

**Congressional Caucus
On Armenian Issues
Co-Chairs Condemn
Dangerous Rhetoric
From Aliyev**

WASHINGTON— Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues Co-Chairs Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ-06), Gus M. Bilirakis (FL-12), David G. Valadao (CA-21), and Adam B. Schiff (CA-30) released a statement on January 18 condemning dangerous statements made by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in his January 10 interview to local TV networks, laying claim to Armenian territory and refusing to withdraw his troops:

“President Aliyev’s most recent escalatory remarks, including his refusal to remove troops from Armenian territory, follow the same pattern he used in the buildup to the ethnic cleansing of over 100,000 Armenians in Artsakh last fall. He makes hostile statements, uses those claims to justify further mobilizing his military, and then takes aggressive action because he believes there will not be any consequences. The international community has sadly proven him right with its inaction over the last few years.

“It is past time we hold his regime accountable for the belligerent rhetoric and actions it has taken against Armenians in the South Caucasus. The United States and our regional partners should use every diplomatic tool, including sanctions, to help guarantee the territorial integrity of Armenia and push back against Aliyev’s blatant threats against it. We call on the State Department and our international partners to take immediate action to halt any further Azeri aggression and ensure Armenia’s safety and security.”

**EU Envoy Nixes Trip
To Baku**

By Siranuysh Gevorgian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Just like a US envoy, the European Union’s special representative to the South Caucasus, Toivo Klaar, refrained from proceeding to Baku after holding talks with senior Armenian officials in Yerevan on Thursday, January 18.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process was the main focus of the talks. Klaar’s office told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on January 19 that he will not visit the Azerbaijani capital this time around because

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ANFNEWS PHOTO

**Istanbul Rally Held to Commemorate
17th Anniversary Of Dink Assassination**

ISTANBUL — On Friday, January 19, Hrant Dink was commemorated where he was assassinated 17 years ago, in front of the Sebat Building which used to house the offices of Agos Newspaper. In addition to the large crowd gathered in front of the Sebat Building, viewers from outside Istanbul were able to participate in the commemoration through the live broadcast in English and Turkish.

Besna Tosun who is one of the Saturday Mothers/People read Çigdem Mater’s letter who has been imprisoned at the Bakırköy Prison under the Gezi Trials since April 2022. In her message, Çigdem Mater said “The murder committed on 19 January 2007 right in front of the Sebat Building was not a ‘momentary’ act. We know this very well. On top of the unlawfulness of the past 17 years, what lies beneath is a century-old unlawfulness.”

At the commemoration where unreciprocated demands for justice are voiced, this year sociologist and writer Oya Baydar addressed the crowd. In her speech, Baydar addressed Hrant Dink and his struggle, and said that the bullets fired at him were also fired at the peoples of this country, at its peace. She reminded that each year those who meet in front of the Sebat Building desire to live together as equal and free people on this land, as opposed to those who attempt to tear us apart and turn us into enemies.

In her comments, Baydar said “Hrant was both the bearer of the troubles and pains of this country as well as the remedy and conscience of its oppressed, suffering peoples.”

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*Krekorian Brings Political Savvy and
Experience to LA City Council*

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

LOS ANGELES — Paul Krekorian is the president of the City Council of Los Angeles, the second most powerful position in the second largest city in the United States. Consequently, Krekorian is one of the most prominent Armenians in American politics. He has not shied away from using his position to make Armenian issues better known, while working to improve city government.

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Paul Krekorian, center, at the dedication of the Republic of Artsakh Square, in front of the Azerbaijani consulate general in Brentwood, with, from left, Elen Asatryan, Robert Avetisyan, Traci Park and Adrin Nazarian on Aug. 31, 2023

**EU Concerned
About Azeri
‘Territorial
Claims’ on
Armenia**

YEREVAN — The European Union on Monday, January 22, expressed serious concern at what its foreign policy chief described as territorial claims to Armenia made by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

“We agreed that Azerbaijan needs to return to substantive peace and normalization talks with Armenia,” Josep Borrell said after chairing a meeting of the foreign ministers of EU member states that discussed the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict among other issues.

“The latest territorial claims by President Aliyev are very concerning, and any violation of Armenia’s territorial integrity would be unacceptable and will have severe consequences for our relations with Azerbaijan,” he told a news



European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, right, speaks with Belgium’s Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib during a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels, January 22, 2024.

briefing in Brussels.

Earlier this month, Aliyev renewed his demands for Armenia to open an extraterritorial corridor to Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave. He also demanded Armenian withdrawal from “eight Azerbaijani villages” and again dismissed Yerevan’s insistence on using the most recent Soviet maps to delimit the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Borrell issued the same warning to Baku in November as the EU decided to deploy more observers to Armenia’s volatile border with Azerbaijan . The 27-nation bloc launched the monitoring mission in February 2023 with the stated aim of preventing or reducing ceasefire violations there.

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JERUSALEM

**Armenian
Christians Fight
Controversial
Land Deal**



GERMANY

**Children Show
The Therapeutic
Power of Drama**



NEW YORK

**A Radiant Evening
Of Music and
Art at St. Vartan
Cathedral**





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Gymnast Badalyan Wins 3 Gold Medals in Norway

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian gymnast Anna Badalyan earned three gold medals at the Northern Lights 2024 tournament in Norway, held this past week.

She took first place in the all-around, rings and clubs events.

In 2023, she won one gold and three bronze medals in Amsterdam.

Armenia, Kazakhstan Sign Defense Cooperation Plan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan visited Kazakhstan on January 23.

Papikyan met with the Minister of Defense of Kazakhstan Ruslan Zhaksylykov. Discussions during the meeting centered on security and various mutual interests concerning Armenian-Kazakh defense cooperation. Finally, a defense cooperation plan for 2024 was signed between the two ministries.

Mirzoyan Urges Russia To Refrain from Making Accusations

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan, on January 23 urged his Russian colleagues to refrain from making accusations against Armenia.

Mirzoyan referred to the accusation from Russia that the Nagorno Karabakh issue, including the status issue, was closed when Nikol Pashinyan signed a statement in Prague in accordance with the Alma-Ata Declaration. He then accurately presented the sequence of events.

“In August 2022, Russia presented proposals that included the following provision: the status of Nagorno-Karabakh is postponed indefinitely. By the end of August, Armenia agreed to these proposals, but Azerbaijan expressed its disagreement. Subsequently, in September 2022, Azerbaijan initiated an attack on the sovereign territory of Armenia.

“Armenia turned to Russia and the Russian side stated that the boundaries are not clear enough, consequently, Russia faces difficulties in assessing the extent to which the sovereign territory of Armenia has been violated.

“Afterward, in October 2022, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a quadrilateral statement in Prague, in which they agreed that the delimitation of borders should occur based on the Alma-Ata Declaration. The declaration specifies the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, coinciding with the administrative border between the two former Soviet republics.

“I want to urge my Russian colleagues to narrate the cause-and-effect relationships and chronological sequence correctly and at least not to attribute to the Armenian side accusations in which the Armenian side has no guilt,” said Mirzoyan.

“On the contrary, there were expected and supposed actions by others, and in the absence of that action, Armenia took concrete steps, including in the form of the Prague statement,” Mirzoyan.

Is Armenia Fulfilling Aliyev's Demand with New Pashinyan Constituion Proposal?

YEREVAN (JAMnews) — “The Republic of Armenia needs a new constitution, not constitutional amendments, but a new constitution. And this issue should be the subject of a broad discussion,” Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said this week.

Armenian experts claim that Pashinyan is essentially fulfilling the demand of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, who spoke of the need to provide Baku with guarantees that there will be no “attempts at revanchism” in Armenia. They believe that it is for this purpose that the prime minister proposes to adopt a new legal framework; they also do not rule out pressure from Turkey.

The Armenian Constitution refers to the 1990 Declaration of Independence, the first paragraph of which mentions the joint resolution of the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR and the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh of December 1, 1989 “On the Reunification of the Armenian SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh.”

In addition, the declaration enshrines the main provisions of statehood formation, from the establishment of relations with other countries to the demand for “international recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey.”

The prime minister announced his proposal at the Ministry of Justice, where a report of work carried out by the ministry in 2023 was discussed: “I am convinced, and time has confirmed, though after stages of some doubts – at least for me and for a number of colleagues – that the parliamentary model of governance is the most appropriate for Armenia, taking into account our democratic aspirations and strategies.”

Pashinyan also said little will change in the current model of governance. What is important to him politically is that The Republic of Armenia have a constitution adopted by the people with the results of the vote beyond doubt, the constitution make the country more competitive and viable in the new geopolitical and regional environment.

Last year Armenia's prime minister spoke of disagreement with the Declaration of Independence, which contained a “confrontational narrative.” Until Pashinyan's latest statement on the need for a new constitution, only amendments to the main law had been discussed. The reform concept has not yet been published; the ministry has

sent it to the government. The discussions will start this month. It is planned to approve the concept in three months.

A day after declaring the need to adopt a new constitution, Pashinyan said at a meeting of the initiative group of the ruling Civil Pact party: “We want additional guarantees from Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan from us.”

He explained that he was referring to guarantees to exclude territorial claims against each other. According to him, both countries see subtexts in the peace treaty proposals that could be transformed into “territorial claims, if not today, then in the future.”

“We expect guarantees that Azerbaijan does not intend to leave hidden threats in the subtext for future territorial claims against Armenia. We want such guarantees, but we are also ready to give such guarantees. This is an interconnected process.”

But he did not directly say whether his proposal for new constitution was linked to the provision of these guarantees.

“Assault on a pillar of the Republic of Armenia”

Parliamentary opposition members Gegham Manukyan, Anna Grigoryan, Kristine Vardanyan and Artur Khachatryan, MPs from the Hayastan faction (Armenia), made a joint statement decrying the move.

In their opinion, Pashinyan is thus “preparing the ground for meeting another demand” of the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem:

“The demands constantly made to the Republic of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan have been the exclusion of the provisions on the right of the Artsakh people to self-determination and commitment to international recognition of the Armenian genocide from the fundamental documents of the Republic of Armenia.”

Political scientist Suren Surenyants says that the new constitution implies the creation of a new republic. In his opinion, one could talk about an important and new milestone in the development of statehood, if we are talking about political and public discussions on the foundations of statehood.

“Pashinyan, on the other hand, needs a new constitution to ‘edit’ Armenia's declaration of independence (to exclude what Aliyev calls ‘revanchism’), to establish ‘legitimate’ borders with a new ‘cadastral’ certificate,” Surenyants stated.

He believes that the prime minister is

announcing the reduction of Armenia's territory and wants to give this process a “nationwide package, according to the cadastral certificate certified by Aliyev.”

Political scientist Tigran Grigoryan recalls that in December 2023, Aliyev announced that Baku expected Yerevan to guarantee the exclusion of “revanchism.”

He studied articles by representatives of expert and political circles of Azerbaijan on this topic. He quoted one Azerbaijani expert, Rusif Huseynov, as saying that “Armenia's legislation still contains territorial claims to Azerbaijan.”

“Such a legal background causes concern in Azerbaijan, where they predict such scenarios, when the Armenian Constitutional Court may reject the peace agreement or a future change of power may lead to territorial claims,” the political scientist wrote on Facebook.

Political analyst Tevan Poghosyan agrees with the opinion that Pashinyan is pushing Aliyev's demands.

He says that if the constitution were amended, the first two clauses based on the declaration of independence would remain unchanged: “The declaration of independence takes as its basis the objectives of the existence of Artsakh and its unification with Armenia. In order not to preserve all this, Pashinyan says: let's tear this paper up, throw it away, because Aliyev made a demand and I have to fulfill it.”

He does not rule out that in the future the ruling team will also raise the issue of adopting a new declaration so that the word “Artsakh” is mentioned in it.

According to political scientist Stepan Grigoryan, the declaration of independence contains “painful points” for Turkey as well: “In addition to what is written about the unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, there is also an article recognizing the genocide committed by Turkey in Western Armenia and Anatolia.”

Grigoryan says it is necessary to understand exactly what changes Pashinyan is thinking about, whether there is a need for them or whether all this is being done under pressure.

According to him, the new constitution presupposes significant changes. He wonders how the Prime Minister envisions a new constitution if its main provisions are not changed and the model of governance is not changed.

Azerbaijan Vandalizes Another Church In Artsakh

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijan continues its state policy of appropriating Armenian cultural heritage in occupied Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), the Ombudsman of Hayk Culture warns.

“Daily cases of vandalism also target the churches and cross-stones in Artsakh which Azerbaijan falsely claims to be originally the heritage of Caucasian Albania,” it said in a social media post.

A photo posted on the Ararat Telegram channel on January 22 reveals that the Spitak Khatch Monastery in the village of Vank in the Hadrut region has been vandalized, reconfirming Azerbaijan's consistent efforts to wipe off Armenian traces in Artsakh.



Photo shows a cross in Spitak Khatch Monastery before and after the Azeri takeover of Artsakh



ARMENIA

Armenia Greenlights Controversial Amulsar Gold Mine

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Operation of the contested Amulsar goldmine has been greenlit after Armenia's government accepted a 12.5 percent share in the mines on Thursday.

The agreed project also notes that the Ministry of Economy will manage the share once the mines are operational.

The share was agreed upon when Lydian Armenia, the company operating the mines, Armenia's Economy Ministry, and the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) signed a memorandum of understanding in February 2023.

The government's decision to accept the share from the company effectively greenlit the mines' operation, despite years of protests by eco-activists and residents of communities adjacent to the mine.

At the time of the memorandum's signing, EDB agreed to extend a loan of \$100 million to Lydian Armenia for



Amulsar Gold Mine

the construction and operation of the mines 'in compliance with the best international mining practices and strict adherence to the applicable legislation of the Republic of Armenia, by promoting the local market and employment in affected communities'.

Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan praised the project, stating that he predicted the mines would contribute to increasing Armenia's GDP by about 1 percent.

"We have no right to refuse such an opportunity," said Kerobyan.

In Thursday's government session, Ani Ispiryan, the Deputy Minister of Economy, announced that Lydian Armenia will invest \$250 million in the operation of the mine.

Ispiryan announced that the mining company would annually pay an extra \$7 million to local communities near the mine in addition to allocating environmental protection projects funded by environmental taxes.

During the cabinet session, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that the government greenlit the mines' operation after receiving answers to their inquiries.

"It is commendable that, following one example, the investors wanted the people, in the form of the government, to participate and share in that project," he said, referring to Geopromining's offer of 15 percent of the Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine to the government in 2021.

"The operation of the Amulsar gold mine with this model dispels our concerns and will be an additional stimulus for economic growth," said Pashinyan.

Lydian Armenia told RFE/RL that the decision to grant shares in the company to the government was made by its shareholders.

"And in the case of long-term and large-scale projects like the Amulsar project, such cooperation allows sharing both success and responsibility," the company stated.

A month before the government's approval, The Guardians of Amulsar, a group of activists opposing the operation of the mine, sent an open letter to the EDB board, saying that residents of the town of Jermuk and their supporters were committed to protecting Amulsar mountain from development, and warning that support for the project was 'an adventure and doomed to failure'.

"Amulsar is a living area for the population of the Jermuk community, and we will not give it up," read their letter.



The Vice Chair of EDB, Denis Ilyin (left), the Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan (center), and Jeffrey Coach, a board member at Lydian Armenia. (Ministry of Economy photo)

EU Concerned About Azeri 'Territorial Claims' on Armenia

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Aliyev twice canceled talks with Pashinyan which the EU planned to host in October. Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov similarly withdrew from a meeting with his Armenian counterpart scheduled for November 20 in Washington. Baku accused the Western powers of pro-Armenian bias. It now wants to negotiate with Yerevan without third-party mediation.

Sounding a similar note was European Commission's lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy Peter Stano, who told Armenpress that the EU has been sending clear messages to Azerbaijan that any violation of Armenia's territorial integrity would be unacceptable and will have severe consequences for EU-Azeri relations.

"The European Union has spared no diplomatic efforts to help reach a mutually acceptable settlement of the conflict over the past few years. We have been in close contact with the Armenian and Azerbaijani

leaderships, tirelessly reiterating our support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity of both countries and the resolution of issues exclusively by peaceful means. Our communication channels remain open. The EU has been using every opportunity to pass clear messages to Azerbaijan that any violation of Armenia's territorial integrity would be unacceptable and will have severe consequences for our relations," Stano added.

He added, "The President of the European Council Charles Michel, the High Representative /Vice-President Josep Borrell and the EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar continue their engagement for a sustainable and lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan."

French Senate Vote

On January 17, the French Senate voted 336 to 1 to adopt a resolution supporting Armenia and demanding sanctions against Azerbaijan. With the resolution the Senate:

The resolution supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Armenia and condemns the military attack carried out by Azerbaijan with the support of its allies on September 19 and 20, 2023 against Nagorno-Karabakh.

In addition, it calls on Azerbaijan to guarantee the right of the Armenian population to return to Nagorno-Karabakh by providing conditions that will ensure their safety and well-being and call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from the sovereign territory of Armenia.

