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Azeri FM Seeks Direct Talks With Armenian Counterpart

By Lusine Musayelian and Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — More than one month after canceling a US-mediated meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers, Baku has proposed that they hold direct talks at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov revealed the proposal at a news conference on December 28. He did not say whether the Armenian side has already responded to it. There was no immediate reaction to Bayramov's statement from Yerevan.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was scheduled to host Bayramov and his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan in Washington on November 20 for further negotiations on a peace treaty between the two South Caucasus nations. Baku canceled the meeting in protest against what it called pro-Armenian statements made by James O'Brien, the US assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia.

O'Brien visited Baku earlier this month in what appears to have been a failed bid to convince the Azerbaijani leadership to reschedule the canceled meeting. A senior aide to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said on December 19 that Washington must reconsider its "one-sided approach" to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict before it can mediate more peace talks.

see TALKS, page 3

Pashinyan Receives Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian (Armenpress photo)

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia/Armenpress) — The Prime Minister welcomed the visit of the delegation led by Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to the Republic of Armenia, on December 27.

see VISIT, page 5

Jerusalem Patriarchate Attacked by Masked Mob

Several Armenians Injured Protecting Property

JERUSALEM (Combined Sources) — A massive and coordinated physical attack was launched on bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians and other Armenian community members in Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem said in a statement on December 28.

"Several priests, students of the Armenian Theological Academy and indigenous Armenians were seriously injured in the attack.

"Over 30 armed provocateurs in ski-masks with lethal and less-than-lethal weaponry including powerful nerve-agents that have incapacitated dozens of our clergy broke into the grounds of the Cow's Garden and began their vicious assault. We stress again, several priests, deacons and students of the Armenian Theological Academy along with indigenous Armenians are seriously injured. Armenian clerics in Jerusalem are fighting for their lives against provocateurs," acting with impunity, the Patriarchate said.

"This is the criminal response we have received for the submission of a lawsuit to the District Court of Jerusalem for the Cow's Garden, which was officially received by the Court less than 24 hours ago. This is how the Australian-Israeli businessman Danny Rothman (Rubenstein) and George Warwar (Hadad) react



Diggers remain at the site, after arriving earlier this month and knocking down one wall and digging up in one section of the car park (Irish Times photo)

to legal procedures.

"The Armenian Patriarchate's existential threat is now a physical reality. Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and indigenous Armenians are fighting for their very lives on the ground. We are calling on authorities around the world and the International Media to help us save the Armenian Quarter from a violent demise that is being locally supported by unnamed entities," the statement reads.

"The Patriarchate calls on the Israeli

Government and Police to start an investigation against Danny Rothman (Rubenstein) and George Warwar (Hadad) for organizing their continuous criminal attacks on the Armenian Patriarchate and Community, attacks which seem to have no end in sight.

"Israel is a State of law and order and such criminal behavior cannot be tolerated and go unpunished," the Patriarchate's statement concluded.

see JERUSALEM, page 6

Armenia Turning Away From Russia, Says Lavrov

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia is reorienting its foreign policy towards the West at the expense of its long-standing alliance with Russia, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview published on December 28.

"Unfortunately, official Yerevan, succumbing to the persuasion of Westerners, is trying to reform its foreign policy line," he told the official Russian news agency TASS. "It is exchanging the time-tested alliance with Moscow not even for concrete help from the West but only for vague promises."

Lavrov was particularly concerned about what he described as Armenia's deepening ties with NATO.

"Yerevan has been developing cooperation with NATO and its individual member countries lately," he said. "This year, Armenia took part in several dozen events with the alliance. It continues to modernize its armed forces according to NATO standards, and the republic's military personnel are undergoing training in a number of NATO member states. This cannot fail to

cause us concern."

"I hope that Yerevan is aware that deepening interaction with the alliance leads to a loss of sovereignty in the field of national defense and security," he warned.

Earlier this week, a senior NATO official praised Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government for moving away from Russia and seeking "more cooperation and political dialogue" with NATO.

"Armenia has decided very clearly to make some shift in their foreign policy, to take some distance from Moscow," Javier Colomina, the NATO secretary general's special representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, told Georgian television.

Pashinyan declared in early September that his government wants to "diversify our security policy" because Armenia's heavy reliance on Russia has proved a "strategic mistake." He claimed that Moscow is "unwilling or unable" to defend its South Caucasus ally. Armenia hosted a US-Armenian military exercise later in September.

see LAVROV, page 6



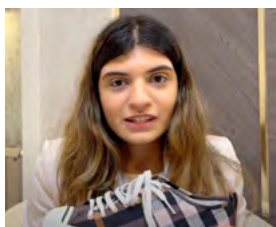
"I HOPE THAT YEREVAN IS AWARE THAT DEEPENING INTERACTION WITH THE ALLIANCE LEADS TO A LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY IN THE FIELD OF NATIONAL DEFENSE AND SECURITY."

—SERGEI LAVROV
RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

UZBEKISTAN

Chess Federation Fines Player Over Her 'Sports Shoes'

Page 5



CALIFORNIA

Anahid Oshagan Honored with California Senate District 25's 2023 Woman in Law Award

Page 8



MASSACHUSETTS

Christmas Pageant At Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont

Page 14





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Over 400 Karabakh Teachers Have Jobs in Armenia's Educational System: Minister

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — About 400 teachers who were forcibly displaced from Karabakh already have jobs in the education system of Armenia, Minister Education, Science, Culture and Sport Zhanna Andreasyan told a press conference on December 27.

"More than 200 teachers have been sent to the provinces. They are provided with an additional payment of 30 percent of their salary. In a number of communities of Syunik, Vayots Dzor, Tavush, Gegharkunik, in addition to the additional payment, they also receive 50,000 drams per month," the Minister said.

Andreasyan noted that the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh caused a number of problems that needed to be solved immediately. According to her, ensuring that school-age children receive proper education was a priority.

Andreasyan added more than 17,000 school-age children are enrolled in the Armenian education system.

Fate of 80 Armenian POWs In Azerbaijan Unknown

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Human rights lawyer Siranush Sahakyan has said that the fate of 80 Armenian prisoners of war remains unknown. According to her, Azerbaijani authorities do not officially confirm their capture, although human rights defenders have collected evidence of that.

Sahakyan said in an interview with Armlur.am on December 27 that in addition to the 80 captives, 23 others have been confirmed to be in Azerbaijani custody.

Recently, 32 Armenians returned from Azerbaijan as a result of a statement published by Yerevan and Baku.

Kocharyan's Corruption Trial Ends Without Verdict

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A court ended the marathon trial of former President Robert Kocharyan on December 27 after he agreed to plead the statute of limitations.

Kocharyan, who ruled Armenia from 1998-2008, was first arrested in July 2018 shortly after the "velvet revolution" that brought Nikol Pashinyan to power. He initially faced only charges stemming from a 2008 post-election crackdown on opposition protesters in Yerevan.

The ex-president was subsequently also charged with receiving a \$3 million bribe from an Armenian businesswoman. He, his former chief of staff Armen Gevorgyan and two retired army generals, went on trial in May 2019. They all rejected the accusations as politically motivated. Kocharyan claimed that they are part of a "political vendetta" waged by Pashinyan.

The coup charges against the defendants were dropped after Armenia's Constitutional Court declared them unconstitutional in 2021.

