-Azerbaijan talks through the facilitation of the European Council President Charles Michel. All this makes the EU a viable candidate to provide necessary safety and security guarantees to ensure the smooth travel of Armenian passengers and cargo via Nakhijevan.

Russia, Iran and the EU are the potential actors that can support Armenia and Azerbaijan to finalize the restoration of communications by providing necessary security guarantees for Armenians, who may travel via Nakhijevan and, in the later stages, via Azerbaijan proper. Other countries and international organizations may also be included in the negotiations. However, one thing is clear: Given the history of crimes against the Armenian civilian population by Azerbaijan, Armenians can only use Azerbaijani territory for travel and cargo transportation with third-party guarantees. Anyone interested in restoring communications between Armenia and Azerbaijan should encourage the sides to start discussions on these topics; otherwise, a secure and prosperous South Caucasus will remain an unachievable dream.

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



The Will to Engage

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one of the most pertinent lessons that any political leader of Armenia should draw from Armenian history.

Over-dependence on any single strategic ally, especially in an alliance that is one-sided in the sense that one ally is much stronger, has more diverse geostrategic interests, and has significantly more to give to the alliance than to receive, is bad foreign policy. This is bad regardless of who the ally is. For Armenia, a one-sided over-dependence on the US would be as ill-advised as its one-sided over-dependence on Russia has been, albeit in different ways and with different risks.

Not only the right lessons have not been learned, but some wrong “lessons” or conclusions have been drawn, especially from the outcome of the 2020 44-day war and the subsequent September 19, 2023, ethnic cleansing of Artsakh. By far the most catastrophic of these is the claim that the loss of Artsakh was inevitable and pre-destined. That is probably the most pathetic attempt to exonerate the failures of not only the political leadership during the war, but also, inadvertently many of the mistakes committed during previous regimes of both Armenia and Artsakh since Independence — the implied logic being, ‘if our losses were inevitable, then they could not have been caused by our own mistakes.’ A natural follow-up catastrophic conclusion is that Armenia “wasted” thirty years and huge national resources trying to solve the “insolvable” problem of Artsakh.

That conclusion represents a precious missed opportunity to understand the true causes of Armenia’s failure

and to learn the right lessons from it. Armenia’s mistakes during the 26-year period from the 1994 Bishkek Cease-fire protocol to the 2020 war — which essentially boil down to chronic complacency, criminal neglect of the interests of the State, and corruption — have been outlined in previous articles (see for example the section entitled *Realism vs Defeatism* in this article.) But it is worth bringing up two particular mistakes in the context of this article: First, Armenia’s failure to challenge the international recognition of Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan, which has no valid legal or historical basis; and second, Armenia’s failure to recognize how the interests of its strategic ally, Russia, and especially the interests of Russia’s political elite, had changed.

These lessons may seem irrelevant now that Artsakh is depopulated. And in the short-term, from a practical point of view, they probably are. But one consequence of refusal to learn from history is that it further erodes the will to engage, because *the will to engage does not survive and thrive in a vacuum, but in the continuity afforded by historical context.* Historical lessons are important even if they do not provide an immediate actionable policy.

Another dangerous position that has emerged is that the sole responsibility of the government is today’s Republic of Armenia, contained within its 29,800 sq km area. The country’s Coat of Arms (see segment from 4:30 min to 5:30 min) is deemed irrelevant to the Republic that was formed in 1991, and even Mount Ararat, which has been part of the spiritual and emotional Armenian Homeland for millennia, is rendered out of place within that 29,800 sq km area. The head of state teaches schoolchildren today that those who say Ararat is our highest mountain is not talking about Armenia but about something else — see segment from 4:20 min to 5:00 min point.

The deeper implications of this policy have a direct impact on Armenia’s will to fight for a just cause by casting doubt on the Armenian national identity. Also, and for the first time since the end of the Soviet Union, it formalizes the schism between the Armenian population living within the 29,800 square kilometers and the remaining Armenian population in the world. It drives a wedge between Armenia and the vast and invaluable resources of

the nation.

While a single-minded pursuit of State interests is the government’s primary responsibility, it can neither justify nor condone the abandonment of broader national causes. In fact, if the main objective of the government had been to further the interests of the State rather than the interests of its rule, it would have worked very hard to protect Armenian interests and rights all over the world, and to harness their considerable capabilities to the service of the State. Any government of the Republic of Armenia has both an obligation and an immeasurable benefit from caring for Armenian heritage around the world, whether that be the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem, justice in Artsakh, St. Lazarus Island in Venice, or the various communities in the Middle East and around the world.

Sooner or later, both the Armenian nation and the Armenian government will recover their will to engage, in the broadest sense of the phrase, because the current situation is anathema to the nature of the Armenian nation. That is the only way that Armenia can achieve the just and sustainable peace that the public covets today. Fortunately, in certain spheres, the private sector is already driving this process. There is a new, competent, and visionary generation thriving in Armenia today, which, unphased by the general malaise, proceeds to contribute to the development and strengthening of the country. It includes both professionals and fresh political thinkers. It does not yet have much say in government policy, but by changing reality on the ground and by example it can eventually lift the standards in both the general public and within government ranks. It remains to make sure that by the time this generation makes an impact, enough of the Motherland will still be standing and ready to embrace a renewed will to engage its formidable challenges.

(Vahan Zanoian is a global energy and security specialist. Over a span of 35 years, he has advised 15 different governments on economic development policy, energy sector strategy, national security, and global competitiveness. He has also served as a consultant to numerous international and national oil companies, banks, and other public and private organizations.)



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