The resolution also condemned the arbitrary arrests of political leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh.

It also focused on Armenian heritage sites in Karabakh, calling "for the removal of Azerbaijan from the intergovernmental committee for the protection of cultural values in the event of an armed conflict."

In addition, it seeks the establishment of

an international group of experts at UNESCO and its mission to Nagorno-Karabakh to prepare an informative report on the state of cultural and religious heritage.

The resolution was written by the leaders of all political factions in the Senate: Bruno Ratayo, Marise Carrere, Cécile Soucierman, Guillaume Gontard, Patrick Kanner, Hervé Marcel, Claude Mallure and Francois Patria, as well as the head of the France-Armenia friendship group in the Senate, Gilbert-Luc Devinaz.

The session was chaired by the vice president of the Senate, Sophie Primas. Stephane Sejourne, the newly appointed Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, was also present at the meeting.

Armenian Ambassador to France Hasmik Tolmajian and Nagorno-Karabakh representative Hovhannes Gevorgyan were present at the session as guests of honor.

(Azatutyun, Public Radio of Armenia and Armenpress contributed to this report.)



ARMENIA

Armenian Car Re-Exports Hit New Record

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia's re-export of mostly second-hand cars more than doubled last year as local traders continued to take advantage of Western sanctions imposed on Russia over its war in Ukraine.

Armenian government data shows the total value of those exports rising to almost \$533 million in January-November 2023 from \$217 million in the same period a year earlier.

This growth was particularly rapid in the first half of the year when used cars became the country's number one export item. It appears to have somewhat slowed down in the following months after the Russian government imposed higher duties on imports of such vehicles.

The sanctions include serious restrictions on trade with Russia. Also, Western automakers pulled out of the Russian market following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, pushing up the prices of new cars and forcing many Russians to switch to cheaper used models. Car traders from other nations, including Armenia, rushed to capitalize on the market opportunity.

According to Armenia's State Revenue Committee (SRC), the number of cars imported to Armenia jumped nearly six-fold to almost 45,300 in 2022. The SRC has been struggling to cope with long lines of cars formed outside its main customs terminal, processing imported vehicles.

They include not only used cars but also brand new ones. The SRC reported sharp rises in taxes collected from local dealers of carmakers such as Mercedes-Benz and Toyota in the first half of 2023. Both Mercedes-Benz and Toyota stopped directly supplying their cars to Russia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Armenia has also been re-exporting consumer electronics and other Western-manufactured goods to Russia. This is the main reason why its exports to Russia tripled in 2022.

The re-exports prompted concern from EU and especially US officials about a year ago. They pressed the Armenian authorities to comply with the Western sanctions. The authorities introduced in May mandatory government licenses for shipments of microchips, transformers, video cameras, antennas and other electronic equipment to Russia.

According to the Armenian government's Statistical Committee, exports to Russia rose by 50 percent to \$3.2 billion in January-November 2023.

Armenia's overall exports reached a new record high of almost \$7 billion. This includes \$2.1 billion worth of what the Statistical Committee describes as precious stones and metals and jewelry items. Rough diamonds imported from Russia and re-exported to other countries, notably the United Arab Emirates, are believed to account for a large part of that figure.

French Soccer Great Anelka Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Retired French soccer great Nicolas Anelka visited Armenian on January 18, during which he met with officials as well as refugee children.

Anelka met with the President of the Football Federation of Armenia Armen Melikbekyan and discussed the prospects of establishing a football academy in Armenia, the Football Federation of Armenia said.

He visited the FFA Technical Center/Football Academy and familiarized himself with the infrastructures.

On the same day, he visited the Sport and Culture Center in Abovyan to meet with forcibly displaced children of Nagorno-Karabakh and presented gifts to them.

Armenia National Olympic Committee President Gagik Tsarukyan accompanied Anelka during the visit to



Soccer (football) great Nicolas Anelka signs an autograph in Yerevan.

Abovyan.

In a statement, Tsarukyan said Anelka had expressed desire to meet the children of Nagorno-Karabakh and gift them presents.

The Sport and Culture Center in Abovyan has been providing shelter to the NK children since September 2023.



Nicolas Anelka stands with Gagik Tsarukyan with young refugees in Abovyan.

Karabakh Factions Vow to Fight for 'Collective Repatriation'

By Shoghik Galstyan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Vartan Oskanian, a former Armenian foreign minister, has announced that he will lead a political committee set by Nagorno-Karabakh's main political factions exiled in Armenia to campaign for the "collective repatriation" of the region's displaced population.

In a statement posted on Facebook on Thursday, January 18, Oskanian said the committee will reveal its composition and details of its activities "in the coming days."

"The primary mission of the Committee is to advocate for and pursue the right of the collective repatriation of the Artsakh people with international guarantees, ensuring their safe, secure and dignified resettlement in their homeland," he said.

"Achieving enduring peace in the region remains unattainable when a segment of the Armenian people is forcefully uprooted from its homeland, and a coerced notion of 'peace' is imposed upon Armenia, with the looming threat of further losses," added Oskanian, who has increasingly

criticized Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's policy on the Karabakh conflict in recent years.

According to Davit Galstyan, a leader of Karabakh's Justice party, the committee was set up by the exiled Karabakh parliament in early December.

"Since no Armenian officials raise our cause in the international arena, this is an opportunity to prevent the Artsakh issue from being completely forgotten," Galstyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Friday.

Galstyan said the committee led by Oskanian should engage international actors who have called for the Karabakh Armenians' safe return to their depopulated homeland recaptured by Azerbaijan as a result of its September military offensive. He did not say whether he will be ready to negotiate with the Azerbaijani government.

Baku has denied targeting Karabakh civilians during the two-day military operation or forcing them to flee the region in the following days. It has pledged to protect the rights of local residents willing to live under Azerbaijani rule. Karabakh's leaders and ordinary residents ruled out

such an option even before their exodus.

Armenia's ruling Civil Contract party indicated on Friday its disapproval of the initiative made public by Oskanian.

"I don't believe that the repatriation is possible without a peace treaty [between Armenia and Azerbaijan]," said Gevorg Papoyan, the party's deputy chairman. "These are just going to be political speculations, attempts to draw political dividends."

"I also won't rule out provocations against Armenia by the fifth column," Papoyan added without elaborating.

Pashinyan has repeatedly indicated that the Karabakh issue is closed for his administration. His political allies lashed out at Samvel Shahramanyan, the Karabakh president, late last month after he declared null and void his September 28 decree liquidating the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Shahramanyan said that he had to sign the decree in order to stop the Azerbaijani assault and enable the Karabakh Armenians to safely flee to Armenia.



INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan Revives Demand for Corridor Through Armenia

By Ani Avetisyan

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has called Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s latest remarks about border delimitation/demarcation and transit links “totally unacceptable” and a “blow” to the peace process.

“I promise a financial reward to anyone who finds the term ‘Zangezur corridor’ in the November 9 agreement,” Pashinyan told a group of MPs on January 13.

It was an ironic reference to the Azerbaijani side’s contention, reiterated recently by Aliyev, that the provision on opening transit links in the Russian-brokered peace accord that ended the 2020 Second Karabakh War stipulates a seamless corridor through Armenia connecting mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan exclave, without Armenian border or customs checks.

That idea is referred to in Azerbaijan as the “Zangezur corridor” and Baku has pushed for it with varying degrees of intensity since the 2020 ceasefire. Early last year it seemed to back down on the demand in the context of the peace talks.

In early October, shortly after Azerbaijan’s lightning offensive to seize the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh, the corridor project seemed to be off the table after ground was broken on an alternate route through Iran. (Tehran, like Armenia, is vociferously opposed to the Zangezur corridor idea.)

The issue, which has long inspired Armenian fears of an Azerbaijani invasion, is now back on the agenda, as Aliyev said in a January 10 interview that if the corridor was not opened, “Armenia will remain in an

eternal deadlock. ... If the route I mentioned is not opened, we will not open our border with Armenia anywhere else. So they will do themselves more harm than good.”

In October last year, the Armenian prime minister introduced an initiative called “Crossroads of Peace” aimed at regional cooperation. That proposal includes linkages between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan with Armenian border and customs checks. Azerbaijan has dismissed it out of hand as “PR.” (According to the 9 November 2020 agreement that ended the Second Karabakh War, the route linking mainland Azerbaijan Nakhchivan is to be monitored by Russian border troops.)

Exclaves and Villages

Elsewhere in his January 10 interview, Aliyev demanded the return of enclaves and border villages that have been under Armenian control since the First Karabakh War three decades ago.

Pashinyan seemed to back the idea of an exchange of enclaves, with a “mutually agreed map” as part of the process, but said that if Azerbaijan demanded the return of eight villages, Armenia would “raise the issue of 32.”

That was a reference to several bits of former Soviet Armenian territory that have similarly been controlled by Azerbaijan since the first war, as well as to the territory inside Armenia, estimated to total about 215 square kilometers, that Azerbaijani troops have occupied following several incursions between May 2021 and September 2022.

Armenia and several Western states have demanded the withdrawal of Azerbaijani

troops from Armenian lands. But Baku has refused, citing the lack of demarcation of the borders as justification.

And Aliyev said explicitly he had no intention of withdrawing them in his January 10 remarks. “We are not taking a step back because that border must be defined. However, our location, which is currently disputed by Armenia, does not include any settlement.”

The delimitation and demarcation of state borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the opening of transport links, remain the most contested issues between the two countries following Azerbaijan’s takeover of Karabakh in September. The border commission working on the delimitation and demarcation issues held its latest meeting late last year and the next one, according to Aliyev, is to be held this month, with the question of the border villages in the Gazakh region of Azerbaijan being on the agenda.

Although the principles of a peace deal were said to be agreed upon in November, the sides seem to have dismissed each other’s draft proposals for the peace agreement.

Additionally, the sides disagree on who should mediate the talks. Yerevan opposes Moscow’s mediation, while Baku has turned down EU or US-initiated talks in recent months.

In December, the two countries managed to issue a joint statement and agree on a prisoner exchange, but they do not have a clear plan to continue the bilateral talks.

(This article originally appeared on Eurasianet.org on January 17.)

INTERNATIONAL

Khachaturyan Meets with Global Leaders At Davos

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — President of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan has met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian during the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The embassy said that during the meeting the Iranian FM “emphasized the importance of preserving historic routes of connectivity and absence of geopolitical changes in the process of the developments in the Caucasus.”

On the same day, he met French President Emmanuel Macron.

During his time at the WEF, Khachaturyan met with Argentine President Javier Milei, Amnesty International Secretary-General Agnes Callamard and Finland’s Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen.

Wrestler Arsen Julfalakyan Now Represents Argentina

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Olympic silver medalist, world and European champion, wrestler Arsen Julfalakyan no longer represents Armenia, Armenpress reports citing the Secretary General of the Wrestling Federation, Arayik Baghdadyan.

“Arsen Julfalakyan has not competed under the flag of Armenia for 4 years. He decided to change his sports citizenship and now competes under the flag of Argentina,” Baghdadyan said.

When representing Armenia, Julfalakyan took part in the Grand Prix that took place a few days ago in France and became a silver medalist.

He participated in three Olympic Games as a member of the Armenian national team.

PACE Officials Challenge Credentials of Azerbaijan Delegation

YEREVAN (Armenpress) —The credentials of Azerbaijan’s delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) have been challenged on substantive grounds on the opening day of the 2024 winter plenary session.

“Making the challenge, Frank Schwabe (Germany, SOC) cited political prisoners in the country, the violent displacement of people from Nagorno-Karabakh, the fact that Assembly rapporteurs were unable to visit Azerbaijan at least three times during 2023, and the lack of an invitation to the Assembly to observe the country’s 7 February presidential election. He was supported by at least thirty members of the Assembly, belonging to at least five national delegations as required by the rules.

The challenge was immediately referred to the Assembly’s Monitoring Committee and to its Rules Committee.

Under the rules, the Assembly must vote to ratify the credentials, not to ratify them, or to ratify them “together with depriving or suspending the exercise of some of the rights of participation or representation of members of the delegation concerned in the activities of the Assembly and its bodies.

Rally Commemorates 17th Anniversary of Dink Assassination

DINK, from page 1

She added, “Some people are special. They embody the values of their times, lands, and peoples. Hrant was such a person. As I remember him dearly today, I do not mean to offer a mere praise for Hrant Dink. This thought had occurred to me already back then when I met him for the first time in 2002 as we came together to establish the Peace Initiative.”

She continued, “He was in fact screaming the language of peace against the racist-nationalist bigotry that turned peoples into enemies. He was a trailblazer breaking taboos, defying the lies, and obscuring of the official history. And we do know that the forces

nested in darkness are most afraid of taboos being broken, of their lies being exposed, of their dark faces being seen. This is why they shot Hrant.”

She conclude, “I salute those who cherish the same values with you, I salute those who vowed to defend those values courageously at the expense of their lives. I salute those who pay the price of advocating these values in prison cells and exile; I cannot possibly name them all, yet let me mention the symbolic figures Selahattin Demirtaş, Osman Kavala, Gültan Kışanak, and let me salute them all on your behalf too.”



Oya Baydar speaks, as Hrant Dink’s widow, Rakel, stands to her right (Photos: Murat Kök)



Jerusalem: Armenian Christians Fight Controversial Land Deal

By Yolande Knell

JERUSALEM (BBC News) — While Christmas may be a distant memory for many, the Armenians of Jerusalem only just held their annual celebration on January 19.

This year, the holiday was overshadowed by the war in Gaza and the ongoing threat to the survival of the community from a deeply controversial real estate deal.

Many spent the day in an unconventional fashion, joining a sit-in at a tent in their church car park, which is part of a large plot at risk in the Armenian Quarter of the walled Old City.

“This illegal, treacherous land deal actually brought us all together,” says Setrag Balian, a ceramicist turned activist.

Armenians date their presence in the holy city back to the 4th Century. Many of the 2,000-strong community live inside the large, cobble-stoned compound of St James Convent.

In the past, they have often been divided by political differences and family fights and there have been rifts between Jerusalemite Armenians and their Church leaders who act as employers and landlords for many.

Yet for two months, local Armenians and priests have all been staying in a large, improvised tent here, around-the-clock, to try to block the development going ahead. They eat here and work shifts as guards behind a make-shift barricade decorated with Armenian flags.

Together, they say, they have seen off attacks by contractors with bulldozers, armed settlers and masked thugs.

“Everything was put in danger with this deal,” Setrag



Protesters building a barricade in the Armenian Quarter

Located on Mount Zion, it has huge religious significance and is incredibly valuable real estate but an annual fee of just \$300,000 (£237,000) was to be paid by the developer.

“For that amount you could barely rent yourself a couple of falafel shops in the Old City,” commented one Armenian using the car park, who asked for his name not to be used.

Amid heated protests by locals and a decision by Jordan and the Palestinian Authority to withdraw their recognition of the patriarch over his role in the deal, pressure grew on the Church to cancel the contract.

Meanwhile, an international team of Armenian lawyers came to investigate and give advice.

The patriarch claimed he had been tricked by a trusted priest who was later defrocked. He finally announced a formal move to cancel the deal in October.

At that point, tensions between Armenians and representatives of the developer - whose workers had forcibly taken over the car park — began turning into direct confrontations.

When Israeli bulldozers arrived at the contested site to try to begin demolition, Armenians rushed to block it. The next month, there were claims of intimidation as the developer arrived with several armed men.

investors in Israel and overseas have sought to buy properties to try to cement Israeli control over occupied East Jerusalem.

Palestinians want this part of the city as the capital of their hoped-for future state. Jewish Israelis view the whole of the city as their eternal, undivided capital.

Researchers at the Israeli non-profit organization Ir Amim, which is focused on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and supports the diversity of Jerusalem, are worried about developments in the Armenian Quarter.

“This is close to sensitive places,” says Aviv Tarkasy. “Creating a settlement in this area is part of very far-reaching aims of settler organizations who basically want to Judaize completely the Old City, with their eyes on the Temple Mount or al-Aqsa Mosque.”

The settlements built in occupied territory are seen as illegal under international law, although Israel disagrees.

The BBC has contacted the developer behind Xana Gardens several times but not heard back.

The now-defrocked American priest who coordinated the deal, Baret Yeretsian, was surrounded by a mob of angry young Armenians shouting “traitor” as he exited St. James Convent last year, assisted by Israeli police, before moving to Southern California.

He has since denied to journalists that the developer has any political or ideological agenda, describing such accusations as “propaganda” based on his Jewish identity.

The Armenian Church has now begun proceedings through the Israeli courts to challenge the validity of the contract for the Cows’ Garden.

As locals gathered around a brightly lit Christmas tree in their makeshift tent last week, they remained resolute but were aware that their legal fight could easily take years.

Whether incursions can be stopped in the meantime remains to be seen.



Local Armenians and priests have been staying in an improvised tent on the land as they protest against the deal

says. “Whoever wants to take away our rights and endanger our presence and our lives here, we will stand up against them and defend our rights till the end.”