Armenian Church Head's New Year Address Not Aired By State TV

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Breaking with a decades-long tradition, Armenia's state television has not broadcast a New Year's Eve address by Catholicos Karekin II, the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church increasingly at loggerheads with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

The annual addresses by Karekin and his two predecessors, followed by similar speeches delivered by the incumbent president or prime minister of the republic, had been aired shortly before midnight on December 31 ever since 1990.

"This year, at the last minute, the Public Television Company informed, without any reason, that His Holiness' New Year's message will not be broadcast before midnight, as was traditionally customary," the church's Echmiadzin-based Mother See said late on Sunday, December 31. It said it rejected the state-controlled broadcaster's offer to air the message during an earlier news program.

Public Television did not issue any statements on the matter as of January 1. Its executive director and spokesperson did not answer phone calls and written questions from RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

The apparent snub drew strong condemnation from some senior clergymen as well as many opposition and public figures. They accused Pashinyan of ordering the country's leading TV channel run by his loyalists not to air Karekin's speech right before his televised remarks.

The Armenian government did not respond to those claims. Its press office also could not be reached for comment.

Pashinyan's relationship with the ancient church, to which the vast majority of Armenians belong, has increasingly deteriorated in recent years and especially since the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Karekin and other senior clergymen joined the Armenian opposition in calling for Pashinyan's resignation following Armenia's defeat in the six-week war.

Pashinyan and other senior Armenian officials have boycotted Christmas and Easter liturgies led by Karekin for the past three years. In May 2023, the premier accused the church of meddling in politics,

prompting a scathing response from Karekin's office.

Tensions between the government and the church rose further in early October when Karekin blamed Pashinyan for Azerbaijan's recapture of Nagorno-Karabakh and the resulting mass exodus of the region's ethnic Armenian population. The church repeatedly condemned Pashinyan for recognizing Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh before Baku's September 19-20 military offensive.

The Catholicos spoke of a "relentless pain of immense losses in our hearts" and referred to "the occupation and depopulation of Artsakh" at the beginning of his New Year message aired by other TV stations.

By contrast, Pashinyan made no direct mention of the loss of Karabakh in his address to the nation. Instead, he pointed to Armenia's continuing robust economic growth and praised his government's response to the influx of more than 100,000 Karabakh refugees.

Catholicos Issues New Year's Message

YEREVAN — The Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II issued a New Year's Message on December 31. Excerpts of that speech appear below.

"We welcome the dominical year of 2024 with deep concerns, filled with the relentless pain of immense losses in our hearts. We experienced a challenging year, but relying on the Lord, we look to the future of our nation with hope and optimism. In the face of the occupation and depopulation of Artsakh, the severe situation created around Armenia, and the existing problems, we must resolutely overcome the difficulties, keeping strong the dedication and love for our homeland and faith in our Almighty Lord.

"We are the heirs of a nation that was in pain and suffered, but did not surrender, had experienced the genocide, but was not destroyed, was massacred, but did not die.

Certainly, the history of a people whose historical records are marked with beautiful testimonies of godliness and patriotism, with a ceaseless desire to live and create, cannot be interrupted. Trials often happen in peoples' lives, but those nations that remain resilient in spirit and have faith in God, bravely face hardships and challenges.

Now, dear ones, let us renew ourselves in spirit and mind, let us be strengthened with hope, reflect on our progress and deeds with self-examination, correct the shortcomings and slips, let us not allow the division of hatred to be sown in the national life, the destructive adaptation and indifference to take root. Let us live a life adorned with faith, with God-bestowed love for each other, so that we feel God's gracious presence amongst us.

Let us be united in Armenia and the Diaspora and use our collective efforts to protect national interests and to create a new dawn in the life of our countrymen and the nation. Let us realize that the motherland is the only sacred place where the prayers and dreams of Armenian generations of all times are stored, where the identity of the Armenians will continue to be formed, and from whose sacred land the Armenian people will continuously gain strength. Let us surround our sisters and brothers forcibly displaced from Artsakh with caring love; let us increase hope in them so that the vision of returning to native Artsakh never fades and faith in God remains strong. Let us support the needy and distressed and seek the help of the Most High for our missing and captured ones and their families.

Ex-President Sargsyan Rejects Pashinyan's 'Lies' on Karabakh

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Former President Serzh Sargsyan on December 28 brushed aside Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's latest statement blaming Armenia's former leaders and foreign powers for the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Sargsyan said that Pashinyan admitted having "consciously sacrificed" Karabakh to Azerbaijan in a televised interview last week.

Speaking to Armenian Public Television, Pashinyan claimed that US, Russian and French mediators leading the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group had predetermined the "dissolution" of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic with their peace plans drawn up prior to his rise to power in 2018. He said virtually none of those plans offered a comprehensive solution to the conflict with Azerbaijan.

Some of the mediating powers for decades used the conflict as a "truncheon hanging over Armenia's head," Pashinyan charged amid his government's unpre-

cedented tensions with Russia.

"I saw many lies and falsifications in that speech, but I must single out one important fact. Armenia's ruler admitted that he sacrificed Karabakh consciously," Sargsyan told reporters.

"I just didn't understand what truncheons he is talking about, who had brandished those truncheons over Armenia's head," he said. "The [Minsk Group] co-chairs who had issued five statements to the effect that Nagorno-Karabakh's status must be determined through the expression of [Karabakh residents'] will?"

"Did he mean the country which had provided us with billions of dollars' worth of weapons for free or at discounted prices and which he handed over to Azerbaijan?" the ex-president added, referring to Russia.

Most of the Karabakh peace proposals were based on the so-called Madrid Principles which the United States, Russia and France originally put forward in 2007. This framework agreement envisioned that Karabakh's predominantly ethnic Arme-

nian population would determine the region's internationally recognized status in a future referendum.

Pashinyan has repeatedly denounced the Madrid Principles in an effort to absolve himself of blame for the 2020 war in Karabakh won by Azerbaijan. He has said that this peace formula, largely accepted by Sargsyan and his predecessor Robert Kocharyan, essentially recognized Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan and called for Armenia's "capitulation."

Armenian opposition leaders and other government critics have shrugged off those claims. They say that Pashinyan made the disastrous war inevitable by rejecting the last version of the Madrid Principles.

In 2021, Sargsyan publicized the secretly recorded audio of a 2019 meeting during which Pashinyan said he opposes that peace plan because it would not immediately formalize Karabakh's secession from Azerbaijan. Pashinyan said he is ready to "play the fool or look a bit insane" in order to avoid such a settlement.



ARMENIA

Karabakh Refugees Hold Little Hope for Azerbaijan Peace

NOYAKERT, Armenia (AFP) — Before fleeing the advancing Azerbaijani troops for Armenia, Suren Martirosyan glanced back one last time at his fruit garden in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the momentary vision has haunted him ever since.

“That image of our beautiful garden, which I saw for the final time, still lingers in my eyes: pomegranates and persimmons gleamed brightly on the trees under the brilliant sun,” he said, looking at his calloused hands.

The 65-year-old’s family of eight is among more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians who fled Karabakh after Azerbaijan recaptured the long-disputed region in a September lightning offensive against Armenian separatist forces.

The exodus of the entire Armenian population from the mountainous enclave has sparked a refugee crisis in Armenia.

On September 19, “we heard machine-gun fire and artillery shells exploding close to our house,” said Suren’s daughter-in-law, Arevik.

“At first, we thought it was just another skirmish with the Turks,” she said, referring to Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis.

“But then our panicked village headman came in and said we must all run away as the Turks were already in the village outskirts.”

The Martirosyans now live in a decrepit house they rented thanks to government aid in the village of Noyakert, some 50 kilometers from Yerevan.

After just one day of fighting, Armenian separatist authorities, which had controlled Karabakh for three decades, surrendered and agreed to reintegrate with Baku.

Suren blamed Russian peacekeepers —



A truckful of Armenian refugees from Artsakh (Karabakh) heading for Armenia (AFP photo)

deployed in Karabakh after Armenia’s ally Moscow brokered a ceasefire in autumn 2020 — and the Yerevan government for the fall of the breakaway Karabakh republic.

Azerbaijan’s victory marked the end of the protracted territorial dispute, which had long been seen as unresolvable.

On September 26, separatist president Samvel Shahramanyan signed a decree

ordering that the breakaway republic “will cease to exist” by the year’s end.

But in a surprise move last week, he rolled back on the announcement in comments given in Yerevan.

The statement appeared to undo a historic move by the separatists to dissolve the disputed territory that was at the center of two costly wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 and the 1990s.

It will have no effect on the ground, as Karabakh is now under full Azerbaijani control, and Yerevan is unlikely to support the continued functioning of separatist institutions on its territory.

But Shahramanyan’s decision resonated with many Karabakh refugees who still cherish their decades-long dream of secession from Azerbaijan.

“Kids are constantly having nightmares, crying at night and keep asking me when we will return home,” said Arevik. “We will return under the sole condition: if we will be living separately from the Turks, and when our children’s safety will be guaranteed 100 percent.”

Arch-foes Armenia and Azerbaijan have said they are close to signing a peace agree-

ment based on the recognition of each other’s territorial integrity.

But few among Karabakh refugees share the hope, as deeply-rooted ethnic hatred still poisons relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis after decades of enmity.

“I don’t believe in peace” with Azerbaijanis, said 65-year-old refugee Boris Dolukhanyan, whose son was killed in the 2020 war with Azerbaijan.

“How can we live alongside Turks who killed my child?” he added. “We must become strong enough to retake our land by force.”

Dolukhanyan said his family “lived a prosperous life” in Karabakh’s main city of Khankendi (Stepanakert in Armenian), where they had several houses, land plots, and a farm of exotic birds.

“We left behind our paradise,” he said, adding that they now rent a three-room apartment in Yerevan, which they can no longer afford, and are looking for cheaper housing.

His 10-year-old granddaughter, Ruzanna, said her Christmas wish was for “Santa to make a miracle so that we can return home.”



Artsakh flags at a military cemetery in Armenia (AFP photo)

Azeri FM Seeks Direct Talks With Armenian Counterpart

TALKS, from page 1

Aliyev withdrew from talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan which the European Union had planned to host in October. The EU too has been accused by Baku of pro-Armenian bias. Armenian leaders have suggested that Aliyev is simply dragging his feet on the peace treaty in hopes of clinching more Armenian concessions.

Bayramov said on December 28 that Yerevan’s position on key details of the peace treaty has become more acceptable to Baku after Azerbaijan’s September 19-20 military offensive that led to its recapture of Nagorno-Karabakh. He did not shed light on that “progress” or the remaining differences between the two sides.

One of the key sticking points is their border disputes. Mirzoyan reiterated on December 27 that the peace treaty should con-

tain a concrete mechanism for delimiting the Armenian-Azerbaijani border such as Soviet military maps printed in the 1970s.

The border issue has been one of the main sticking points in ongoing talks on the treaty. Hikmet Hajiyev, a top foreign policy adviser to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, said last week that Baku believes “the border delimitation issue should be kept separate from peace treaty discussions.” Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov likewise noted afterwards that the treaty cannot “ensure a 100 percent solution to all issues.”

Baku continues to oppose that. Bayramov insisted on delinking the border issue from the treaty. He also said that the signing of the treaty depends on the “political will” of the Armenian side.

“We hope to see the extent of that political will in the coming days,” added the

Azerbaijani minister.

Armenian opposition leaders have warned Pashinyan’s government against signing the peace agreement before the border delimitation. They say that Baku wants to leave the door open for territorial claims to Armenia.

“It is extremely important for us that the future delimitation process is predictable and its principles, its foundations are fixed in the peace agreement,” said Mirzoyan. “For us, a reference to [concrete] maps would be such a way of ensuring that predictability without predetermining the results [of the process.]”

The Armenian government has insisted, at least until now, on using specific Soviet military maps for that purpose. Baku rejects the idea backed by the European Union.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Iran’s visiting Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Mirzoyan said the con-

flicting sides continue to discuss the “possibility of incorporating maps” into the peace agreement.

“We don’t have the final text of the agreement,” he said. “Therefore, nobody can tell what the end result of the negotiations will be.”

Pashinyan and other Armenian officials themselves suggested this summer that Aliyev wants to leave the door open for future territorial claims to Armenia. Some Armenian analysts believe this is the reason why Aliyev keeps delaying further negotiations mediated by the United States and the European Union.

Mirzoyan on December 27 listed the “avoidance of high-level meetings” among “negative signals” coming from Baku. He said at the same time that Yerevan hopes the Azerbaijani side will adopt a “more constructive” stance in the coming weeks.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

**Azerbaijan Donates \$34M
In Aid to Ukraine**

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Azerbaijan continued to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine in 2023, announced the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan in a press release, according to the Azerbaijani media, on December 28.

According to the source, the humanitarian aid, as well as the aid for restoration and reconstruction purposes provided to Ukraine by the Republic of Azerbaijan amounted to the total of 57 million Manats (about \$34 million), half of which has been provided in the current year.

**Turkish Super Cup Final
In Saudi Arabia Postponed
Amid Row**

ISTANBUL (Reuters) — The Turkish Super Cup final between Galatasaray and Fenerbahce scheduled to be played in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh on December 29, was postponed over what the clubs described as "some problems" in the event's organization.

At the heart of those issues, according to reports, was the wish of the two Istanbul teams to wear t-shirts featuring Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, during the warm-up ahead of the evening kick-off.

Turkish media said Saudi officials had rejected this demand, though it was not clear why, and that the clubs refused to play in the Super Cup final at the King Saud University venue, which is also known as Al-Awwal Park stadium, as a result.

Saudi state TV cited a statement by organizers the Riyadh Season saying the cancellation of the final was the result of the teams not adhering to match regulations.

The scheduled final coincided with the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the secular Turkish Republic.

**France Expels Two
Azerbaijani Diplomats**

PARIS (Public Radio of Armenia) — France on December 28 declared two employees of the Azerbaijani Embassy in France persona non grata, the Foreign Ministry informs.

The decision came after Azerbaijan expelled two French diplomats from the country.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry on December 26 said that two French diplomats had been ordered to leave the country over actions "incompatible with their diplomatic status."

The ministry said in a statement that it had summoned French Ambassador Anne Boillon to voice a "strong protest over the actions of two employees of the French Embassy." The statement, however, did not provide the exact reason for the two diplomats being sent home.