Last April, facts began to emerge about a 2021 contract secretly signed between the Armenian Patriarch and a Jewish Australian-Israeli developer. It gave a newly-created firm, Xana Gardens, a 98-year lease to build and operate a luxury hotel in an area known as the Cow’s Garden.

The deal covered a plot of 11,500 sq m, abutting the ramparts of the south-western corner of the Old City, with an option to take over an even bigger area.

It includes the car park, some church buildings and the homes of five Armenian families, accounting for about 25% of the Armenian Quarter.

Further attempted incursions came after the protest tent was set up. The most violent was last month when masked men came to the car park beating people with sticks and using tear gas. A priest, Father Diran Hagopian, broadcast events on Facebook Live.

“They were shouting, ‘you should go out from this land’,” he later told the BBC. “One of their leaders was shouting: ‘You can break their legs, you can even kill them, but they should leave.’”

The apparent involvement of known Jewish settlers in attacks alongside other evidence has increased long-held suspicions that a powerful settler organization is involved in the attempted land takeover.

Ever since Israel captured the Old City and its holy sites from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East War, Jewish

UK Monitoring ‘Cow’s Garden’ Situation

JERUSALEM (Public Radio of Armenia) — The UK is monitoring the situation in the Cow’s Garden (Goveroun Bardezeh) site of the Armenian Quarter of Old Jerusalem and is clear on the need to avoid any further rise in tensions, Andrew Mitchell, UK Minister of State for Development, said in response to a question by Tommy Sheppard on January 19.

“The UK’s position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states,” the Minister said.

“The UK is a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and an advocate for the integrity of culturally important areas to be respected. The UK continues to take a strong stance against settler violence, and urges Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. We keep our sanctions under review and reserve the right to introduce further measures,” he added.

Turkey Set to Approve Sweden’s NATO Membership Bid After Long Delay

By Huseyin Hayatsever and Tuvan Gumrukcu

ANKARA (Reuters) — Turkey’s parliament is widely expected to approve Sweden’s NATO membership bid on Tuesday, January 23, clearing the biggest remaining hurdle to expanding the Western military alliance after 20 months of delays.

Turkey’s general assembly, where President Tayyip Erdogan’s ruling alliance holds a majority, is set to vote on the application that Sweden first made in 2022 following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Once parliament has ratified the move, Erdogan would be expected to sign it into law within days, leaving Hungary as the only member state not to have approved Sweden’s accession.

Hungary had pledged not to be the last ally to ratify, but its parliament is in recess till around mid-February. Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on January 23 he invited his Swedish counterpart to visit and negotiate his country joining the bloc.

“I don’t see any reason to negotiate in the current situation, though ... we can have a dialogue and continue to discuss questions,” Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom told Swedish news agency TT.

Sweden’s government had no comment on Turkey’s parliamentary process.

Turkey and Hungary maintain better relations with Russia than other members of the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

While opposing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Turkey has criticized Western sanctions on Moscow, which has cautioned that it would respond if NATO bolstered military infrastructure in the two Nordic states.

Sweden, whose membership bid marked a historic shift in its security policy, would enhance NATO defenses in the Baltic Sea region. Ankara’s delays have frustrated some of its Western allies and enabled it to extract some concessions.

When Sweden and Finland asked to join NATO in 2022, Turkey surprised some members in raising objections over what it said was the two countries’ protection of groups that Ankara deems terrorists.

It endorsed Finland’s membership in April last year but, along with Hungary, has kept Sweden waiting. Ankara had urged Stockholm to toughen its stance on local members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which the European Union and United States also deem a terrorist group.

In response, Stockholm introduced a new anti-terrorism bill that makes being a member of a terrorist organization illegal. Sweden, Finland, Canada and the Netherlands also took steps to relax Turkey arms-export policies.

Erdogan, who sent Sweden’s bid to parliament in October, has linked Sweden’s ratification to U.S. approval of sales of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey.

The White House backs the sale and some analysts expect a deal to swiftly follow Turkey’s ratification of Sweden’s bid. But there is no clear time frame for the U.S. Congress to approve it, and Turkey faces some congressional opposition over delaying NATO enlargement and its human rights record.

Parliament’s foreign affairs commission approved the bid last month, with Erdogan’s ruling AK Party, nationalist allies MHP, and main opposition CHP backing it. Opposition nationalist and Islamist parties rejected it.

EU Envoy Nixes Trip to Baku

ENVOY, from page 1
of the ongoing presidential election campaign in Azerbaijan. It downplayed this fact, saying that the European diplomat remains “in close touch” with Azerbaijani officials.

The US envoy, Louis Bono, visited Yerevan last week to discuss continuing US attempts to reschedule a meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers which US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was due to host in Washington on November 20. Baku canceled the meeting in protest against what he called pro-Armenian statements made by James O’Brien, the US assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia.

According to some Azerbaijani media outlets, Azerbaijani officials refused to receive Bono. The US embassies in both South Caucasus nations did not deny the snub.

Also, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev twice withdrew from EU-mediated talks with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan slated for October. Aliyev’s top foreign policy aide said afterwards that Baku and Yerevan do not need third-party mediation in order to negotiate a bilateral peace treaty.

Last week, Aliyev again demanded the opening of an extraterritorial corridor to Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave



Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan (right) meets Toivo Klaar, EU special representative to the South Caucasus, January 18, 2024. Share

through Armenia’s Syunik province and Armenian withdrawal from “eight Azerbaijani villages.” And he continued to dismiss Yerevan’s insistence on using the most recent Soviet maps to delimit the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Pashinyan rejected Aliyev’s demands, saying that they amount to territorial claims to Armenia and undermine prospects for the kind of

peace treaty that is backed by the EU and the US

Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan complained about Aliyev’s “unconstructive” remarks when he met with Klaar on Thursday. According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Kostanyan also accused Baku of hampering transport links between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan Commission Call for Expulsion of French Companies

BAKU (AFP) — An Azerbaijan parliamentary commission called Thursday for the expulsion of French companies from the oil-rich country, including energy giant TotalEnergies, in the latest deterioration of relations between Baku and Paris.

Azerbaijan has repeatedly hit out at France for criticizing Baku’s Karabakh offensive last year, and for plans by Paris officials to help arm neighboring Armenia.

The commission urged severing economic ties with Paris in response to a French Senate resolution that “condemned the violation” of Armenian territory.

“The committee believes it is important to impose sanctions on France,” the committee for international relations of Azerbaijan’s parliament said in a statement.

“All French companies, including To-

tal, should withdraw from Azerbaijan and French companies should not be allowed to participate in any projects carried out by the Azerbaijani state,” it said.

TotalEnergies has worked in Azerbaijan since 1996. In September last year its executives took part in the inauguration of the Absheron gas field with President Ilham Aliyev.

Azerbaijan took control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory in a lightning 24-hour military offensive last year.

The region is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but was home to a majority Armenian population and controlled by pro-Armenian separatists.

The parliamentary committee accused Paris of being “racist, Azerbaijanophobic and Islamophobic” over its response.

It also asked the country’s foreign

ministry to “take steps” to recognize the French Mediterranean island of Corsica, as well as French Polynesia and France’s Pacific archipelago of New Caledonia, as independent.

The moves were the latest signs of mounting tensions between France, a historic ally of Armenia, and Azerbaijan, with Aliyev accusing Paris of wanting a new war in the Caucasus.

On January 17, the French Senate adopted a resolution calling for the right of ethnic Armenians to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, and for a UNESCO mission to ensure the protection of historic Armenian churches in Karabakh.

Almost the entire ethnic-Armenian population — more than 100,000 people -- fled Karabakh for Armenia in the wake of Baku’s takeover.

Mkhitarian Part of Inter Milan Italian Super Cup Winning Team

ROME (Public Radio of Armenia) — Former Armenia international Henrikh Mkhitaryan on January 23 said it was amazing winning the Italian Super Cup with Inter Milan.

“Greetings to all our fans out there,” Mkhitaryan wrote on social media.

Inter beat Napoli 1-0 and win the Italian Super Cup for the third time in a row. The final played in Riyadh was decided by a goal by Lautaro Martinez in the 91st minute.

Inter Milan captain Lautaro Martinez struck a last-gasp goal to snatch a dramatic 1-0 win over 10-man Napoli as they claimed their third successive Italian Super Cup title on Monday.

The victory also handed Inter an eighth Supercoppa title, trailing only one behind Juventus’ record haul of nine.



Community News

Dr. Watenpaugh To Speak on Comparison Between Armenian And Native American Genocides

FRESNO — “Eradicating Culture, Erasing Lives: Children and the Armenian and Native American Genocides” will be the topic of a presentation by Dr. Keith Watenpaugh of University of California, Davis (UC Davis) on Thursday, February 1, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus. The event is supported by the Florence Elaine Hamparson Armenian Memorial Fund.

In this talk, Watenpaugh, professor and director at UC Davis Human Rights Studies, draws the genocide of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire into the comparative study of indigenous genocide. He focuses on the erasure of indigenous children’s identity by state authorities through boarding schools to argue that the ideology and practice of modern humanitarianism is a definitive shared element of indigenous genocides across the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Common experiences of denial by powerful states and cultural erasure invite added comparison and intersectional solidarity. The talk seeks to address Native American and Armenian Studies scholars together, elaborate a working vocabulary for future collaborative research in Human Rights Studies and serve as a point of departure for public scholarship and policy engagement.



Dr. Keith Watenpaugh

Watenpaugh is professor and founding director of Human Rights Studies at UC, Davis. Since 2013, he has directed a multi-disciplinary international research program to assist refugee university students and scholars fleeing the war in Syria, which has garnered support from the Carnegie Corp. of New York and the Open Society Foundations. Currently he leads an effort to expand refugee access to higher education through the Ford-foundation supported Article 26 Backpack project. He is author of the multiple-award winning *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (University of California Press, 2015), and his first book, *Being Modern in the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 2006) chronicles the rise of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious middle class of the city of Aleppo in the first decades of the 20th Century.

The lecture is free and open to the public.

The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.



From left: L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, L.A. City Council President Paul Krikorian, and Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Father Alexei Smith (photo by Karine Armen)

AIWA-LA Ecumenical Program Shines Light on Armenian POWs

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES —The Los Angeles chapter of the Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA-LA) hosted an ecumenical prayer

program titled “One Cause, Many Faiths - Uniting Voices for Armenians in Captivity,” at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels in Los Angeles on Wednesday, January 17 in support of the Armenians in captivity in Azerbaijan.

The program started with a welcome by Archbishop Jose Gomez, head of the Archdiocese of the Catholic Church in Los Angeles, followed by an opening prayer by Fr. Alexei Smith, Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Nicole Nishanian, Affiliate President of AIWA, Los Angeles, welcomed everyone, thanked the religious leaders, and introduced the program’s emcee, KTLA Channel 5 reporter Ellina Abovian. The politicians who participated were Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, L.A. City Council President Paul Krikorian, and California State Senator Anthony Portantino.

The event included musical performances by Greg Hosharian on instrumentals and vocals by soprano Natalie Buickians, whose mesmerizing voice carried beautifully throughout the Cathedral with selections of Soorp Soorp, Ave Maria, and Der Voghormia.

AIWA - LA Vice President Margaret Mgrublian, explained the reasons for the group’s decision to host the event: “The bonds between the diaspora and the homeland are so strong that we had several on our AIWA board who personally had connections with the families of the hostages being held by Azerbaijan. It was apparent that we needed to get the message across in a broader way. There is a distinct advantage to raising voices with the help of our non-Armenian communities.”

Krikorian talked about the history of the conflict and compared it to the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Supervisor Barger mentioned the recent resolution that was passed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to release all the

see AIWA, page 9



AIWA Committee with Father Alexei Smith and Judge Gassia Apkarian (photo by Karine Armen)

Rep. Chu and AESA Explore Means to Support Armenian STEM Community

PASADENA, Calif. — On December 18, 2023, representatives of the Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA) met with United States congressional member Judy Chu to explore opportunities for increasing support for the Armenian STEM community. In attendance were AESA President Ace Tarakchian, AESA Vice President Linda Megerdichian, AESA Public Affairs Committee Chair Jay Tourgoutian and AESA Board Member Nareh Saghatelian.

The meeting was facilitated by community advocate and Los Angeles County Commissioner David George Gevorgyan and AESA Member Syuzanna Abrahamyan. The delegation was joined by the Pasadena chapter chair of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) Danny L. Donabedian.

“The AESA’s work to support Armenian professionals in the San Gabriel Valley and elevate opportunities for young Armenians in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is invaluable to our region — ensuring our families and local economy are strong now and into the future. I am proud to work in Congress to increase opportunities for STEM careers and will always appre-



Rep. Judy Chu with AESA President Ace Tarakchian

ciate our partnership. I look forward to seeing all the accomplishments of the professionals AESA supports for years to come,” remarked Rep. Judy Chu.

“AESA was very pleased to meet with Rep. Judy Chu, who has demonstrated her consistent support for the Armenian-American community as well as for STEM education and funding,” said Tarakchian. “We look forward to working closely with Rep. Judy Chu’s office to advance issues of importance to Armenian-Americans in science and technology, and to become a resource of subject matter expertise for the community,” Tarakchian concluded.

“Congresswoman Judy Chu and AESA joining in consultation is an important step forward to increasing government support and resources for the science and technology professionals of the San Gabriel Valley,” see SUPPORT, page 9



COMMUNITY NEWS

Manoogian School 9th Grader Wins Robofest, Gets Chance to Attend Robotics Olympiad

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — In a remarkable achievement, 9th-grade student Jurius Azar from AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School has emerged as the first-place winner at Robofest, Lawrence Technological University’s prestigious international autonomous robotics program for high school students.

Robofest challenges student teams to design, construct, and program autonomous robots capable of independent action. Azar showcased exceptional skills and innovation securing the top spot in the competition.



Jurius Azar

The victory has earned Jurius Azar an invitation to the 25th International Robotics Olympiad (IRO), the oldest international robotics competition, set to take place in

Greece in January. This will be the first time the IRO is hosted in Greece, marking a significant milestone for the global robotics community.

Since its inception in 1999, the International Robot Olympiad has brought together 38 member countries and witnessed the participation of over 1000 students each year. The competition aims to promote scientific thinking among adolescents and foster the development of talent in the field of robotics.

Azar will be representing AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School as he competes against peers from around the world. The IRO challenges participants to build and program autonomous robots to earn points in the Robot Game competition, propose solutions to identified problems in the Project category, all while adhering to the Core Values of the competition.

This achievement highlights his exceptional skills and underscores AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School’s commitment to nurturing and developing young talent in robotics. The school provides opportunities for students to excel in STEAM-related activities, preparing them for success in an increasingly technology-driven world. Students at the AGBU Alex & Marie Manoogian School refine their skills in the new \$2M STEAM Center, opened in the Fall of 2022. The STEAM faculty, known for their compassion and unwavering commitment, consistently encourage students to achieve the next level of excellence in their pursuits.

Rep. Chu and AESA Explore Means to Support Armenian STEM Community

SUPPORT, from page 9

said Gevorkyan. “Congresswoman Chu has been a strong supporter of Armenian organizations of the 28th congressional district, and we are grateful for her deep commitment to all her constituents,” he continued.

Chu was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2009 and represents the 28th Congressional District which includes Alhambra, Altadena, Arcadia, La Canada Flintridge, La Crescenta-Montrose, Pasadena, San Gabriel and Monrovia. Her jurisdiction includes institutions such as JPL, which is run by Caltech for NASA. Rep. Judy Chu has a

distinguished background in STEM and has continuously advocated for increased funding for scientific education, research and space exploration. Her commitment aligns with AESA’s mission, setting the stage for a promising collaboration to drive progress in STEM fields.

Founded in 1983, the Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA) is a non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-profit organization dedicated to empowering the worldwide Armenian STEM community to reach its fullest potential and facilitate global progress through STEM education, collaboration and humanitarian initiatives.

AIWA-LA Program Shines Light on Armenian POWs

AIWA, from page 8

Armenian hostages held illegally in Azerbaijan. She said, “We will send the signed letter to the Biden Administration demanding the immediate release of all the hostage. Armenia and its people are resilient and can live in peace and coexistence.”

Portantino in his comments recalled a trip he had made to Artsakh in 2016, where an Artsakh soldier gave him a handful of soil as a symbol of the soldier’s homeland. He said he keeps that soil in his office and wonders if that young soldier is still alive.

Gassia Apkarian, a California Superior Court Judge and co-founder of the Center for Truth and Justice (CFTJ), told the congregation, “I am here today, not as a judge but as a warrior.” The CFTJ has several firsthand testimonials from the survivors of the Artsakh war. She stressed the importance and the challenges of collecting data to take Azerbaijan to court. “As long as there is a single Armenian that is targeted and is in a dungeon in Azerbaijan, we will continue to talk about it. We will

fight for justice. We will make sure, unlike what happened in 1915, those who commit atrocities will be held accountable.”

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, gave the closing remarks. Other religious leaders who spoke were Bishop Mikael Mouradian, Head of the Catholic Eparchy, Father Zareh Sarkisian of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, and Reverend Hendrik Shanazarian, Minister to the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America.

The program ended with a processional exit of the clergy while a quartet played music. Mgrublian said, “Gratefully, the non-Armenian religious community joined us and even opened the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels for this very solemn and meaningful event. It was an emotional sight to see religious leaders who represented many different denominations praying in unity with us and calling for the release of those held unlawfully captive.”

Knights of Vartan Vartanantz Gala and Fundraiser to Benefit Armenian Border Schools

GLENDAL — On Sunday, February 4, the Knights of Vartan Los Angeles Tri-Lodge will host a “Vartanantz Gala and Fundraiser” at the Renaissance Banquet Hall here. One of the many missions of the Knights of Vartan is to ensure the future of Armenia by preserving schools on its borders.

Armenia is faced with an urgent need for educational facilities to accommodate refugee children who, along with their families, were forcibly displaced from their three millennia-old homeland: Artsakh. The Knights of Vartan Los Angeles Tri-Lodge is currently focused on Kindergarten No. 3 in the small border town of Chambarak, Armenia (population 5,800). The local school, which was already overcrowded, has now been overwhelmed by the arrival of refugee children from Artsakh. Chambarak’s generous and kind-hearted residents have demonstrated incredible solidarity by opening their hearts, homes and schools to over six hundred Artsakh refugees.



The Knights of Vartan is committed to the noble task of revitalizing and enlarging Kindergarten No. 3 in Chambarak. The goal is for Artsakh refugees, who have relocated to Chambarak, to stay rooted in Chambarak, thus reinforcing the irrefutable sovereignty of Armenia. Kindergarten No. 3 has three classroom buildings. Two have already been successfully refurbished and updated by the Knights of Vartan into exceptional educational facilities. The third building sits unused. It is in dire need of repairs and upgrades to make it a safe and comfortable place for children to learn and be nurtured. It is our plan to refurbish the third building, providing much-needed classroom space.

Jack Hadjinian, former mayor of Montebello, will serve as the master of ceremonies at this year’s gala to support Kindergarten #3 in Chambarak. Paul Krekorian, Los Angeles City Council President, will serve as keynote speaker. This year’s Vartanantz Gala honoree is Armen Aroyan, a true Armenian patriot and philanthropist. For decades, Aroyan led pilgrimages to Historic Armenia. The renowned expert guided groups to visit the beloved villages of their forefathers.

Giragosian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Krekorian Brings Political Savvy and Experience to LA City Council

KREKORIAN, from page 1

City Council Reform

The council, with 15 members, is the lawmaking body for Los Angeles. Krekorian was elected as representative of City Council District 2 at the end of 2009, which includes areas like North Hollywood, Studio City, Sun Valley, Toluca Lake, Valley Glen, Valley Village and Van Nuys, and contains the highest percentage of Armenian voters in the city. In 2012, Krekorian was elected as chair of the council's Budget and Finance Committee, where he served for ten years and helped maintain balanced city budgets through a recession and Covid-induced economic turmoil.

In December 2022, he was elected as council president, taking over after a scandal forced the prior president, Nury Martinez, to resign. An audio recording was leaked of Martinez and two other council members, Kevin de León and Gil Cedillo, all three Latinos, making racist comments about various individuals and ethnic groups in a conversation with labor union leader Ron Herrera about redrawing council district electoral lines.

"It was deeply disturbing," Krekorian said. While Armenians were comparatively minor targets, compared to Blacks and Americans of Oaxacan descent, in the discussion, their inclusion was also troubling. He explained: "We didn't have the most shocking parts of that conversation directed to us as Armenians, but it was an example of the sort of stereotyping that we see. ... Thy look at me and see the Armenian guy. They don't see the representative of the 2nd council district. They see the Armenian guy, and there are references to my staff — 'I am sure they have a name that ends in 'ian' and those sorts of things; mocking references to somebody's appearance who used to work for me, so that was hurtful."

Cedillo, unlike Martinez (and Herrera), refused to resign, but lost his reelection campaign. De León is still in office and running for reelection, though Krekorian had made it clear early on that both should have resigned from the council. Krekorian pointed out to the *Mirror-Spectator* that the City Council has no enforceable authority to remove a member from office and could suspend a member only if they are indicted for a crime or certain other circumstances. Krekorian said, "I did remove him from his committee assignments but that and censure are really the only steps that the council can take. He was elected. It would not be a healthy democratic process if the council could remove an elected official, who is elected by the voters of that district, because we don't like something that they did, unless there are extreme circumstances that require protection of the city — like if somebody was criminally indicted."

Immediately after being elected president, in his acceptance speech, Krekorian had promised to reduce the power of his new position. He said last month to this newspaper: "There is significant power, for lack of a better word, inherent to the position, but I think we should create an atmosphere and a structure whereby it is clear that that power stems from the members, not from the individual council president." He noted that the council at present is the most diverse in the history of the city, ethnically, politically, and in terms of the number of women, while his leadership style

has been much less heavy-handed than predecessors.

In terms of structural changes, Krekorian said that a charter review commission will "look at the entire city charter and determine where we can make changes, all of which will have to be approved by voters, to make the council and the city as a whole more effective, more efficient, more transparent and less subject to corruption. I am also reviewing all of the council rules to determine how we can have meetings that operate more efficiently, how the office of the presidency can be less of an influence on outcomes, and also, by the way, less subject to corruption." Term limits on the council president, he said, made sense to him, allowing for a more regular rotation of this post.

Krekorian backs the creation of an independent commission to carry out redistricting of council districts. The plan, approved by the City Council on November 29, 2023, would have to be approved by voters in November of this year, he said, after which it would take two years to set it up. This would be the first time in a century that redistricting would be done independently of the council, so, as Krekorian said, "this would be a huge achievement in and of itself." The actual redistricting will be based on the results of the decennial census.

He also is pushing for expanding the number of council districts, which would dilute the power of each member. He said, "If you have smaller districts, it doesn't necessarily guarantee the election of a member of any particular group, but each group's voice will be more influential in the outcomes. That is what I think is the biggest advantage of this. There are other advantages too. It will reduce the influence of big money in council elections. It will reduce the likelihood of somebody abusing their position because they have outsized power as the representative of 270,000 people and all the land use authority that we have and everything else."

In terms of the practical implementation of the creation of more districts, Krekorian said, "There is conflict of interest in making some of the decisions that we would have to make, so we made the decision to ask that the charter reform commission take this up."

He added that though the *Los Angeles Times* may have thought that he and the council were slow walking this process, in fact, "It would be entirely disruptive to try to change the size of the council districts before we do the next round of redistricting." The next regularly scheduled redistricting is in 2031, after the next release of US Census data, while if redistricting is done earlier, as some advocacy groups propose, he noted that this would require an extra boundary-drawing process for the council districts.

Entering Politics and Mobilizing Armenians

Krekorian is a third-generation San Fernando Valley, California, resident, but his paternal grandfather Yervant emigrated from Hussenig village of Kharpert province to Worcester in around 1896 before eventually coming to Los Angeles. Meanwhile, Yervant's maternal uncle was a student at the University of Michigan in the 1880s before returning to teach as head of the mathematics department of Euphrates

(Yeprad) College, where he was arrested at the start of the Armenian Genocide and killed.

Krekorian said that he knew from an early age, even before high school, that he wanted to serve his country in some way. "My dad was a marine, I grew up in a patriotic household, and I just felt that the highest calling for me would be to serve in some way in public service. Elected office seemed like a dream. It didn't seem like a realistic goal, but it seemed like that would be the cumulation of everything," he related.

He went to the University of Southern California and became a political science major. He joined the gubernatorial campaign for Jerry Brown in 1978 and started a Democratic political organization on campus. Then he got an internship with his state assemblyman, Tom Bane. He planned to go to law school and after practicing law for a few years find his way into government service, but a couple of years working as an entertainment, business and intellectual property lawyer quickly turned into 15, and he only engaged in politics on the side. Suddenly, Bane called him out of the blue in 1992, and said that he is not running for reelection. He asked if Krekorian would like to run for his Assembly seat. Krekorian ended up deciding not to do it, "But," he said, "for a couple of weeks there, I was making a rational decision, looking at my life, looking at the facts, looking at the opportunities, and thinking, yes, I can run for the State Assembly, and deciding to do it. Now we have come the full arc from it seems like a dream to not only is it doable, I am doing it."

He became excited about government again and got involved in Bill Clinton's presidential campaign that year. Krekorian ended up starting a grassroots campaign political organization in the area that later would become his Assembly district. In 1993 he met political strategist Eric Hapcopian, and around the same time, Adrin Nazarian, all Democrats. In 1994, the Democrats got crushed in the election. Krekorian recalled, "We started looking ahead and thinking, well, how can we make sure that the Armenian community in this area becomes a valuable swing constituency that we could move to the Democratic column and help the Democrats win in this area, and lead that effort."

Their theory, Krekorian recalled, was that the American Armenians like himself who had been in the San Fernando Valley or Glendale a while were mostly Republican. Many were business people. The newer Armenian immigrants, if they registered to vote, were Republicans because they wanted to support fellow Armenian Governor George Deukmejian, rather than deep-seated partisanship. This meant they could be converted, and so the trio worked to register Armenian voters in the late 1990s. Raffi Manoukian ran for Glendale City Council in 1999, and Krekorian announced his campaign for State Assembly in 2000.

Krekorian said, "So those two efforts of those two campaigns really mobilized the community like it never happened before. We registered thousands of people to vote. We were on Armenian tv all the time. We were going door to door. We had hundreds and hundreds of young volunteers, who

would meet people at the door, and these voters had never been approached by anybody who spoke Armenian or spoke Farsi. It was a transitional, pivotal moment for the community because people saw they were not being treated as outsiders. They were being given the opportunity to elect a member of the California state legislature. That alone was a new concept. I mean, it was just something that they were highly motivated by."

Krekorian said that he has always chosen not to be involved with Armenian political parties, but he worked pretty closely at the time with the Armenian National Committee, which was just starting out in the 1990s in southern California and was involved with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (he even met his wife through it), as well as the Armenian Assembly of America.

He said, "We were all kind of doing the same thing, moving in the same direction, but the Armenian organizations had the institutional reach into the community, and what we had was the knowledge of the way American politics works, and how you run a real campaign. Integrating those efforts was the exciting part of this equation." Armenian institutions are necessary, Krekorian explained, "not just to elect people, but to hold elected officials accountable — not just Armenian elected officials but our so-called friends too."

It was possible for Krekorian to work with a variety of Armenian organizations, though they might have been at odds with one another. He said, "It was not easy, but part of the reason that I think it worked was that they saw me as not being firmly from one camp or the other. When I was growing up, I wasn't. If you grew up in Lebanon, you were identified with a party. I wasn't, at all. They saw me as the American Armenian who could deliver a skillset and a body of experience that most of the folks in the organizations didn't have."

In the 2000 election, California experimented with a variant of the "blanket" or "open primary" system in which all registered voters could vote for any candidate of any political party on the same ballot, and then the top Republican vote winner would run against the top Democratic vote winner. "So there was a guy, an Armenian Republican, who got into the race, thinking, this is a Republican district. It should stay a Republican district... We tried very hard to unite the community, because we knew that whoever was the Democratic nominee was going to win, because the Democrats had the majority of votes in that district. Getting somebody nominated on the Republican side just to lose was not serving the community's interests," Krekorian said.

Republican Armenians could have voted for Krekorian under the open primary system but instead a lot of people supported the Republican Armenian and Krekorian lost the primary. The Republican Armenian, as predicted, won the Republican nomination but lost the general race in the November election that year. Raffi Manoukian won his council race. Krekorian said, "So I lost the election, but that foundation was the start of what we see now of the Armenian empowerment of Southern California... There were people who were in that campaign who got their first taste of

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COMMUNITY NEWS

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politics and government who have gone on to great things.”

Three years later, Krekorian used the momentum created to become the first Armenian elected to the Burbank Board of Education, and three years after that, in 2006, he got elected to the Assembly seat he lost in 2000, the 43rd District, which includes many Armenian-populated areas like Glendale, Burbank and eastern parts of the San Fernando Valley.

Anti-Armenian Racism

Krekorian said that often when he speaks to groups of younger Armenians, they just take it for granted that Armenians can run for office. “They don’t understand how much of a steep hill that was to climb, and how the whole point of it was to kick open the door for other people,” Krekorian reminisced.

He said, “I have, you might have noticed, a poster of Jackie Robinson in my lobby. The reason is, I have been the first of a lot of things. I was the first Armenian elected in Burbank. I was the first Armenian elected to that Assembly seat to represent the Glendale-Burbank area. I was the first Armenian elected to any office in the city of Los Angeles, and I am the first Armenian City Council president. All of that is great, but being first is not the point. The point is not to be the last. The point is to open the door for other people. You do that by commanding respect, by doing a good job, and by being an example that others can be proud of. That is what I have always strived to do, and that is why I have that poster there: to be a reminder that had he failed or become an embarrassment, or had he been somebody subject to criticism for some reason or another, it would have set back the cause of desegregating the major leagues. I feel the same way.”

When Krekorian was growing up in Los Angeles, he said he never experienced anti-Armenian sentiment or racism because there was only a small community of Armenians there, compared to the present, and general ignorance about Armenians reigned until the waves of immigration from Lebanon, Iran and Armenia. However, during the same period that he and others got busy registering Armenians to vote, and there was opportunity for political empowerment, there also was overt racism, in the 1980s and 1990s. “I can’t say it was a direct cause and effect,” Krekorian remarked, but the dehumanizing racism was public, even in letters to the editor published in the Glendale newspaper. He said, “It was almost socially acceptable to direct racism towards us. That was the environment in which we started the political journey. It would be offensive under any circumstances for any group to have to listen to that kind of racist stereotyping.”

It led him to action. Krekorian said, “it was a highly motivating factor for me to work harder to try to empower this community and let them know that they actually have a voice in their government because they were being shunned so much by it.” Though being Armenian was seen as a real advantage in his first Assembly race, at the same time, Krekorian said, he had to face all of the pushback from the anti-Armenian racists in Glendale, Burbank and elsewhere. Walter Karabian, a mentor for Krekorian in politics, told him early in his career that it is often easier for an Armenian to get elected in a place where there is not a huge Armenian population because you won’t get as much of that racist pushback. Krekorian said, “If you are running, I don’t know, in San Diego, and there isn’t any of that, you are just a guy with a long name, an unusual name, but there isn’t that kind of racism. Here, it was very vile and very toxic.”

Krekorian said that the overt part of this racism by now has subsided somewhat. He said, “People started to realize, I think, how deeply troubling that was, but I still feel the unspoken part of it... sometimes people... tend to still categorize and stereotype in a way that is benignly racist.”

Armenians in US Politics Today

Today, Krekorian said, “I would say that as a community, we are more involved than the average American. We are more apt to participate in voting than the average American, and that is all I think the direct result of the work we started 20 plus years ago.” It does take extra effort on the part of candidates for office to be culturally aware and speak to people in their language, he said.

This involvement is recognized by politicians. Krekorian said, “You see it in the respect that we are afforded by elected officials. In this area, people are almost always, whether they are Armenian or not, really concerned about whether they can get the Armenian vote. That has its own benefits on an ongoing basis. I think our community’s nationwide reputation for political involvement is such that members of Congress and others listen to us maybe more than they would for a similarly sized community that was less involved. It’s not enough, but still I think we have a lot to be proud of in how we have built the political reputation of this community.”

Armenians should be more demanding of concrete results, Krekorian said, from elected officials. He stated, “I think we have been too generous in allowing elected officials to call themselves friends of the Armenian community because they show up at the Genocide monument on April 24. That is the price of admission. That doesn’t make you a friend. That is the barest minimum you can do. What makes you a friend is when you ask for a meeting with President [Joe] Biden to demand action from the American government to stop genocide from occurring at political risk, that is when you get to call yourself a friend of the Armenian community.”

Despite some political successes in the US, Armenians have not been able to achieve much concerning recent events in Armenia and Artsakh. Krekorian said, “The bigger picture right now is when we see genocide occurring in front of our very eyes to Armenians and the world collectively yawns. To me, I have no explanation for that other than we are a group of people that the majority doesn’t see fit to support. Yes, I get that there are geopolitical reasons for that, but you can’t get past also the racial aspects of it.”

Krekorian said that he uses Ukraine as an example a lot. He said, “Aggression in Europe by [Vladimir] Putin is something that we have to stop at all costs, but aggression by Azerbaijan with the aid and support of Putin against Armenians a few hundred miles to the southeast is not seen as being as important. We are not European enough, I guess.” He said that the world must see that Artsakh, and the territorial integrity of Armenia, are global issues, not just Armenian ones.

As to why the local *Los Angeles Times* did not do a better job on covering these issues, despite the large local Armenian population, Krekorian shrugged and said, “I have no idea. I really have no idea. It has been a source of great frustration for as long as I can remember.”