"France notes the decision taken by Azerbaijan to declare two members of the French Embassy in Azerbaijan persona non grata. It categorically rejects the allegations presented by Azerbaijan to justify its decision," the French Foreign Ministry said in response.

Sweden Edges Closer to NATO after Vote In Turkish Parliamentary Commission

ANKARA (Euractiv) — The Turkish parliament's foreign affairs commission approved Sweden's NATO membership bid on December 26 in a key step towards enlarging the Western bloc after 19 months of delays in which Ankara demanded security-related concessions from Stockholm.

The commission, controlled by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ruling AK Party, voted to back the bid — which Sweden made last year in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine — after some four hours of debate, including talks on other matters. It had postponed a vote on the bid after an earlier debate on 16 November.

The next step is a vote in the parliament general assembly, where Erdoğan's party also holds a majority. It is also expected to pass there in a vote that could be held within weeks. Erdoğan would then sign it into law, concluding a process that has frustrated some of Ankara's allies and tested its Western ties.

Commission head Fuat Oktay played down expectations for a speedy vote in the general assembly, telling reporters in parliament that the parliament speaker would decide on timing.

"The decision to submit it to the general assembly has been made now, but this should not be interpreted as (a sign) that it will pass the general assembly with the same speed. There is no such thing," Oktay said. Parliament is set for a two-week recess in early January.

Erdoğan's AK Party, its nationalist MHP allies, and the main opposition CHP vot-

ed in favour of ratification, while the small Islamist Felicity party and right nationalist İYİ party voted against it.

In a statement following the commission's approval, Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström said Sweden welcomed the move and looked forward to joining NATO.

Boris Ruge, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, said on social messaging platform X that the commission's approval was "excellent news".

Oguz Kaan Salici, a lawmaker from the CHP and member of the commission, told Reuters that his party had asked for an explanation on what had changed since the 16 November commission meeting, adding he expected all parties to take a similar stance in the general assembly.

"We questioned what changed from the last meeting to this meeting. As the main opposition party, we asked for this to be explained to us. They briefed us on the steps Sweden has taken, Turkey's foreign policy priorities, and openly referred to the talks between President Erdoğan and (US President Joe) Biden," Salici said.

Turkish Objections

Erdoğan raised objections in May last year to both Swedish and Finnish requests to join the alliance over what he said was their protection of those Turkey deems terrorists and over their defense trade embargoes.

Turkey ratified Finland's bid in April, but kept Sweden waiting until it took more

steps to crack down on local members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which the European Union and United States also list as a terrorist group.

In response, Stockholm introduced a new anti-terrorism bill that makes being a member of a terrorist organisation illegal, saying that it had upheld its part of a deal signed last year.

Sweden and NATO members Finland, Canada and the Netherlands also took steps to relax Turkey arms-export policies.

While NATO member Hungary has also not ratified Sweden's membership, Turkey is seen as the main roadblock to adding the Scandinavian nation to the military alliance and bolstering its defenses in the Baltic Sea region.

Erdoğan sent Sweden's bid to parliament in October, but has also linked its ultimate ratification with US approval of sales of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey. After a call with Biden this month, he said Washington was eyeing the ratification to move on the request.

The White House backs the sale, though there is no clear timeframe for the U.S. Congress to approve it and Turkey faces some congressional opposition over delaying NATO enlargement and over its human rights record.

Turkey's tough diplomacy over the last 18 months irked some alliance members amid the war in Ukraine. Unlike its allies, Ankara maintains good relations with Moscow as well as Kyiv, opposing Russia's invasion but also the Western sanctions on Russia.

Luis Moreno Ocampo Releases Second Report on Nagorno Karabakh Genocide

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — In a new paper former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Luis Moreno Ocampo analyzes the ethnic cleansing against a group of Armenians living for centuries in Nagorno Karabakh constituting genocide and deportation as a crime against humanity.

"There is a reasonable basis to believe that Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor that started in December 2022 and Azerbaijan's military attack on September 19, 2023, constitute genocide under Article II c) and b) of the Genocide Convention, as well as Article 6 c) and b) of the Rome Statute and the crime against humanity of deportation under Article 7 d) of the Rome Statute," Ocampo says.

In a few days, more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians were forcibly deported from Nagorno-Karabakh, leaving their homes and belongings. On October 30, 2023, Juan Mendez, the first UN Special Adviser on the prevention of genocide, published a report concluding that: "The decision to leave — caused by the attack but also by the nine months of deprivation of food and medicine — exposed the serious mental harm produced in all ethnic Armenians by the official policy and practice of Azerbaijan, which fits the definition of the genocidal act contemplated in Article 2 (b) of the Convention: causing serious bodily or mental harm in members of the group."

The International Court of Justice confirmed Mendez's factual analysis and the violation of the rights of the ethnic group protected. On November 17, the International Court of Justice analyzed that "... more than 100,000 persons of Armenian national or ethnic origin have found them-

selves compelled to leave their place of residence and reach the Armenian border since the operation commenced by Azerbaijan in Nagorno Karabakh on 19 September 2023."

"What's the difference between crimes against humanity and genocide?" Philippe Sands answered the question, explaining that Hersch Lauterpacht developed the concept of crime against humanity in the Western tradition to protect individuals from massive attacks. Instead, Raphael Lemkin created the crime of genocide to protect national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups," the report reads.

It includes testimony of Artak Beglaryan, former Human Rights Defender and State Minister of Artsakh, who details his experience as evidence of the serious mental harm suffered by the entire ethnic group as established by the Genocide Convention

Article II b).

As a Nagorno-Karabakh leader, Artak Beglaryan was hunted by Azerbaijan forces before and after the September 19 attack. Still, unlike most of the others, he was able to escape in extremely difficult circumstances despite his visual impairment.

As mentioned, more than twenty victims of genocide, including three former Artsakh presidents and five other community leaders, were incarcerated by Azerbaijan. Their captivity is part of the genocide and a message to their community: if you come back to Nagorno-Karabakh, you will be starved, incarcerated, or killed.

"A recognition that genocide was committed will trigger the state parties' obligations to prevent and punish and would help to protect the rights of the victims, particularly the Armenian prisoners taken as hostages," Luis Moreno Ocampo wrote.

Former Georgian PM Announces Political Comeback

TBILISI (Panorama.am) — Georgia's former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the Georgian Dream party, said today, while addressing the Georgian Dream Congress, that he is returning to politics and will assume the position of the Honorary Chair of the Georgian Dream Party, Civil Georgia reported on December 30.

He began by saying that political activity "is not part of his character," citing his earlier pledge in 2012 to leave politics after winning the 2012 elections, which he did in 2013, taking an "unprecedented decision in world politics" and leaving the post of Prime Minister. He said he did not enter politics for wishing to have a leadership

position but with the belief that it was in the interest of the country and the people, and left politics with the belief that he had "completed the mission" and that the criminals would never get back the ambition to return to power.

However, he said, "the criminal political system has stronger roots than it seemed." Therefore, he first had to return to politics in 2018. In this context, he recalled the words of the then-EU ambassador, who told Ivanishvili that "without your return, nothing would have remained of the ruling party." He said he had fulfilled his "mission" and put the ruling team in order. Then he left politics again.