Krekorian said he felt that the Armenian demonstrations in front of CNN in Los Angeles, blocking highways, and street protests in the US in the past few years were better than nothing, but not effective. He said, “What would have been effective, in retrospect, was for us to have spent the last 20 years telling the story and developing

allies who understand the story in a way that would make it unthinkable for a totalitarian dictator aggressor to use violence to change the status quo and we failed to do that. That failure, over the last 20 plus years, is not something that we could make up for in weeks or months during the blockade.”

Armenians, he said, were mistakenly “satisfied to just expect that the status quo would always prevail. We didn’t act when we saw [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev spending his petrodollars on arms. The Armenian worldwide community and our allies didn’t do enough to prepare for what should have been foreseeable.”

The situation remains critical. Krekorian declared: “I say often to anyone who will listen, that when a brutal dictator who is shameless about what the world thinks of him, promises to do something, you should take him at his word. And when he describes Armenia, or parts of Armenia, as being Western Azerbaijan, you should take him at his word. When he says that he is going to plant the flag of Azerbaijan in Republic Square, don’t just write this off as hyperbole. This is a man who feels completely unrestrained by international norms, and so if we are not preparing to prevent those things and not convincing our allies to do more to prepare for those things, then I am afraid that the result will be predictable.”

Krekorian has stood up for Armenians on the international scene on many occasions, including sponsoring a special resolution of the City Council of Los Angeles recognizing the independence of the Republic of Artsakh in 2013, a press conference at City Hall supporting the people of Artsakh during the 2020 Artsakh war, calling on President Biden to stop Azerbaijan’s aggression in September 2023, and naming the square in front of the Azerbaijani consulate general in Los Angeles Republic of Artsakh Square. When asked how far one can go on such international issues as a local official, or whether there is pushback to such actions, he responded, “In the first place, Los Angeles is maybe the most diverse city that has ever been. I think that there are over 100 languages spoken at home by kids. We have the largest diasporan communities of something like 30 countries living in Los Angeles.”

He said that in fact, “There is no real pushback, per se. I would say actually that, on the other side, because we are the second largest city in America, being in my position gives me a better platform than I might have if I were in a different position.” He related that when he and Karen Bass, the mayor of Los Angeles and a former Congresswoman, went to Washington last October, they were able to get senior-level meetings with the Biden Administration and members of the State Department and that was possible only because they represented Los Angeles. He said, “If I were from some smaller town, we wouldn’t really be given the time of day. That, I think, is why it was so important to take this track here in Los Angeles.”

Of course Krekorian also did a lot for Armenians on a local level too in addition to the political mobilization mentioned above, such as in 2012 getting the City Council to approve a motion to have electoral materials be available in the Armenian language in the city and supporting the march to commemorate the Armenian Genocide on its centennial in 2015 as well as pushing for its recognition in the US and commemorating it annually in various ways.

Legacy and Future

When asked how he might define himself in the spectrum of American politics, he replied, “I try not to hew too much to labels, especially because the labels are

changing so rapidly these days. It is meaningless to me. I have been a Democrat all my life. My dad raised me as a Democrat.” He said this was because of the fundamental values of the party.

He recalled his father talking to him, and said, “He told me, at that time, well, the Democrats are the ones who fight for the little guy, and so that has been my defining philosophy... When you look at the things that have been most important to me, and my policymaking, it has been about creating good jobs, environment protection, promoting education and child welfare, and investing in our public infrastructure. These are the sorts of things that I think are traditional Democratic values and priorities. But I also believe very strongly in ensuring that we have a commitment to public safety. I think that it is unfortunate to see as much division as we have had in recent years over the basic idea that we should have a well-trained, well-funded police department to combat crime.”

Elaborating, Krekorian said that he thought people saw him as “somebody who understands also that we have to run government in a way that works and that is pragmatic. I was chair of the budget committee for ten years. I was proud of the fact that we had sustained balanced budgets, and the largest reserves in the city’s history were built up under my leadership. We had a sustainable economic, financial foundation for this city and all of its services, and that is something that everything else that the city wanted to do was dependent upon. ... I think most people see me as being an effective problem solver, as being somebody who listens to different points of view and isn’t pigeonholed into positions because of bumper sticker sloganeering.”

When asked what achievements during his roughly 20 years in political office he was most proud of, outside of the Armenian realm, he replied, “I think the fact that I was the author of the first tax incentive in California history to bring motion picture and television jobs back to California was a big one. I was the author of the initiative that led LADWP [Los Angeles Department of Water and Power], the biggest municipal utility in the country, to reach 100 percent clean energy by 2035. I have helped to lead the campaign against plastic pollution in the environment... I think in the last year that we will have completed a lot of steps for reforming government that I am going to be able to claim as part of my legacy as well, independent redistricting being the start of it. I think ... that will have a lasting effect on the city for a long time. There is a lot more.”

Due to term limits, this is Krekorian’s last year on the City Council. When asked what he plans afterwards, he replied, “Everybody asks, and I understand.”

He pointed out that he had an opportunity to run for Congress when Adam Schiff decided to run for the US Senate in a district with a large Armenian population, and in fact he was looking at this seat as early as 2000. However, he said, “I felt that since I had been given this opportunity to help turn Los Angeles around as the leader of the Council, I couldn’t leave this position to go and do what is necessary to run for Congress. So I had to take a pass on that.”

However, he said, “I remain very interested, and I will remain very interested after I leave here, in finding ways that I can influence our federal government in a way that will be more supportive of Armenian interests than what we have seen. I want to find ways to help us to accomplish some of the things that I mentioned earlier that we haven’t done over the last 20 years to make the case for Artsakh and Hayastan’s integrity and security and safety. Whatever I do will encompass those goals.”



Arts & Culture

Marina Vagharshyan

On Ancestors, on Art, on Herself



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Artist Marina Vagharshyan’s apartment is one of my favorite places in our city. Everything is beautiful here — the interiors, the paintings on the walls, and the hostess herself. She is the fourth generation in her family who has made art, and even the youngest member of the family, the artist’s 8-year-old grandson, Mher, is a fan of drawing. Bright colors, sunny paints, multi-figure compositions on the canvases create an atmosphere of positivity and optimism, filling the soul with calmness, warmth and creative motivation, even if you do not paint yourself.

Marina Vagharshyan (born in 1953 in Yerevan) studied at Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Fine Arts, Department of Design. In 1975-1986 she participated in two feature films and six animations at “Armenfilm” Studio, also directed the cartoon film “The Weathercock” (1986). She had solo exhibitions in Yerevan, Vienna, Kassel (Germany), Lodz (Poland), Dubna (Russia) and participated in numerous group exhibitions in Armenia, Georgia, France, UK, the US, Poland, Sri Lanka and Japan. Many works by Vagharshyan are held in public and private collections in Armenia and abroad. About 10 books have been published with her illustrations; more than 70 illustrations she created for magazines and newspapers.

“The miniatures of the artist from distant Armenia are made with the greatest scrupulousness, almost filigree finishing of details. But I wanted to note something else. Marina is an excellent ‘storyteller.’ Her works are small essays, short stories and even whole novels. They contain the philosophy of life, which has learnt love and disappointment, bitterness of separations and not devoid of self-irony wisdom,” wrote Gerhard Matthias of Germany.

“Marina Vagharshyan’s world is the world of women. Women surrounded by millions of secrets — and, of course, belonging to this fabulous existence. The paintings, designed in the style of Chagall’s fantasies, are an impulse to enter the peculiar atmosphere of a woman’s boudoir. From the very beginning, the style see ART, page 14



Children perform in “The Journey of the Waterlily,” a production of the inclusive Miasin theater group.

Children Show the Therapeutic Power Of Drama

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent years, numerous governments and public institutions have devoted increasing attention to promoting harmony among diversity in society. While political bodies may have established legal guidelines for integrating persons of different backgrounds, cultures and personal capabilities, creative approaches by therapists in the cultural realm have developed exciting results in theater. Drama therapy has proven to be an effective means for individuals to interact on a metaphorical level, to play roles in fictional narratives that allow them to deal with difficulties, whether real disabilities or emotional, psychological barriers to healthy social interchange. And in so doing on the stage, they educate audiences to tolerance and inclusivity.

The concept is as old as Aristotle, who introduced the idea that drama could produce catharsis in an audience. Dealing specifically with tragedy, he defined it as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself . . . with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” But it is not only tragedy that has this power of catalyzing emotional change, nor is the viewer the only one to experience its impact. The players on the stage, whether in comedy or tragedy, themselves undergo transformation or development in emotion and attitude.

And for children it can be great fun. That is the experience of youngsters participating in projects of the Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center (RPPC), established in 2017 as the reorganized successor to the Yerevan Center for Medical-Psychological-Pedagogical Assessment. Working as a government-regulated institution, the RPPC coordinates pedagogical and psychological assistance to children, deals with special needs and seeks to enhance their academic and social lives. It provides the necessary training facilities and services to personnel at all levels involved in the work.

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Armenian Concert Pianist Senekerimian On Stage in Los Angeles

By Kevork Keushkerian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — Harout Senekerimian was born on November 1, 1982. He began playing the piano at the age of 4 with the encouragement of his father. His first teacher was Vatche Mankerian. At the age of 9, he began studying under the tutelage of Dr. Louise Lepley at the prestigious Colburn School of Performing Arts in Los Angeles.

Upon high school graduation, Harout entered the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, studying piano with Alvin Chow. After graduation, Harout began his master’s studies under Arkady Aranov at the Manhattan School of Music. He continues to concertize in both solo and chamber concerts in Southern California as well as maintaining an active piano studio.



Harout Senekerimian

Harout’s solo piano concert took place on Sunday, January 21, at the Zipper Concert Hall in Los Angeles. It was sponsored by the Boyadjian Family and Lukas and Savannah Kartounian. The concert hall was almost full with his relatives, friends and classical music lovers of all ages.

The program had two parts. The first part included three selections from Claude Debussy, Aram Khachaturian’s Adagio from “Spartacus and Phrygia,” ten selections from “L’Enfant Terrible,” Op. 40 from George N. Gianopoulos and Franz Liszt’s “Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6.”

Harout’s flowless rendition of Khachaturian’s Adagio mesmerized the audience, Armenians and non-Armenians alike. A short intermission was given, before the rest of the program continued.

The second part of the program was entirely dedicated to famous American composer George Gershwin. It included eighteen songs from his “Songbook,” three preludes for piano and *Rhapsody in Blue*, which was composed exactly 100 years ago.

It was an evening of sheer enjoyment for lovers of classical music.



ARTS & CULTURE



Children perform in “The Journey of the Waterlily,” a production of the inclusive Miasin theater group.

Children Show the Therapeutic Power of Drama

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It cooperates with state, international, and non-governmental organizations, as well as various Ministries of the Republic of Armenia and institutions of advanced education.

In March 2022, the RPPC launched the MIASIN (Together) inclusive theater studio, under Marine Asatryan. Asatryan, who has been working with youngsters in art projects since 1988, has specialized over the past 15 years in using play-acting to enhance inclusiveness. The studio project currently has 12 children (4 boys and 8 girls), some of them with disabilities. Its purpose is to foster creativity in the children, increasing their awareness and acceptance of themselves and others, with their strengths and weaknesses, and thereby facilitating their social integration. Success in these endeavors contributes to raising awareness and acceptance of diversity among all social layers.

The theater group put on its first play in October 2022, whose title “Stronger Than You Seem,” comes from A. A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*, a literary classic for children.

Three hundred guests attended the Yerevan performance. For the following year, the group planned to offer multiple performances of the play in the Yerevan, Armavir, and Shirak regions, where they could reach more than 700 children and adults. In 2023, with five more children joining the group, it also added a new play to its repertoire, “Jrashushan Journey” (“The Journey of the Water Lily”).

At the premiere of the new play in Yerevan on December 18, 2023, at the Armenian School of Public Education at Kh.Abovyan University.

The young actors and actresses came on stage with the words, “Whatever it is, we will not give up; And we will always move forward, always forward.” This sums up the message of the play. It tells the story of a Mother Water Lily who wants to educate her youngsters to become adult, gracious, and mature Lilies. She warns them that it is going to be a long journey, a difficult one, full of dangers and obstacles. The “Seeds” must be smart enough to deal with adversity, mastering challenges to eventually become real Water Lilies. After going through storms and even facing wild animals, in the end they turn into real beauties. Their determination provides the kindness, truth, and patience required to overcome difficulties.

The play is true to life for many children. One girl portraying a “Seed” triumphs over speech disorders and motor skills issues. She realizes that the story she is enacting is important because, she says, it “shows that conquering challenges is part of realizing our dreams.”

Lilith Manticyan, director of the RPPC, praised the close cooperation among the organizers, players, and parents. Araxia Svajyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, congratulated the cast and producers, expressing confidence that the play would appear on several stages and would communicate its positive emotions and optimistic message throughout the country. Plans are already afoot for a national tour of the play. As a token of appreciation for their efforts and performance, which featured original music, beautiful costumes and sets, the young players and volunteers received awards.

(Material for this article was provided by Margarit Piliposyan of Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), which sponsored the project together with the Mirak-Weissbach Foundation.)

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Half day visit Citadel of Mohamed Ali & Gayer Anderson museum and Khan El Khalily & El Moezz St., lunch at Ain El Sira restaurant.. HMEM at night

After breakfast, visit of Egyptian Museum in El Tahrir & Abdin Palace - Lunch

Breakfast and check-out, transfer to Cairo airport flight CAI/ASW, visit the High Dam, transfer to Basma hotel, Fullucka tour on the Nile. (optional Nubian village visit as optional visit)

Abu Simbel visit, check in Nile cruise M/S Beau Soleil, Aswan market visit

Aswan visits: Philae temple & the unfinished Obelisk, lunch on boat, Kom Ombo city & sail to Edfu City

Edfu temple by Hantour (horse carriage), sail to Luxor city crossing Esna Locks
Upon arrival you will visit Luxor East bank, Karnak temple & Luxor temple. Sound & light show in Karnak temple

Visit west bank in Luxor, Valley of the Kings & Hatshepsut temple and two statues of Memnon, lunch and transfer from Luxor to Hurghada Prima Life Makadi resort

Free days to enjoy the beach, the red sea & the resort.
All-inclusive basis (Alcoholic beverages excluded)

Breakfast, check-out and Hurghada flight to Cairo, bus trip to Alexandria, check-in Romance Alexandria hotel, bus tour & free time

Alexandria tour: Qaitbay citadel, Alexandria library, Pompey's pillar, Kom el Shoqafaw catacombs, Montazah Palace - lunch at Yacht club (Not included)
(Optional visit: Al Alamein. Early departure, visits and joining group upon return – will miss some of Alexandria visits)

Breakfast and check-out, visit of Pyramids & Sphinx area PLUS tour of Sheikh Zayed city, check-in to Baron Hotel in Heliopolis. Armenian club at night

Full day visits: Civilization Egyptian museum & Old Cairo and lunch at Andrea restaurant. Armenian club at night

Easter at church, Armenian cemetery and KEF night at HMEM

Shopping spree after breakfast - CFC (Cairo Festival City Mall) in the morning, small ride into New Cairo till reaching AUC and back to Almaza City Center

FREE day, at night bus transfer to the Nile Pharos night cruise, dinner & oriental show (2 hours Nile cruise) – Farewell party

Breakfast & check-out, final transfer to Cairo international airport for final departure

Land cost \$US 3475 (includes 2 internal flights)

Included

5 & 4 star accommodation (double occupancy, single occupancy additional \$US 1050)

Flights from Cairo-Aswan and Hurghada-Cairo

Local transportation, driver, guide, security, tours, shows, entrance fees, taxes

75% of the meals (18 breakfasts, 12 lunches and 9 dinners)

Excluded

International flights

Visa fees if needed

Alcoholic beverages

USD 100/person for tips that organizer will collect and distribute to travel related tipping. You tip for services offered by others (porters, servers, maids, taxis, ...)

Optional tours (Al Alamein, Noubian village, ...)

Additional information (refer to registration Terms & Conditions)

A valid passport with an expiry date 6 months beyond the intended stay

A deposit of \$US 750 upon registration

The payments should be made the latest on January 15, 2024

All participants book their own flights and will be met at Cairo Int'l airport upon arrival

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT PHARAOH'S LAND DURING EASTER and RAMADAN

For details and questions about registration

Tekeyan Cultural Association (514) 747-6680 centretekeyan@bellnet.ca

Kayané (514) 983-4759 kayaneb@gmail.com

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ARTS & CULTURE

Marina Vagharshyan: On Ancestors, on Art, on Herself

ART, from page 12

presented, the warm colors and the climate of optimism, together with the paintings, created an equally friendly atmosphere around the remarkable artist. Marina's ideas are an inner need to express her feelings. Her painting is a psychotherapeutic exercise, which relaxes the psyche by talking openly about herself. The view of a woman in art, it is a conceptual view of life, it is a worldview," wrote Jaga Milton of Poland.

"The aptly found wording of her paintings — 'visual storytelling' — resembles a psychotherapeutic act of releasing, relaxing the psyche by means of storytelling, revealing one's gut. Moreover, Marina often tells her dreams. This is the psychological subtext of her extremely sincere creativity. And there are also social, moral and ethical, and even visionary overtones. After all, she paints as if she is presenting through the prism of her personal experience and subjective vision what she has actually experienced - what people tell and say to each other in ordinary relationships or in fateful collisions, what they generalize and draw conclusions from," writes Lilit Sargsyan of Armenia.

Dear Marina, from your personality, environment and work one can sense an innate intelligence and urbane tradition not often found among us, which is not surprising - your roots go back to such significant centers of Armenian culture as Shushi and Tiflis. You were five years old when your grandfather, the noted intellectual, actor and writer, People's Artist of the USSR Vagharsh Vagharshian, passed away. What memories do you have of him?

On the one hand I was lucky to be my outstanding grandfather's granddaughter, but on the other hand I was too young when he passed away. I can definitely say with him went a big layer of happiness, allocated to us, meaning our whole family, in which I was lucky to be born. To a greater extent I recognize him now, getting acquainted with his books and the literature about him. However, that small period of time, which fell to my share, still left its imprint. Our family was characterized, I would say, by a unique atmosphere. Very rarely was there boredom — this noisy, artistic family did not sit idly and enjoy themselves. In the evenings, when grandfather was free, he often took us, grandchildren and neighboring children, in considerable numbers, out of town in his Zim car. Jacques, an Armenian from France, was his personal chauffeur.

His attention and kindness to anyone, even strangers, was boundless. He and his wife lent a helping hand to people many times. He adopted a boy from an orphanage when he lived in Krasnodar, and now I am Facebook friend with the son of this boy. After moving to Yerevan, he adopted a girl whose parents, originally from Shushi, were listed as "enemies of the people."

By the way, Shushi is a separate theme in our family. My grandfather was born in this city. With what pleasure, I got acquainted with the life, manners, people of different kinds, who lived in Shushi before 1919, thanks to my grandfather's book, *My Friends, Relatives and Me*. The pogroms of the ill-fated year touched the grandfather's family directly - the deceived father was thrown into the well of his own house, which was burnt together with other houses of the white-washed, once beautiful for that time city. About this tragedy in the family little talked about, tried to keep silent. It seems to me that having experienced a lot of grief, my grandfather had a pronounced empathy for his kind.

And yet, grandfather did not lose his sense of vitality and love. I remember the feeling of love that filled the atmosphere of our family and no wonder - the love of loving couples of my ancestors, as well as the love for the children who reciprocated, created this unforgettable state. Nowadays it is a rare phenomenon.

The best films of your father, filmmaker Laert Vagharshyan, have entered the golden lore of Armenian cinema. I read with great pleasure the two volumes of his memoirs — valuable documents about the Soviet era and about many major Armenian figures. What struck me was that as a Soviet official, Laert Vagharshyan was not a member of the party for a long time and faced many obstacles.

The path of director Laert Vagharshyan, I would say was not an easy one at all. To work and create in a country where art was the main tool of the Soviet ideology and where he was forced to bend to it was not in harmony with his perceptions and worldview. Hence, several films created by him were put "on the shelf." Then the party and its top-brass forced him to become the director of "Armenfilm" studio, which led to the fact that he invited Paradjanov and

thanks to his support the film "The Color of Pomegranate" was made. Authoritative masters of art were invited to discuss the film on father's initiative, as the film frightened and angered people from the party and was on the verge of being banned. However, the opinion of Martiros Saryan and others influenced the result. One of the officials could not stand it and said: "It is all Vagharshyan's fault!" In his notes, Dad proudly stated: "I do not need any better praise." He was right — Paradjanov's name and his film about Sayat Nova are known in the world. After Dad left this position, no one called Paradjanov to Armenia.

As for the children, or maybe the whole family, he tried to protect us from bad information, moreover he tried to keep the atmosphere at home mostly positive. And love always won!

In 2023, one of the top films at the world box office was Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer." And I remembered that back in the 1970s your father wanted to



"On Zikatar Mountains" by Marina Vagharshyan (2022)

make a film about this scientist, but he was told in Moscow that "Armenfilm" would not be allowed to make such a picture.

The fact that he planned to make a film about the creator of the atomic bomb Oppenheimer once again proves that he went his own way. He had to like the material of the future work: everything he was interested in (and he was interested in many things), he wanted, as a scientist, to plunge into the very essence and present it to the audience. He was very close to the poetry of Vahan Teryan — he was collecting material for a film about him, as well as on William Saroyan, with whom he had the opportunity to communicate, but, unfortunately, life dictates its own.

When Dad decided to give up shooting "Hello, it's me" — he refused to shoot a film with an almost ready script with a non-problematic from the ideological point of view subject — for this period he did not get any money. And the whole load of the family was carried by my fragile, but strong-in-spirit mother. My mother, Ekaterina Saghat-elyan, who graduated from the Moscow Conservatory, was the first harpist in Armenia and therefore the load was heavy — she not only had to play with the symphony orchestra, but also to teach at the Yerevan Conservatory to educate the staff in the harp class. With such a schedule, she was still a loving wife and incredibly caring, focused on raising me and my older brother, Vagharshik.

Because of such ancestors, you have interacted with many prominent figures in the arts since childhood. Here I see that the portraits of your grandfather painted by Martiros Saryan. Were there other noted artists who were close to your family?

My father undertook a documentary film about the great, but at that time not quite in line with socialist realist art, Martiros Saryan. Naturally, this film, too, fell into disgrace. But the film was so beautifully shot that thanks to the efforts of Ruzan Saryan, Saryan's granddaughter, the film has been restored and is constantly shown in the Saryan Museum. Martiros Saryan was one of the most revered artists in our family. My father often took me to visit him, where we were more interested in his studio. One work by Saryan - a portrait of Sergei Eisenstein, Dad said, was saved by him at the moment of the author's dissatisfaction with the painting. At that time, my father asked Martiros Saryan to paint a portrait of me. I have the most vivid and unforgettable memories of those moments when I posed for the great master. Surprisingly, the portrait turned out to be a bit older than me at that time, but I recognize myself, as I became like that much later.

The list of other famous people, who came to visit us, is long. Our family often organized feasts, which were fun, witty and interesting. I have in my memory remained

the most vivid ones or those who liked. The actors' house on Lenin Avenue, now Mashtots Avenue, belonged to famous people. Actors Hrachya Nersesyan, David Malyan, Avet Avetisyan, singers Shara Talyan, Tatevik Sazandaryan lived across the street and many other famous people lived in our courtyard. I remember Suren Kocharyan - he amazed me with his voice, artistry and, most importantly, his memory (he could recite poetry endlessly), circus superstar Leonid Yengibarov, showing his complicated tricks right in the room: I remember his modesty. Artist Valentin Podpomogov was distinguished by his sense of humor and made me laugh with anecdotes.

Let's move on to your creativity. Bright colors in Armenian painting do not surprise anyone, but you seem to be able to do it. What difficulties have you overcome in your art as a woman?

It always seemed to me that I would never be able to do any kind of art. Studying at Chekhov's secondary school, I was mostly engaged in lessons, music, sports and private English lessons. I was reminded of drawing by my dad in ninth grade. His decision to have me go to university in drawing was non-negotiable. I understood this and hiding the tears that appeared at that moment (alas, not from happiness), accepted this surprise with dignity. I was at that moment in a zero position on drawing and to overcome all for one year seemed to me unthinkable. As a child I always had the opportunity to paint with oil paints on my father's easel, liked to draw faces, like all children. But to dream about this profession, somehow did not enter my head. I dreamed of becoming an archaeologist or a hypnotist or, at the worst, a physicist (laughs).

In the end, having come to terms with my unexpected fateful situation, I began to attend drawing and painting lessons. I entered the Yerevan Art and Theatre Institute, the faculty of design. We had about 20-25 students in our course, there were only three of us girls. I studied without much interest, but my first sketches with ink and pen surprised me.

How did I manage to overcome gender issues? When I was young, of course, I defended my "rights," but gradually wisdom came (laughs). I think it is very important to remain a woman and not compete with the opposite sex. The main thing is to recognize our differences in world-views and perceptions. Accordingly, peaceful coexistence, not competition, will improve the personal growth of both men and women. Well, there was a time when I had doubts about the right choice of profession. I was once supported by singer Melania Abovyan who compared our professions — are male singers inferior to female singers? It means we both serve art, but in different forms. I was very grateful to her for the hint!

You worked in Armenian animation at a time when it was making its mark. I think working in animation influenced your style.

After graduation, I had an assignment at the Research Institute of Technical Aesthetics, where I was given the opportunity to work as a graduate designer. But I could not enter this boring, unrelated to real industrial design. At the same time, I became interested in Armenian animation, which was often shown on TV. I remember this period of my life with gratitude and pleasure - it taught me diligence, concentration of creative thought. And yes, fundamentally I became a completely different artist. My cycle where graphics merges with "film vision" was liked everywhere I exhibited. I was very lucky - I had several solo exhibitions in Europe, where, in principle, I established myself. Exhibitions are not only a test, but also your own growth. Of course, it was not immediately clear what this "news" was, even to me. I had the goal of not being like anyone else, but what artist does not want to have their own language? I don't know if I was able to achieve that.

I think it is obvious that you have. In the 21st century Armenia, is it possible to live only by the work of an artist?

Of course, you can! And you have to live in Armenia. If you think only from the point of view of comfort, this question is not for me. Happiness has many components. I am happy that my paintings are available in different countries; I am also happy that many families in Yerevan have bought my paintings.

And are you happy that your daughter, Lilit Vagharshyan, has also become an artist?

I am always working hard and infecting, I think, my surroundings and including my talented daughter. I am very happy that Lilit, is doing something that gives her joy. And that is the most important thing!



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Walnut Carrot Cake Muffins

The California Walnut Board was established in 1948 to represent the walnut growers and handlers of California. The Board is funded by mandatory assessments of the handlers. The California Walnut Commission, established in 1987, is funded by mandatory assessments of the growers. The California Walnut Board and California Walnut Commission represent the California walnut industry, made up of 4,000 growers and approximately 75 handlers. California walnuts comprise more than 99 percent of U.S. production of English walnuts and approximately half of the world trade.

California-grown walnuts are not genetically modified. The California walnut industry understands consumer concerns regarding genetically modified foods. Therefore, they work closely with the University of California's walnut breeding program to release new walnut varieties for planting that have been developed through conventional breeding methods. The California Walnut Board does not anticipate production of genetically modified walnuts in California in the foreseeable future.

Walnuts are naturally a gluten-free food. If you have Celiac Disease or are sensitive to gluten, please check the packaging to ensure that the product was not processed in a facility with products that contain gluten. Walnuts are the only nut significantly high in omega-3 ALA. Omega-3s are essential fatty acids critical to various body processes.

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet—known at the DASH diet—is an eating program that was developed through research sponsored by the U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH) that is aimed at reducing blood pressure and cholesterol. It includes eating fruits and vegetables, low-fat or non-fat dairy, nuts (including walnuts), and whole grains. It includes high fiber and low to moderate fat, and is rich in potassium, calcium and magnesium. Recent DASH studies have shown benefits of lowering sodium intake on blood pressure. Not only have studies shown that eating walnuts is associated with improved blood pressure and cholesterol levels, walnuts are naturally sodium-free and thus are a perfect food for those following the DASH diet guidelines.

These moist and delicious muffins are perfect for breakfast, a holiday brunch, or as a light snack.

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups firmly packed finely grated carrots
Juice of 1 large orange
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1/4 cup light olive oil
1 cup honey, liquefied in microwave (30 sec.)
1/2 cup crushed or chopped pineapple, drained
1 cup unbleached white flour
1 1/2 cups whole-wheat pastry flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
3/4 cup California walnuts, chopped

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a mixing bowl, stir together the carrots, orange juice, vanilla, olive oil, honey, and pineapple until well blended.

In another bowl, stir together the flours, baking soda, and spices. Mix in the walnuts. Blend the dry ingredients into the carrot mixture, stirring until just mixed.

Pour the batter into a 12-cup muffin pan lined with paper liners. Fill muffin cups 2/3 full. Bake for 30-35 minutes.

Note: You can also pour the batter into a nonstick 8-inch-square baking pan and bake for 45-60 minutes until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Remove from oven, let cool slightly, cut into 12 pieces, and serve.

For this recipe, go to: <https://walnuts.org/recipe/walnut-carrot-cake-muffins/>
California Walnut Board and Commission
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Folsom, CA 95630
Phone: (916) 932-7070
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Website: <https://walnuts.org/>
<https://walnuts.org/about-walnuts/>
<https://walnuts.org/nutrition/>

The walnut was first cultivated in California by the Franciscan Fathers in the late 1700s. The earliest walnuts to enter California were known as “mission” walnuts. Unlike today's walnuts, these first entries were small with hard shells. The trees flourished in the Mediterranean-like climate zones of California, and by the 1870s modern walnut production had begun with orchard plantings in southern California, near Santa Barbara. In the next 70 years the center of California's walnut production shifted with successful plantings in the central and northern parts of the state. Many of today's improved cultivars are descendants of early plantings. Luther Burbank is credited with early research in California walnut cultivation.

California walnuts are produced in a wide variety of sizes, color grades and combinations of sizes and colors to meet the specifications of any industrial formulation. Commercial product meets the same high standards of quality as those sold directly to the consumer. Follow California Walnuts on social for menu inspiration, tips and tricks, restaurant and industry trends, special foodservice events, health and nutrition information and more:

<https://www.facebook.com/cawalnuts>
<https://twitter.com/cawalnuts>
<https://www.pinterest.com/cawalnuts/>
<https://www.youtube.com/user/CaWalnuts>
<https://www.instagram.com/cawalnuts/>
By Nick Oltarsh of Lobby at Twelve Restaurant in Atlanta

Photos courtesy of California Walnuts.
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Makaroni Pastaria Brings Fast-Casual, Fresh Pasta to Boston's High Street Place

By David Cifarelli

BOSTON (MassLive) — A new fast-casual pasta concept has debuted at one of Boston's food halls, giving guests a chance to order fresh pasta in a matter of minutes.

Makaroni Pastaria, which opened earlier in January at High Street Place in Boston, specializes in made-to-order pasta. Guests can choose from one of eight dishes that are started right after they order them.

Makaroni Pastaria offers fresh take on classic Italian dishes, but with a twist. There is Bolognese Linguine that is made with beef and veal, and Italian Sausage Orecchiette made with fresh broccoli rabe.

Fancier options include the Spicy Seafood Tagliatelle that is served with calamari,

clams, white anchovies, cured olives and capers in a spicy tomato broth, and Burrata Truffle Ravioli served with Pomodoro and olive oil.

“Makaroni Pastaria is a heartfelt endeavor to share the authentic taste of Italy with a broader audience,” said Chef Nina Festekjian, who oversees the stand as well as other High Street concepts Hum'oveh and Kutzu. Hum'oveh is inspired by Middle Eastern street food, offering stuffed flatbreads alongside hearty entrée platters. Hum'oveh also features mezze such as spicy feta dip, hummus, and eggplant dip. Kutzu focuses on the culinary traditions of Southeast Asia, Vietnam and Korea, and is a noodle-centric concept featuring Pho-Men bowls, as well as signature Bibimbap, Banh Mi sandwich-

es, salads, daily squeezed lemonades.

Festekjian and General Manager Aleks Bakhrahk thought High Street was the perfect place to introduce the concept to workers, travelers and food enthusiasts in the city who are looking for a fast-casual pasta option.

“High Street Place's diverse and dynamic dining scene, along with its engaged and welcoming community, make it the perfect destination for our vision of relaxed Italian excellence,” Festekjian said in a press release.

“We're thrilled to bring our passion for Italian cuisine to High Street Place, where every dish reflects our commitment to quality, flavor, and the joy of sharing food,” she continued.



Makaroni Pastaria at High Street Place

Makaroni opens at 11 a.m. daily and closes at 8 p.m. Monday through Wednesday and at 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. The stand is closed on Sunday. High Street Place is located at 100 High St. in Boston.

A Radiant Evening of Music and Art at St. Vartan Cathedral

NEW YORK — St. Vartan Cathedral was the stage for a spectacular evening of soulful music, creative artistry, and spiritual uplift on the evening of January 13.

The candlelit concert, titled “At the Crossroads,” went forward as part of the Eastern Diocese’s ongoing celebration of the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Armenian Church in America.

Several hundred audience members braved a frosty January evening to enter a cathedral enclosed by a network of scaffolding, as it undergoes an extensive restoration of its exterior.

But what they found inside was a novel and unique visual experience, as the familiar sanctuary was transformed by arrays of candles and special lighting, creating a mood that was at once mystical and warmly inviting.

The program itself featured the internationally-renowned projection artistry of Kevork Mourad, along with performances by a roster of superb vocal and instrumental artists. Together, they delivered a concert that reconceived traditional elements of Armenian culture in a memorably unique manner.