INTERNATIONAL

Chess Federation Fines Player Over Her 'Sports Shoes'

By Claire Moses

SAMARKAND, Uzbekistan (*New York Times*) — The International Chess Federation fined a 23-year-old chess player from the Netherlands at its World Rapid and Blitz Championships in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, for wearing “sports shoes.”

FIDE, as the federation is known, fined Anna-Maja Kazarian 100 euros (\$111) for wearing what the organization’s arbiters deemed “sports shoes” during the tournament this week. It also required Kazarian, who streams her games to more than 34,000 followers on Twitch, to change into more formal shoes in between games.

Failing to change into other shoes, which she needed to retrieve from her hotel room across the river from the tournament’s venue, would “result in not being invited in the pairings for the next round,” according to the official warning, which she received on a yellow laminated card.

The shoes in question are plaid, canvas Burberry sneakers with white rubber soles. She held them up in a YouTube video that she recorded after the incident, and said that the shoes had been a gift from her sister.

“I barely ever wear them because they’re fancy,” Kazarian said in the 48-minute video, in which she recapped the day and her games.

The first rule of FIDE’s dress code for the tournament is “dress to impress,” the federation’s website states. The dress code is supposed to promote a “good and positive image of chess” and “shall be strictly enforced,” according to the website.

Generally, sneakers are allowed, but “sports sneakers” are not. The difference between the two is not clearly stated in the dress code.

For women in particular, the following is not allowed: “sport’s sneakers, clacking shoes, any kind of jeans, any kind of inappropriate cloth (e.g. torn cloth or cloth with holes, unclean cloth), sport caps, sun glasses, revealing attire.”

The rules for men are similar. “Sports sneakers, T-shirts, any kind of jeans, any kind of inappropriate cloth (e.g. torn cloth or cloth with holes, unclean cloth), sport caps, sun glasses” are not accepted.

The ambiguity of the definition of “sports shoes” is tricky for players deciding what to wear, said Pavel Tregoubov, FIDE’s technical delegate at the tournament and a chess player. “I understand her point of view,” he said of Kazarian. FIDE will work on a clearer definition of sports shoes for future dress codes, Tregoubov said.



Anna-Maja Kazarian and her offending “sports shoes” (Photo courtesy of The Messenger)

Kazarian wasn’t the only one who received a yellow card with a warning during the tournament this week. Arbiters gave out two yellow cards in the open section for all players and three in the women’s section, Tregoubov said, adding that all of them were issued because of sports shoes. The arbiters gave out the cards only in cases in which they were 100 percent sure that the shoes were too sporty for the tournament, he said.

The yellow cards that were given out at this year’s tournament, which has 330 participants, were a new feature to make sure that more people followed the dress code, Tregoubov said.

Kazarian was the only player who objected, Tregoubov said, adding that “all other players accepted it.”

Critics on the internet were quick to condemn the strict dress code, with some people arguing that the chess organization has the wrong priorities.

Others questioned why a male player was allowed to wear white sneakers at the tournament, as seen in a picture posted by FIDE itself, while Ms. Kazarian’s were deemed inappropriate.

In a phone interview on December 28, Kazarian ex-

pressed her disappointment with how FIDE had handled the situation and said that being rushed from the venue and driven to the hotel had been stressful and unpleasant. In the YouTube video, Kazarian also said that she felt she had been treated as if she were a criminal.

“If she felt like a criminal, I’m very sorry for that,” Tregoubov said. “Usually the arbiters are shy,” he added. “It’s not like in football.”

Kazarian said the experience left her stressed and unfocused during her rounds of chess games on Thursday, a day after the incident. On Thursday she wore heels, she said.

“They should adjust the rule so it’ll be clearer,” Kazarian said, adding that a blanket ban of all sneakers would have been easier to follow.

After Kazarian took a car to her hotel on Wednesday and changed out of her sneakers, she returned to the venue to finish the day of games. But she was preoccupied by the situation, she said, which reverberated into the next day.

“They acted as if I didn’t read the dress code,” she said. “Their attitude toward me just was not friendly.”

Pashinyan Receives Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian

VISIT, from page 1

“I am happy for the high-level contacts and mutual visits that we see between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is important not only for the further development of our bilateral relations, but also in the sense of being more understandable to each other in our foreign relations and policies in general. Of course, we constantly discuss the issues of the bilateral agenda and I am glad that a working and sincere atmosphere has been established in these discussions. I also know that you had a productive discussion with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and you have active, intensive working contacts, which I am also happy about. I would also like to hear from you about the agenda and expected results of the visit,” said the Prime Minister.

Iran’s Foreign Minister first conveyed to Pashinyan the warm greetings of the President of the Republic of Iran Ebrahim Raisi. “The President asked me to warmly

congratulate you and the friendly people of the Republic of Armenia on New Year and Christmas. Your Excellency, I am very happy to meet you. We had a very good, constructive and useful discussion with my colleague, Foreign Minister Mr. [Ararat] Mirzoyan. Today we are in the Republic of Armenia to once again emphasize the attention we pay to bilateral relations and their importance. Our assessment is that both countries are on the right track. We are witnessing the development of relations in the political, economic, cultural, educational and humanitarian spheres. Along with that, we also pay special attention to deepening the relations,” Amir-Abdollahian noted.

The two discussed a number of issues related to the Armenian-Iranian cooperation agenda. In particular, reference was made to the deepening of bilateral trade and economic ties, the projects implemented and planned in the near future in infrastructure, as well as in other fields.

The parties also exchanged ideas on top-

ics of regional significance, including the processes surrounding the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty, the unblocking of regional transport communication channels based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and reciprocity, the “Crossroads of Peace” project of the RA government. Iran’s Foreign Minister noted that his country supports the unblocking process based on the above-mentioned principles, particularly the “Crossroads of Peace” project.

Amir-Abdollahian said Iran supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Armenia, during a joint press conference, conveying congratulations to the Armenian people on behalf of the government and parliament of Iran for the New Year and Christmas.

“Iran has had historical relations with neighboring Armenia, which are further developing, deepening, and reaching a high level day by day. We have had important discussions with my Armenian counterpart and the Armenian Prime

Minister Nikol Pashinyan regarding the necessity of establishing lasting peace in the South Caucasus and the role of Iran in that process, which can be a guarantee of stability and peace. We have a common opinion on various issues of cooperation,” he said.

He added, “We attach great importance to the opening of the consulate of the Republic of Iran in Kapan, which offers a range of services, promoting cooperation, particularly in the economic domain. I have conveyed Tehran’s official agreement to the Armenian authorities regarding the establishment of the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia in Tabriz.”

He concluded by saying, “Iran supports the establishment of sustainable peace in the South Caucasus and the launch of the North-South transit route. Iran also welcomes the project announced by the Prime Minister of Armenia, which has been presented as the Crossroads of Peace. We are ready to be consistent in the development of the North-South transit route.”



INTERNATIONAL

Jerusalem Armenians Injured Protecting Property

JERUSALEM, from page 1

Cow's Garden Deal

The Patriarchate controversially agreed in 2021 to lease the former garden occupying one-quarter of the Old City's Armenian Quarter to Jewish real estate developer Danny Rothman and his Christian Arab partner George Warwar for 99 years. Their Xana Gardens company wants to build a luxury hotel there.