As Mourad painted on a digital canvas, his visuals came to life on a large projection screen situated at the front of the sanctuary. In front of the screens, embraced by the glow of candles, the performing artists appeared individually and in small ensembles, offering beautiful renditions of classic Armenian musical works.

The projected Armenian landscapes, khachkars, churches, and organic forms created by Kevork Mourad seemed to respond to the music, magnifying it, in a masterful performance that left spectators visually and acoustically captivated. The total effect transported the audience through a visual journey exploring Armenian identity, survival, and renewal.



Cellist Ani Kalayjian

The sublime musical talents on display included sopranos Hasmik Asatryan, Anoosh Barclay, and Anahit Zakaryan; mezzo sopranos Hasmik Mekanejian and Solange Merdinian; pianist Hayk Arsenyan, cellist Ani Kalayjian, violist Sami Merdinian, duduk soloist Mher Mnatsakanyan, and organist Ari Terjanian.



Soprano Anoosh Barclay sings before the projected artwork of Kevork Mourad during “At the Crossroads,” a concert at New York’s St. Vartan Cathedral on January 13. (Diran Jеbejian photo)



Mher Mnatsakanyan

Khoren Mekanejian conducted the artists throughout the program, which featured sacred works by Komitas, St. Nerses Shnorhali, St. Gregory of Narek, as well as compositions by Yekmalyan, Khachaturian, Babajanian, Chookhajyan, Hovhannisyan, Dolukhanyan, Arutunian, Emimyan and Mekanejian himself.

The concert itself and its memorable format were the vision of the Diocese’s 125th Anniversary Committee, co-chaired by Bryan and Maria Stepanian, with artistic planning by Solange Merdinian and Seta Paskalian-Kantardjian. It went forward under the generous sponsorship of the Dadourian Foundation.

Following the event, 125th Anniversary co-chairs Bryan and Maria Stepanian (who

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 5 — St. James Armenian Church Men’s Club Welcomes Harvey Leonard, Chief Meteorologist Emeritus, WCVB Channel 5. Monday. Mezza 6:15 pm , 7; pm . Losh Kebab & Kheyma, dinner. \$20.00 per person, 465 Mount Auburn St. Watertown, MA. Church office 617 923-8860.**
- FEBRUARY 7 — CELEBRATING! Making authentic Armenian lavash with Arman Manoukian, owner, The House of Lavash. Virtual, on Wednesday, 5 p.m. Welcome by Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV5. For link to register, <https://www.armenianheritagepark.org/events>.**
- FEBRUARY 10 — St. James Reunion Dance Featuring The Yerakouyn Band and DJ Arden. Hosted by the St. James ACYOA Seniors. All ages welcome. Meze will be served. St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn St, Watertown MA. Tickets: \$65 per person. Advance purchase only by February 1. For tickets please visit: tiny.cc/reuniondance.**
- 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.**
- FEBRUARY 24 — 129th Anniversary of the Lowell Aharonian Gomideh of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Dinner and Program featuring Gev Iskajyan, Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of Artsakh. Presentation on “Artsakh: The Inside Story. From Victorious Republic to Loss of Independence.” Jaffarian Hall, St. Gregory Armenian Church, 158 Main St., No. Andover. 6 p.m. Adults - \$35. Students - \$15. For reservations, please contact Armen at 978-265-9479, armenjeknavorian@gmail.com; or Ara, 617-803-2612, ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com. Portion of proceeds to benefit Artsakh refugees.**
- FEBRUARY 25 — Under the Snow Moon! Virtual program at 4 p.m. Welcome. Meet and Greet. Virtually walk the Labyrinth. Share wishes for the Wishing Tree. Enjoy a musical performances. For link to register, visit <https://www.armenianheritagepark.org/events>.**
- 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.

hail from the St. Gregory the Enlightener parish in White Plains, NY) described the concert as “a powerful combination of sacred, classical, and folk music, that left the audience wanting more. All of the artists lifted our spirits, and reminded us of who we are as faithful Armenians.”

A message from Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, appearing in the beautifully-designed program booklet, summed up the spirit of the evening, and its place in the larger celebration of the Diocese’s 125th anniversary:

“Tonight, let the music and artistry around us lift your spirit, and strengthen your resolve to carry forward the legacy of our forefathers,” the Primate said. “Let us recommit ourselves to the mission of our church: to spread the love of Christ in our lives and communities, and to be beacons of light in a world that yearns for hope and peace.”

Upcoming events in the 125th Anniversary celebration include an ecumenical prayer service for Christian unity at St. Vartan Cathedral on Thursday, January 25; a Children’s Day at the cathedral on Saturday, February 3; and a gala banquet at the New York Botanical Garden on Saturday, April 6.



COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

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Recent Crisis in Yemen and Its Implications for Armenia

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The recent Middle East crisis in Yemen has become the new arena for the clash of interests of different regional and global players. The attacks initiated by the Houthis targeted the major shipping channels lying on the Red Sea, which is the most significant waterway connecting Europe to Asia and east Africa. US commercial ships were also direct targets of the attacks. That is why the United States and other major states became directly involved in the crisis.

But who are the Houthis and what caused this new outburst of the conflict?

The Houthis are a militia group based in Yemen and aligned with Iran. The name of the group comes from the name of their founder, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, who is representing the Zaidi branch of Shia Islam. The group emerged in the 1990s, partially as a reaction to rising Saudi financial and religious influence. However, the group became more prevalent starting from 2004 when the group rebelled against Yemen's Sunni-majority government, causing it to step down leading to a humanitarian crisis. The group being a Shia Islamist political and military organization backed by Iran spent years fighting a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia in opposition to Saudi Arabia's religious influence in Yemen. The Houthis have an estimated 20,000 fighters and their official name is Ansar Allah (supporters of God). The group controls most of the west of the country and is in charge of its Red Sea coastline.

Since the war in Palestine, the Houthis declared that all their attacks were in support of the Palestinians and aimed at stopping Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Houthi leader Abdul Malik Al-Houthi stated that his forces were "ready to move in the hundreds of thousands to join the Palestinian people and confront the enemy." They stated that they would only target shipping from or to Israel, causing transportation costs to go up and with thousands of ships trying to avoid the Red Sea, which affected a huge number of international trade.

Specifically, this Red Sea shipping line is the shortest, cheapest and the most effective way to connect routes between Asia, parts of Africa to Europe via the Mediterranean. "8% of global grain trade, 12% of seaborne-traded oil, and 8% of the world's liquefied natural gas trade" passes through this Red Sea route. That's why any kind of attack or threat to an attack will definitely have a strong impact on international trade.

The active and intense attacks, involving dozens of drones and missiles by Houthis, have been carried out since November 19 and the largest attack directly targeting American ships happened on January 9, when Houthi ballistic missile struck a US-owned

and operated cargo ship.

The US was quick to respond. In coalition with the United Kingdom, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands, it conducted strikes against the Houthi rebels. President Joe Biden in his statement declared that he "will not hesitate to direct further measures to protect our people and the free flow of international commerce as necessary."

The decision of the Biden administration to choose a military solution to the Red Sea crisis needed the support and involvement of international partners. This was the reason Washington in response to dozens of attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea by Houthi rebels created a coalition with such partners as the UK, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands. Naturally, this military campaign can add additional tension to the entire region, which is already tense and heated and it can have a chain reaction especially because of recent developments in Palestine.

We need to keep in mind that despite the lack of direct involvement, the Yemeni civil war is still considered as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Of course, there are interests of regional and global players colliding in Yemen, but one of the main points of tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia is Yemen itself. It should not be forgotten that it was only a few months ago that the process of normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia began with Chinese mediation and this process began to cause serious concern in Washington. Moreover, since the negotiations between the Saudis and Iranians there were real chances for the peace in Yemen, which now looks fragile as these attacks could significantly weaken the Houthis' position in Yemen, which could be exploited by Saudi-backed forces and change the status quo on the ground.

Yet another problem emerged between Iran and Pakistan on January 19 when both countries exchanged missile attacks against each other's territory. Although these clashes have nothing to do with the war in Gaza, they are still alarming as this is another conflict that Iran is involved.

As for the South Caucasus, which is Iran's back door, it should be realized that any development taking place around Iran and weakening the positions of Tehran in our region, has a direct impact on Armenia, as at this moment Iran is the natural guarantor of Armenia's territorial integrity. It is only due to that factor Armenia is still able to preserve Syunik and its territorial integrity from possible Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression.

(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.)

Hope and Despair for Artsakh Refugees in Armenia

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Many organizations started helping Artsakh refugees immediately after the annexation by Azerbaijan. On October 24, 2023, collaborating with a reputable organization, I shadowed a social worker, visiting families now resettled in various parts of Armenia. The first family we visited had five children. Their 5-month-old triplet boys were born during the blockade.

On that warm October morning, we entered Gayaneh's rented apartment. The social worker conversed with Gayaneh and her parents-in-law. I quietly observed the family dynamics. Turning to the 12-year-old boy, I asked, "Do you miss your home? How do you like the school here?" He silently nodded, expressing no complaints. I guess he had learned not to complain and be thankful, but his eyes were sad.

Meanwhile, the social worker attended to Gayaneh's in-laws, discussing their pension and other concerns. I asked Gayaneh, "What were you doing in Artsakh?" With a sigh, she responded, "I was a history teacher in our village." Recollecting their life, she mentioned their recently renovated

house. Her 40-year-old husband operated an auto repair shop on the first floor while they resided above. Additionally, her in-laws owned extensive property, including land, tractors, a truck, and a car. They relinquished everything, arriving in Armenia solely with their documents and one suitcase.

In a brief span, Gayaneh and I had made a connection. She candidly shared, "I loved my job. But one day, feeling unwell, I visited a clinic and discovered I was pregnant with triplets." Considering their age and the prevailing political and economic climate, they hadn't contemplated more children. Yet, with a sparkle in her eyes, she whispered, "It was a gift from God. I wanted these magical triplets." The triplets were born amidst the economic blockade on May 25, 2023, in a hospital in Stepanakert. News spread about these remarkable births during a disturbing period.

Observing Gayaneh's family and their resilient spirit, I learned gratitude and positivity from her. The other two babies woke up, initially smiling, then started crying as hunger struck one after the other. It sounded like a chorus. Grandmother attended to the heaviest boy while the 10-year-old girl

comforted the lightest, leaving Gayaneh to care for the middle child. Their coordination resembled a well-run operation, efficiently managing three babies in a small space.

Finally, I needed to ask Gayaneh about her unwavering positivity, I wanted to probe her mindset. "How do you maintain such resilience without complaining?" Pausing thoughtfully, she smiled and replied, "I'm grateful that everyone is alive and we reached Yerevan safely."

Staying positive is a defense mechanism, a survival strategy. The reality is that 100,000 Armenians have left their lands and rich history. It is a humanitarian issue. Displacement, loss of money, lives, land, churches, and cultural landmarks are genocidal. We need to continue being resilient.

(Karine Armen (Kurkjian) is a teacher, photographer, social worker and writer. She taught as an elementary school teacher in Glendale for 32 years. She has a B.A. in photography and social work and a M.A. in Education Administration. In 2010 Karine translated her mother's self-help articles from Farsi to English and published them in a book called *Inner Heaven*. She is working on her memoir about cultural identity.)



COMMENTARY

Reverse Order of ‘De Facto’ and ‘De Jure’ in NKR

By Garik Poghosyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The dissolution of NKR was a major psychological blow to the Armenian people. The decree spelled the end of Armenian hopes pinned on a Russian peace-keeping force on the ground was a guarantor of the continuation of an Armenian Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh). Around a century ago, Diana Apar, the honorary consul of the first Republic of Armenia to Japan, nicknamed “the stateless diplomat,” wrote a book, *Armenia Betrayed* in 1910 published by Yokohama: The Japan Gazette Press. The book described the Armenian massacres in Cilicia in 1909 and the helplessness of the civilian population vis-à-vis the great political game.

After more than a hundred years, the concept of betrayal seems to be haunting the nation both from within and externally. Much of what domestic political forces and factions have had to quarrel over since the end of the 2020 war in Artsakh has been about betrayal: who betrayed whom, how, when and why. Apparently, what Armenian politics is in dire need of are statesmen who can own up to their wrongdoings. The occasional admission of past mistakes on the part of the opposition seems to be procedural and merely spoken. Consequently, the absence of powerful and united opposition plays into the hands of the current government, which avoids any meaningful discussion of its dramatic trajectory despite the widespread public perception of having political prisoners, mounting foreign debt, a rising crime rate and rampant apathy.

In these circumstances, the fate of the people of the former de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh is becoming increasingly vague. This article suggests that if the de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh existed before (the infamous tripartite November 9, 2020 agreement between Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan that ended the 44-day war, ceded much of what remained under Armenian control to Azerbaijan, trusted the fate of Karabakh Armenians to the Russians and laid the groundwork for the eventual catastrophic exodus of the Armenians), then the recognition of the former NKR is still possible in a reverse order of state-building.

The formula is simple: if de facto states exist on the ground-physically and functionally but lack recognition, then a former de facto state can continue its legal existence through recognition and then claim ownership of the land that was occupied by a colonizing power, in this case, post-Soviet Azerbaijan nostalgic for Stalin’s territorial policies. Thus, the swap we suggest looks into the possibility of recognizing NKR first and then negotiating the territorial reemergence of the former de facto state. In other words, “first de facto, then de jure” is over and “first de jure, then de facto” begins its existence.

An international failure to uphold the rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh would mean a carte-blanche for more bloodletting and encroachment on fundamental human rights across the region, something that has the potential of destabilizing the European Union’s eastern and south-eastern frontier in no uncertain terms. The status-quo is ominous for European security, too, in terms of geographic proximity and defense.

Prof. Thomas Diez from the University of Tübingen believes securitization has replaced “humanitarianism and a spirit of cooperation,” something that he calls “regressive.” This implies the EU might need to take on a more direct and forceful responsibility in order to prevent the nascent instability and violence at its doorstep and beyond. As of March 2023, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that “There needs to be a peaceful settlement in terms of the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh citizens’ right to self-determination. These principles are equally applicable.”

Thus, even though Karabakh has been emptied of its indigenous Armenian population, Karabakh Armenians continue to be the bearers of the right of self-determination. Hence, at this stage, what matters most is to disentangle the possibility to implement the right from being the bearer of it. To claim that Karabakh Armenians used to have the right to self-determination when they populated Karabakh but do not possess the same right after their forced migration would mean to claim that the loss of Ukrainian territories used to be a matter of Ukraine’s territorial integrity as Ukraine is not territorially integral after the Russian invasion.

Hardly anyone would argue that a territory without a permanent population and institutions of self-government could be a state even though a territory is a must for a fully-fledged country to function properly. In a similar fashion, a separate legal-institutional entity and a social body with no fixed abode do not constitute a state by some definitions but continue to be a bearer of rights. According to the Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions, “state formation is not a once-and-for-all process nor did the state develop in just one place and then spread elsewhere. It has been invented many times, had its ups and downs, and seen recurrent cycles of centralization and decentralization, territorialization and deterritorialization.”

On a geopolitical plane, it is safe to assume by losing Artsakh the Russians lost a strategic foothold in a geopolitically and civilizational significant region. In this context, as well as considering Armenia’s membership of Russia-led blocs and unions, one might be tempted to argue that the defeat of the Armenians was equally the defeat of Russia. Despite this, after an alliance agreement was signed between Russia and Azerbaijan, media portray a Russia that is closer to the oil-rich autocracy-Azerbaijan-than its traditional ally, Armenia.

In the wider context of security, human rights and international law, however, the West, particularly the EU, will also be adversely affected by the irrevocable losses of the Armenians in the long term. In addition to the fact that a weak and vulnerable Armenia is easy prey for regional powers, the EU will have to save its own face as a reliable alternative to Russia given its inability to prevent or cease the forced exodus of the Armenians of Artsakh. What’s more, political matters are further compounded by an admixture of Armenia’s dependence on Russia, geopolitics and multilateral civilizational ties that are bound to have a long term impact on Armenia’s perception of its self. Hence, a more engaged and vociferous Europe would guarantee Armenia’s “dual alignment,” a concept propounded by Stefan Morar and Magdalena Dembińska.

Nevertheless, short-term calculations seem to dominate the regional political scene against the backdrop of the geopolitical turbulence caused by the on-going conflict in Ukraine. Some officials from the Russian Duma went so far as to approve of the dissolution of the de-facto state from the perspective of putting an end to hostilities, something that masked a Russian failure to admit the tragic consequences of their peace-keepers’ inaction.

To make matters worse, it became obvious that the international law and institutions undergo a major structural shift-resolutions of supranational bodies and courts fall on deaf ears, while human security is increasingly vulnerable and largely unprotected. To be precise, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 2508 on June 22, 2023, which explicitly stated that, “since 12 December 2022, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, in Azerbaijan, has been denied free and safe access through the Lachin corridor, the only road allowing them to reach Armenia and the rest of the world. This has had serious human rights and humanitarian consequences, notably regarding freedom of movement, non-discrimination, access to healthcare and food, the right to family life and to education.”