The lease agreement signed by the two sides enraged the local Armenian community and also drew strong condemnation from the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. Patriarch Nourhan Manougian subsequently blamed the "fraudulent and deceitful" deal on a now defrocked priest, saying that he was misled by the latter.

Manougian's office announced about two months ago that it has decided to scrap the lease and asked an Israeli court to validate the decision. Armenian clergymen and community activists began the daily vigil at the Cows' Garden after Xana tried to start the construction.

A mobile phone video filmed by one of the priests showed the Armenians clashing with dozens of masked men apparently trying to drive them out of the property on December 28. Several of them were reportedly injured as a result.

"Fortunately, our youth present at the scene managed to resist and repel the attackers," Hagop Djernazian, a community activist, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Friday, December 29. He claimed that the attackers were "sent" by the real estate developers.

"This is how the Australian-Israeli businessman Danny Rothman (Rubenstein) and George Warwar (Hadad) react to legal procedures," the Armenian Patriarchate said in a statement issued the previous night.

"The Armenian Patriarchate's existential threat is now a physical reality," it said, urging the international community to "help us save the Armenian Quarter from a violent demise."

"It is obvious that the provocateurs are once again trying to seize the 'Cow's Garden' estate through terror, threats and violent actions, violating the procedures established by the law," read a separate statement released by the Armenian Apostolic Church's Mother See in Echmiadzin. It urged Israeli authorities to stop the "criminal acts against the Patriarchate and the Armenian community."

Jerusalem's Deputy Mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum described the incident as a brawl between "some Arab Muslim men and some men from the Armenian community." She did not link it to the dispute over the Cows' Garden.

"The city of Jerusalem will not tolerate any criminal activity, whether religiously motivated or otherwise, and the police will prosecute those responsible," The Jerusalem Post newspaper quoted Hassan-Nahoum as saying.

Rothman and his company did not comment on the clash. The businessman did not answer questions e-mailed by RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Armenia's government also did not react to the violence as of Friday evening,

The Foreign Ministry in Yerevan expressed "deep concern" but refrained from demanding any action by Israeli authorities after a series of fresh attacks on Jerusalem Armenians reported a year ago and blamed on Jewish extremists.

In one of those attacks, an angry mob wreaked havoc on a restaurant located in the Armenian Quarter. According to the restaurant owner, they shouted "Death to Christians!" and "Death to Arabs!"

The Armenian Church has for years accused radical Jews of regularly cursing and spitting at its clergymen in the streets of Jerusalem's Old City. Two Israeli soldiers were briefly detained by police in November 2022 for doing so during a religious procession led by an Armenian archbishop.

Bishop Parsamyan Message

In a message to Diocesan faithful, Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan joined the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin in its expression of support for the Armenians of Jerusalem.

"Earlier today, the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin issued a statement on the ongoing situation concerning properties of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In the statement, the Mother See condemns a disturbing recent turn towards violence against the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and

statement on the distressing turn of events involving our centuries-old Jerusalem Patriarchate and the community that has lived and prospered in the Holy City since ancient times.

In these final days of the year, I ask our faithful to please offer prayers to our Lord Jesus Christ, to protect and preserve the Armenian heritage of the Holy Land, and to place His supportive hand on our people there, in our homeland, and throughout the world.

WCC Asserts Rights of Jerusalem Armenians

In a separate statement issued on December 29, the World Council of Churches (WCC) called for the rights of the Armenian community in Jerusalem to be upheld. WCC general secretary Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay said that the ecumenical organization is deeply disturbed by the assaults on the Armenian

peace and for the strength and resilience of the communities under threat."

The Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director of the Eastern Diocese, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, was instrumental in the issuance of the WCC's statement in his capacity as a high-ranking member of the organization's Central Committee.

Condemnation from France

France has strongly condemned the violence against the Armenian community in Jerusalem's Old City.

"France strongly condemns the acts of violence carried out yesterday against the Armenian community in the Old City of Jerusalem, which comes after multiple attacks in recent months by violent extremists," the French consulate-general in Jerusalem wrote on X.

It added that the Israeli authorities must



Cows' Garden property of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Jerusalem. (Photo: Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.)

the Armenian community. We share the full statement in an English translation here:

"With deep concern, we have learned about the ongoing provocations surrounding the 'Cows' Garden' property long owned by the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

"On December 28, some three dozen armed men invaded the precinct of the Cows' Garden and carried out violent actions, as a result of which clergymen of the Patriarchate and members of the local Armenian community received various physical injuries.

"The provocateurs are once again trying to seize the Cows' Garden property through terror, threats, and acts of violence, in clear violation of the procedures established by law.

"We condemn what occurred, in no uncertain terms. In doing so, we also express our hope that the Israeli authorities will respond to the criminal actions against the Armenian community and Patriarchate by using the full force of law; that the culprits will be held accountable; and that a repetition of similar cases will be deterred.

"Finally, we express our support for the monastic Brotherhood of Sts. James of Jerusalem, and the Armenian community, as we pray for God's aid."

On behalf of the Eastern Diocese, I wish to echo the Mother See's expression of support for the Patriarchate and the faithful Armenian community of Jerusalem, and its condemnation of the violence and threats enacted against our brothers and sisters.

We are grateful to His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, for their clear and forceful

community of Jerusalem.

Pillay wrote: "...the recent egregious attacks in the Cows' Garden signal a distressing escalation of violence and the severe infringement of the rights and dignities of the communities in the Armenian Quarter. The systematic attempts to occupy the land by force and violence are profoundly unjust."

"Such actions contravene the moral imperatives of peace and justice that are central to the teachings of all faiths," Dr. Pillay added. "We call upon the international community and local authorities to respond with immediate and decisive action.... The World Council of Churches stands in unwavering solidarity with the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. We pray for a just

prevent such acts of violence.

"It is the responsibility of the Israeli authorities to prevent such acts of violence, as well as any challenge to the status quo. France reiterates its solidarity with the Armenian community of the Old City of Jerusalem and will continue to monitor the situation with the greatest attention," the French consulate-general said.

On December 28, more than 30 armed assailants stormed into the Cow's Garden area in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem and violently attacked a group of Armenian clerics and laymen, as well as other representatives of the Armenian community.

(Stories from Azatutyun and Armenpress were used, as were some posts from X.)

Armenia Turning Away From Russia, Says Lavrov

LAVROV, from page 1

The Russian Foreign Ministry denounced these and other "unfriendly steps," accusing Pashinyan of "destroying" Russian-Armenian relations at the behest of Western powers. The rift between the two long-time allies deepened further after Moscow did not prevent or stop Azerbaijan's September 19-20 military offensive that restored Azerbaijani control over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Despite the heightened tensions, Pashinyan has announced no plans to pull his country out of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Pashinyan said in late October that his administration is also not considering demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Armenia even if it sees no "advantages" in their presence.

Lavrov described as "harmful" any talk of such a withdrawal. He insisted that Armenia cannot successfully confront its grave security challenges with the help of the United States and the European Union.

Pashinyan's domestic political opponents have also criticized his foreign policy moves while agreeing with his assertions that Russia is not fully honoring its security commitments to Armenia. They argue that the West is not ready to give Armenia any security guarantees or significant military aid.