The adoption of the resolution preceded a large-scale aggression against Artsakh in September 2023, which was strongly condemned in another resolution of the Council of Europe. Interestingly, in its declaration that condemned the Azerbaijani military operation against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh adopted on October 17, 2023, the Spanish Senate explicitly admitted the death of hundreds of Armenians, a massive exodus of the population (which implies forced displacement) and reminded Azerbaijan of the fact that it is a party to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, a straightforward allusion to the genocidal nature of the aggression. Earlier in the year, on February, 22, the International Court of Justice “ordered Azerbaijan to take all necessary measures to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions.”

Unfortunately, the power dynamics in the region resulted in a catastrophe that has further exacerbated the situation. As a result of the combination of Russian inaction and Western feeble attempts to discipline Azerbaijan, an energy-rich precious partner of some

of Europe, the region was emptied — through horrific crimes — of its indigenous population for the first time in millennia. Furthermore, Many ancient Armenian Christian monuments — a beloved cultural patrimony of native Armenians—are now in danger of destruction or appropriation (the precedent was set back in 2006 in Old Jugha, Nakhijevan).

A look at the past reveals the Armenians have traditionally tried to please both the West and Russia in the hope that the inalienable right to self-determination will eventually triumph. Victorious but equally short-sighted diplomatically, the Armenians could have adopted a much more robust diplomatic stance, perhaps a much less desirable foreign policy option from the perspectives of Moscow and the West but a more surefire way to be understood in major capitals in terms of national interests and aspiration. Why was the legitimacy of the pre-war NKR borders not a subject of negotiations considering the fact that the territories adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh were not even firmly embedded in Azeri jurisdiction?

To reaffirm his constructive and flexible but staunchly pro-Armenian profile, Armenia’s former president Serzh Sargsyan, who was ousted as a result of the Velvet Revolution of 2018, wrote an article on July, 6, 2021 stating that, “the international community should not recognize the outcome of the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression but it should make efforts to reach a real, comprehensive and long-lasting resolution.”

In a similar fashion, President of NKR, Samvel Shahramanyan, who had signed the decree of the liquidation of NKR earlier, told journalists and angry protesters later in Yerevan, “the Republic of Artsakh is not liquidated. No document can liquidate what was established by people.” Obviously, Mr. Shahramanyan, too, referred to the right of self-determination and the possibility of legal-institutional existence of the Republic of Artsakh upon its physical disappearance.

This means Samvel Shahramanyan can potentially rescind his own order regarding the liquidation of NKR and be deposed, reelected or otherwise subject to institutional checks on the part of the National Assembly of Artsakh whose members might not be in Nagorno-Karabakh any more but continue to the elected representatives Karabakh Armenians.

For around three decades, at least since the inception of the contemporary stage of the conflict in 1988, the Armenian side believed its claim to national self-determination was well-grounded in the context of international law, hence inviolable. With the benefit of hindsight, it might have been more prudent of the Armenians to take the bull by the horns and condemn Joseph Stalin’s policy towards the political fate of Nagorno-Karabakh. After all, the policy of decolonization spearheaded by the UN in the 20th century had ushered in the series of independences. Why did the arbitrary transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to the jurisdiction of Soviet Azerbaijan have to be discussed outside the realm of decolonization when it met at least some of the criteria espoused by the UN?

Ironically, the Soviet Constitution stipulated the right of self-determination, too, and while it was obvious such a possibility was more political than legal, it made the Armenians contemplate political realities in the light of legally admissible frameworks shrouded in intangible realism. This policy of pleasing both Russia and the West, disarticulating national interests and a highly amenable foreign policy would mask the deep-running inconsistencies for decades to come. Indeed, Yuri Barseghov, an award-winning Soviet professor of international law and a former member of the United Nations International Law Commission, published a book back in 1990-before the collapse of the USSR, linking self-determination to the ideology of Vladimir Lenin, which had later been turned upside down by the arbitrariness of Joseph Stalin. Thus, at an odd crossroads of history the Helsinki Final Act was, at least with regard to national self-determination, related to Lenin’s ideology or so the Armenians might have thought.

After centuries of statelessness the Armenian diplomacy was in a precarious condition upon independence. It had to grapple with the formidable West and jealous Russia at the same time paving the way for the recognition of its rights. Nevertheless, it seems the Armenian diplomacy miscalculated the possibility of the long-term concentric evaluations of Russia and the West

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COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

During 2.5-Hour-Interview, President Aliyev Made Existential Threats to Armenia

President Ilham Aliyev, the dictator of Baku, gave a 2.5-hour-long press conference to Azeri journalists on January 10, 2024, during which he spewed not only his usual lies, but also made threats to Armenia's very existence. Here are the highlights of Aliyev's extremely arrogant and alarming words, emboldened by his military victories in the 2020 and 2023 Artsakh wars.

To begin with, Aliyev claimed that "Today's Azerbaijan is among the strongest countries of the world in the truest sense of the word." This is not true. According to the [globalfirepower.com](https://www.globalfirepower.com) website, as of 2024, Azerbaijan's military is ranked 59th in the world. This is far from being one of the strongest countries in the world. Had it not been for the direct control of the Azeri military by Turkish Generals and bringing terrorist mercenaries from Syria during the 2020 Artsakh war, Azerbaijan would not have been able to defeat Artsakh. Aliyev admitted during his press conference that Azerbaijan enjoyed the full backing of Turkey during the 2020 war.

President Aliyev justified Azerbaijan's serious violations of human rights, even genocide against Artsakh Armenians, by stating: "I have repeatedly said that international law does not work. These mechanisms are deployed only for the weaker countries. Bigger states ignore them. For them, it is as if law is not law, international law is not law. Under such circumstances, countries that demand justice, and rightly so, must secure this justice themselves."

Aliyev admitted the difficulties that Azerbaijan's military faced during the 2020 war: "Had the war continued [after November 10, 2020], it would have been very difficult to liberate the Kalbadjar and Lachin districts, especially in the winter season. However, we would have done that too. But our losses could have been extremely high, even higher than in the 44-day war. We all knew that well, because even now anyone visiting those regions can see how challenging the terrain is. However, if Armenia had not signed the act of capitulation, we would have continued the war until the end."

Aliyev's next lie is that after the 2020 war, Armenia was "illegally transporting weapons, ammunition, mines and manpower to Karabakh." This never happened. Aliyev used it as a pretext to attack Artsakh.

The President of Azerbaijan revealed that before the Sept. 19, 2023 Azeri attack on Artsakh, "some of the local Armenians contacted our representatives and made suggestions about contacts, and we did not reject that." Any Armenian who made secret contacts with the enemy should be considered a traitor.

Aliyev then made another important admission. He said that, during the Sept. 19, 2023 attack on Artsakh, "had they [Artsakh Armenians] not surren-

dered, they would have been eliminated. There was no other option." Aliyev is thus confirming that Artsakh leaders had no choice but to surrender in order to save the lives of 120,000 Artsakh Armenians.

Aliyev confirmed that he had planned the arrest of Artsakh leaders who are now held in a Baku jail: "our position regarding the leaders of the separatists was unequivocal—their capture. Some of them tried to escape from there through the Lachin road, others were found in Khankendi [Stepanakert], and elsewhere. We knew their whereabouts." He added that "only two people are missing from that group—they are in Yerevan." Aliyev meant Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan.

President Aliyev disclosed that he had personally warned Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan about the impending Azeri attack on Artsakh on Sept. 19, 2023: "I told both the Armenian leadership and international actors that I could press the button and carry out this operation in a minute and they would not be able to do anything."

Aliyev also vented his anger at France's support for Armenia, condemned that country's colonial past and alleged that Paris had committed genocide against 1.5 million Algerians. He also ridiculed Armenia's recent purchase of French armored personnel carriers, by calling them "tin cans" which are not "a real threat to us."

Aliyev also rejected the latest Pashinyan initiative — 'Crossroads of Peace' — which is supposed to link Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia and Iran. Aliyev said that this is just a PR campaign meant to replace his preferred 'Zangezur Corridor.' Ignoring Armenia's sovereignty, Aliyev insisted that Armenia allow Azeri cargo to pass from Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Meghri, Armenia, without any inspection or customs clearance. If not, Aliyev warned, Azerbaijan will continue its blockade of Armenia.

The President of Azerbaijan bragged that there is no longer any mention of Karabagh in the 'Peace Treaty' being negotiated between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Aliyev dismissed Pashinyan's suggestion to demarcate the mutual border between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the basis of the 1975 Soviet maps, preferring older maps which he claimed gave Azerbaijan much more territory. He also mentioned the ridiculous notion that 'Irevan' (Yerevan) is an ancient Azeri city. Aliyev also claimed that there are eight Azeri villages which are located within Armenia. Importantly, Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan will not withdraw its military from parts of the territory of the Republic of Armenia it has occupied since May 2021 and September 2022. He suggested that Armenia and Azerbaijan sign a peace treaty now, leaving the demarcation of the border to a future date.

Facing such an arrogant and warmongering leader as Aliyev, Pashinyan should stop begging for peace which is a sign of weakness, giving Azerbaijan the opportunity to demand more concessions from Armenia. Armenia's top two priorities should be having a competent leader and a powerful military to fend off threats from its two enemies: Azerbaijan and Turkey.

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making a strategic blunder: Russia and the West would not always agree and, by extension, would not always perceive Armenia's duality approvingly. To be specific, Armenians gave up on the idea of the reunification of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast with the homeland. Further, they neither recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh nor brought the issue of the legitimacy of its post-1994 borders to the table of negotiations.

"What is the way forward ?" one might ask. A government in exile? Recognition of NKR in pre-war borders? A new cycle of international mediation aimed at the implementation of self-determination and return of Karabakh Armenians? We are convinced that reversing "de facto, then de jure" will not turn back the time but will celebrate and perpetuate the right of Karabakh Armenians to determine their fate in their homeland. And this comes at a moment in history when the EU needs to prove its status and reach as a great power to be reckoned with.

(Garik Poghosyan is a PhD candidate at the Public Administration Academy of the Republic of Armenia in political science. In 2021 and 2022, he taught political anthropology to master's students in the same institution. He teaches English at Global Bridge Educational Complex in Yerevan.)

Armenia Cannot Count on Integration With West without Georgia

"The growing influence and power of oligarchic circles in Georgia is a problem for Armenia as well," Armenian political scientist Areg Kochinyan said, commenting on Bidzina Ivanishvili's decision to return to politics. He believes that strengthening of democracy in Georgia should be important for Armenia as well, as "without Georgia Armenia cannot count on integration with the West".

At the request of JAMnews, political scientist Areg Kochinyan and Georgian affairs expert Johnny Melikyan commented on the impact Ivanishvili's return could have on Armenian-Georgian relations, and the aspirations of both countries to move closer to the EU.

Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is considered the shadow ruler of Georgia, announced on December 30, 2023 that he has decided to return to politics. The founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party is now its honorary chairman and has announced his return to active politics for the third time. This time – on the eve of the 2024 parliamentary elections. "The opposition has collapsed and the overly strong ruling party needs to be kept from human error. I will become the new center of gravity," the billionaire declared.

Kochinyan commented:

"What is happening in Georgia. Real, functional power becomes official. The person in whose hands, in fact, the power was concentrated, publicly takes over its realization. This is a more honest approach towards the voters and partners, the international community.

As for the Armenian-Georgian relations, they have reached a certain quality and depth, have a certain layer, which will not change its content regardless of the international conjuncture, quality and form of international relations. Besides, only Georgia and Armenia are democratic countries not only in the South Caucasus, but in the entire region. This is also a fact that cannot be ignored, especially by our Western partners.

Of course, the quality of democracy in Georgia, its depth is very important for us. Active political activity of an oligarch, especially

one who has accumulated his wealth in the Russian Federation, who seeks to occupy important positions of power, cannot be considered an achievement of democracy. This is a problem that we must try to work with.

In the work of the West, the main approach will be to rely on Armenia and Georgia at the same time. Therefore, as much as we value and consider important the development of democratic institutions and deepening of democracy in Armenia, we should treat these processes in Georgia as well. Armenia cannot count on integration with the West without Georgia."

Johnny Melikyan said:

"I link Ivanishvili's return to the internal political processes taking place in Georgia. The goal is to form or strengthen the ranks of the ruling party.

Moreover, the position [of honorary chairman of Georgian Dream] is not symbolic. After the recent changes, Ivanishvili can also nominate a candidate for prime minister. He has the decisive vote and will continue to be the deciding factor.

I don't expect any drastic changes in Armenian-Georgian relations. There is a team, a policy that has not changed since 2012. During the rule of the Georgian Dream and after the change of power in Armenia in 2018, relations between the elites of the two countries have become even warmer. The basis for deepening relations are the trends in both countries. These are the strengthening of democracy, human rights, freedom of speech.

Perhaps in 2024-25 we will see the formation of a new, renewed agenda of deepening relations, and the countries will consolidate the level of their relations as strategic – as Georgia's relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan are. If earlier Armenian officials were talking about this, now the Prime Minister of Georgia is already talking about the establishment of strategic relations with Armenia."

(This commentary initially appeared on JAMnews.net on January 17.)

For Irvine’s Great Park, an Armenian Genocide Memorial Is in the Works

By Hanna Kang

IRVINE, Calif. (Pasadena Star-News) — Irvine is getting closer to erecting a memorial dedicated to the victims of the Armenian genocide within the Great Park.

Early plans for the memorial, approved by the Great Park Board on Tuesday, Jan. 9, include a potential location, the size of the memorial and how the memorial will be funded. City leaders unanimously approved the Orange County Armenian Genocide Memorial Committee’s proposal and directed staff to work with the committee in developing a schematic design and budget.

The proposed location is what will be called the Heart of the Park, a yet-to-be-completed area of the Great Park in its expansion over 300 acres of amenities. Because it is surrounded by a dense forest, the location will provide privacy and peace, said assistant city manager Pete Carmichael.

And the size of the memorial will be consistent and commensurate with the vertical and horizontal area provided within the surrounding forest, approximately 20 feet wide and 15 feet high, said Lauren Jung, the city’s senior management analyst.

The Orange County Armenian Genocide Memorial Committee, comprised of 11 members representing various Armenian organizations from around the county, hopes for construction to begin in the first half of 2026 and be completed in 2027, according to a staff report.

The Heart of the Park, where the memorial will be located, is slated for initial grad-

ing beginning this year with subsequent construction starting in 2026. That area “is a mix of quiet contemplation and social interaction,” Carmichael said.

The committee is in the process of incorporating as a nonprofit in California and requesting nonprofit status with the IRS

couple more months.

The process of homing an Armenian genocide memorial in Irvine began in 2022 after a video surfaced in which Mayor Farrah Khan appeared to joke and laugh with representatives of local Turkish groups, among them a man who has been outspoken in denying the genocide.

Khan, at the time, said the genocide was not a topic of conversation and the video was released out of context. Members of the Armenian community met with Khan, and she said she would support finding a place in the city for a memorial.

“Irvine is home to people from all over the world, including many like Armenians, who have faced a devastating genocide. We currently have Armenian community members whose family members are facing forced displacement in Armenia, Azerbaijan and in Jerusalem,” Khan said. “This is one of the ways that we, as a city, can provide a safe space for people to reflect on the past and strive to do better in the future.”

An estimated 1.2 million Armenians died during the genocide that began in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, widely considered to

be the first genocide of the 20th century, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. While most historians — and the White House — agree the deaths that occurred constitute a “genocide,” the Turkish government has denied a genocide occurred, contesting the estimated death toll.

In February 2023, city leaders directed staff to work toward the dedication of a memorial within the Great Park to the Armenians who died, according to the staff report, and in September, the Great Park Board adopted a policy dictating how the city considers requests for monuments and memorials within the park.

“Out of something horrific and divisive, something beautiful can come out of it,” said Garo Madenlian, a member of the Orange County Armenian Center.

Madenlian said the city moving forward with a plan for the memorial means a lot to the Armenian community in Orange County since many are descendants of genocide survivors.

“My grandparents were orphaned in the Armenian genocide,” he said. “This is really important for us to remember and never forget.”

The committee has planned for April a small commemoration of the start of the Armenian genocide, April 1915, which may take place at the project site.

“We are excited to move something like this forward of this gravity,” said Councilmember Mike Carroll, who also chairs the Great Park Board.

Staff is set to return in March with the schematic design and budget, Jung said.



The Pasadena Armenian Genocide Memorial designed by Catherine Menard is unveiled at Memorial Park Saturday, April 18, 2015. (Photo by Sarah Reingewirtz/Pasadena Star-News)

to fundraise for the cost of the memorial’s design and construction, said chairperson Kev Abazajian.

Per city rules regarding monuments and memorials, the project proponent must foot the bill for the project while the city is responsible for the daily maintenance and upkeep of the memorial.

Abazajian said he anticipates the state designation to be made within the month while the 501(c)(3) designation may take a



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