Community News

John Terzian: He's Been Hiding Celebrities Since 2007

By Sheila Yasmin Marikar

LOS ANGELES (*New York Times*) — Going out, once a hallmark of celebrity status, took a hit this past year. Amid entertainment industry strikes and global turmoil, it seemed like many of the folks who formerly sought to see and be seen threw on sweats and stayed in.

That is, unless you crossed the velvet rope separating the plebeian world from the h.wood world, a gilded nightlife empire governed by John Terzian. As in Narnia and Oz, in h.wood, different rules apply.

There will be martinis. There will be Art Deco-ish sconces. There will be lighting so dim that even those who consider themselves young may reach for their smartphone's flashlight, double checking how much those storied chicken tenders actually cost (\$25).

Finally, and most importantly, there will be no photography. Well — there will be no flash photography, and certainly not of the regulars who make this world go 'round: your Biebers, your Kardashian-Jenners, your Drakes.



John Terzian

"Of course, people sneak photos all the time without flashes," Mr. Terzian said on a recent afternoon, over lunch at the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel. "We know that's going to happen. But the idea is that you should be sitting in comfort, without flashes going off, and because of who we cater to, I want everyone to feel safe."

"I'd rather it be more real," he added, "like if you happened to be with us one night and you saw this person, that's really cool. You were there. But is it all over social media? No."

Mr. Terzian, 43, is a founder of what is officially known as the The h.wood Group, which oversees 18 bars, restaurants and nightclubs around the world (many of which are in Los Angeles). Unofficially, he's the mayor of a roving party circuit favored by A-list stars. Wherever there is an event at which famous types might want to raise a glass, he plants an h.wood flag.

There he was at Art Basel Miami Beach, celebrating the opening of the Miami outpost of Delilah, h.wood's answer to the supper clubs of yore, see TERZIAN, page 9



AMAA NY/NJ Orphan & Child Care Committee members

'Cheerful Giving'

AMAA NY/NJ Orphan & Child Care Fundraiser For Displaced Families of Artsakh

By Gilda Buchakjian Kupelian

PARAMUS, N.J. — In the spirit of charity, a fundraiser was organized by the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) NY/NJ Orphan & Child Care Committee to raise critical funds for the displaced families of Artsakh. The AMAA continues to advance its mission to support these families to restore their normal lives and meet their long-term needs. A private, curated, museum tour of the exhibited artwork of Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat on December 13, 2023, at the Brant Foundation in New York City, added gladness to the attending "cheerful givers."

Art enthusiasts, old and reconnecting friends, and new acquaintances many traveling by a chartered bus from the Armenian Presbyterian Church in Paramus, NJ, gathered at the Brant Foundation, to view the unprecedented, private exhibition of the collaborative art of Warhol and Basquiat led by Contemporary Art Advisor Aileen Agopian, and The Brant Foundation's Docent, Mario Fasani. Aileen Agopian's authoritative input about Warhol and Basquiat, their place and impact on contemporary art, informed those present and enhanced their appreciation of the two icons.

Mario Fasani, spoke in detail about Andy Warhol's emphasis on consumerism, his celebration of pop culture, and elevating everyday items like lemons, apples, soda bottles, and soup cans. Warhol painted mundane items to depersonalize himself from his art, Fasani noted. Fasani also spoke about Haitian American, Brooklyn-born twenty-something artist Jean-Michel Basquiat's expressionism and highlighted his extraordinary collaboration with Andy Warhol expressing art creatively on the same canvas at times, and 're-forestation of each other's art' at other times, see GIVING, page 9



Guests view the private exhibition of the collaborative art of Warhol and Basquiat

PartnersGlobal Names Dr. Alex Sardar to Lead New Global Initiative Supporting Nonviolent Social Movements

PartnersGlobal announces the appointment of Dr. Alex Sardar as Chief of Party of its Powered by the People (PxP) initiative, supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s newly formed Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance. As the largest single democracy and governance grant awarded by USAID to date, PxP will foster citizen-responsive democratic governance



Dr. Alex Sardar

and inclusive development through relationships with non-traditional and diverse partners, including historically excluded and under-represented communities.

Under Sardar's leadership, PartnersGlobal will ensure that support and resources are available to address the needs, challenges, and opportunities identified by grassroots social movements around the world as they work to bring greater dignity, agency, and prosperity to their communities.

With over 20 years' experience in grassroots and social justice advocacy and global development, Alex will lead a dynamic team focused on the alignment of project activities and outcomes with PxP's iterative design and PartnersGlobal's values and strategic priorities. Foremost among these a responsive implementation and resourcing essential for social movements and activists need to achieve broader dignity, agency and progress for communities around the world.

"Alex is the right person to lead PxP's complex, global consortium at this moment in history when democratic values continue to be under attack in so many parts of the world. His deep knowledge of civic space and experience coordinating diverse stakeholders will be invaluable assets to PxP," said co-Executive Director Kyra Buchko. "We are thrilled that Alex will guide implementation of the PxP program, shaping its strategic direction and objectives, including an unparalleled knowledge generation and learning component, which aims to improve industry-wide adaptive practices and upend traditional approaches to development.," added co-Executive Director Roselie Vasquez-Yetter.

Sardar comes to PartnersGlobal, having held leadership roles in a variety of social justice and development organizations. He served as executive director of the SEEP Network; Chief Innovation Officer at CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation; and Vice President of Programs see SARDAR, page 8

COMMUNITY NEWS

ANCA-WR Board Member Anahid Oshagan Honored with California Senate District 25's 2023 Woman in Law Award

LOS ANGELES — On December 6, ANCA Western Region Board Member Anahid Oshagan, Esq., was honored with the “Woman in Law” Award at the 2023 California Senate District 25 Women in Business Awards, presented by Senator Anthony Portantino. This accolade recognizes Ms. Oshagan for her exemplary contributions not only within the legal realm but also for her active engagement in various community-building efforts.

Serving a commendable eight-year ten-

ures—both Armenian and non-Armenian—to advance the Armenian Cause.

Oshagan's service extends beyond the ANCA Western Region, encompassing over six years of dedicated commitment to the Glendale Library Foundation Board. In this capacity, she has championed the representation of all communities and amplified diverse voices throughout Glendale. Oshagan's work was also previously acknowledged in 2009, when she was presented the “Women in Law” Award by the Armenian American Chamber of Commerce.

“As a valued member of the ANCA Western Region Board of Directors, we take pride in the well-deserved recognition bestowed upon Anahid for her noteworthy contributions,” said Nora Hovsepian, Esq., Chair of the ANCA Western Region Board of Directors. “Anahid, as a legal professional and lifelong advocate for the Armenian-American community, exemplifies an unwavering commitment to



State Sen. Anthony Portantino presenting the award to ANCA-WR Board Member Anahid Oshagan.

ure on the ANCA Western Region Board of Directors, Oshagan has passionately engaged in a wide range of both regional and local community endeavors. Her unwavering commitment extends to her roles within the ANCA Western Region Education Committee, where she has been a valuable contributor to the committee's efforts to advocate for initiatives such as the inclusion of Armenian Genocide education programming and community representation in educational institutions. Additionally, her involvement with the ANCA Western Region Community Outreach Committee has underscored her ability to foster unity and garner support across diverse commu-

justice, proving instrumental not only to the advancement of *Hye Tahd* but also to the community at-large.”

“I have known Anahid Oshagan for two decades and have always appreciated her commitment to the community, her talent as a lawyer and her passion for the arts,” Senator Anthony Portantino remarked. “I was pleased that she was nominated and excited to honor her.”

“I am truly humbled and honored for this award,” said Oshagan. “I know that Senator Portantino had a tremendously long list of outstanding and deserving nominees to choose from. That makes this award so much more special.”



Ambassador Makunts Attends Blinken Party

WASHINGTON — Armenian Ambassador to the United States Lilit Makunts on December 29 attended a holiday reception hosted by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his wife, Evan Ryan. “It was wonderful to attend the warm holiday reception for Chiefs of Mission hosted by Secretary Blinken and Ms. Ryan,” Makunts wrote on X. “Looking forward to a more robust Armenia-U.S. partnership in 2024!”

AIWA Coordinates ‘One Cause, Many Faiths – Uniting Voices for Armenians in Captivity’

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) is coordinating “One Cause, Many Faiths – Uniting Voices for Armenians in Captivity,” a special liturgical observance and ecumenical prayer service dedicated to the Armenians in captivity in Azerbaijan. This event will take place on Wednesday, January 17, from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in downtown Los Angeles.

In the spirit of unity and solidarity, AIWA invites the community of both Armenian and non-Armenian religious groups to come together for an evening of prayer, reflection, and support for those affected by the ongoing challenges faced by Armenians in captivity in Azerbaijan. The event aims to bridge faiths, cultures, and communities, highlighting the shared humanity that unites us all.

The liturgical observance will feature speakers by esteemed local politicians and other community leaders who will share their thoughts on the importance of solidarity and collective action; musical interludes with a selection of Armenian Liturgical pieces, enriching the spiritu-

al atmosphere of the event; presentation from the Center for Truth and Justice to provide valuable insights and information regarding the situation of Armenians in captivity in Azerbaijan; and an Armenian ensemble will lend its voices to the occasion, filling the cathedral with the moving and powerful sounds of traditional hymns.

AIWA encourages all members of the community, regardless of faith or background, to join in this meaningful liturgical observance. Together, we can raise our voices in prayer and support for the Armenians facing challenges in captivity in Azerbaijan.

The Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) is a global organization dedicated to empowering and uniting women of Armenian descent. Through various initiatives, including cultural preservation, education, and advocacy, AIWA strives to make a positive impact on the lives of Armenian women and their communities. For more information, please visit <https://aiwainternational.org> or follow AIWA on Instagram @aiwainternational, or Facebook at Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA).

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PartnersGlobal Names Dr. Alex Sardar to Lead Global Initiative Supporting Nonviolent Social Movements

SADAR, from page 6
at Counterpart International. Prior to joining PartnersGlobal, he built his advisory and coaching practice, supporting philanthropy and social impact clients, with an emphasis on coaching emerging leaders in Global Majority countries. He has worked in more than two dozen countries, including Afghanistan, Armenia, Brazil, Honduras, India, Malawi, Senegal and South Africa.

He holds a Doctor of Education degree from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, where his research examined systemic (societal) transitions through improvements in vocational education in post-Soviet contexts. He specializes in user-centered design and generative learning through applied developmental and formative research.

“In our troubled world today, ‘people

power’ is truly the only thing with the potential to move the struggle for progress and human dignity forward,” said Alex. “I’m a firm believer that when it comes to human dignity, bold, smart, unapologetic action and inclusive spaces are critical. That’s why I’m exceedingly proud to join PartnersGlobal to contribute to PxP, which will serve as a lab to test and learn how to accelerate collective impact.”

PartnersGlobal advances peacebuilding and democratic resiliency promoting open civic space across the globe. Through authentic partnership and accompaniment, inclusive processes, and conflict sensitivity, we help to bring about more peaceful, secure, and accountable societies. For more than three decades, our mission and vision for a more peaceful and prosperous world has centered on the preeminent role of local leadership and locally led problem-solving.



COMMUNITY NEWS

John Terzian Has Been Hiding Celebrities Since 2007

TERZIAN, from page 6

alongside Diplo, Leonardo DiCaprio and Janelle Monáe. There he was at the Formula 1 race in Las Vegas, escorting Justin Bieber to the finish line by day (Bieber waved the checkered flag) and working the V.I.P. booths of the Delilah in that city (at the Wynn Las Vegas) by night. (Among the very important people: Jon Hamm, Sofia Vergara and Messrs. Bieber and DiCaprio, the latter two as endemic to Terzian's venues as tequila and soda.)

How does he cultivate their trust? Partly by saying less.

"My places are safe havens," he said. "If they want to talk about them, that's fine."

And partly by holding the hands — sometimes literally — of his top clientele, ensuring that their every need is met, that they never walk into one of his venues feeling lost. Call it the comfort food of nightlife: You enter h.wood world, you know what you're going to get. Flattering lighting. Upholstered banquettes. The aforementioned chicken tenders.

If it's a special night, there will be Terzian himself, in a Dolce & Gabbana tuxedo, eyes darting simultaneously around the room and at the phone in his hand, drinking scantily if at all, patting the shoulders of those who pass, wanting to know, "You good?"

"There is something special about all of John's places," said Kendall Jenner, who hosted a party for her tequila brand, 818, at Delilah Los Angeles in August. "They have that intimate vibe that I love." "He is," she added, "the perfect host."

Always a Host

The son of a lawyer and a piano teacher, Terzian grew up in Los Angeles, playing football and throwing house parties. ("Not my own house," Terzian made clear.

"At friends' places.") As a fourth string quarterback for the University of Southern California — "maybe fifth string," Terzian said — he was tasked with taking out potential recruits. "After the first few signed, the coaches said, 'You've gotta keep doing this,'" Terzian recalled.

He thought he would become an entertainment lawyer, but when he didn't pass the bar ("it was a horrible time," Terzian said) he got a job working for the late Adam Michael Goldstein, known as DJ AM. "I was his everything," said Terzian. "His assistant, I carried records, helped with legal, with branding. I helped him open his own nightclub," called LAX.

Terzian teamed up with Brian Toll, a U.S.C. friend who was also putting together events. In 2007, they opened a place of their own, The Stork. "It was ahead of its time," Terzian said. "We took over an old Burger King; you had to recite a poem to get in the door."

They shut it down after six months and reopened under the name h.wood in 2008. TMZ was on the rise; celebrities needed a place to hide. "We had a little private room and learned how to keep that space really protected," Terzian said. "The influx of the paparazzi was a double-edged sword. A lot of people did not have fun going out."

You wouldn't know it from the way h.wood Group expanded in the 2010s. Toll and Terzian opened Bootsy Bellows, a dance club, with the actor David Arquette as well as bars throughout West Hollywood and on the west side of Los Angeles. "They've done an amazing job," said Scott Sartiano, the owner of New York hotspot Zero Bond and a founder of the nightclub 1Oak, whose Sunset Strip location is being transformed into a new h.wood venue set to debut next year. "They have a track record

of opening exceptional venues."

Delilah, which opened in 2016, ushered in a new era of L.A. nightlife, one based less on a parade of shots and more on the notion of dinner and a show. (Though, parades of shots are still on offer for those who want them, and the potential for revelry is such that Delilah's L.A. address is the title of a track on a recent Drake album.)

Sometimes the show stars sequin-becked burlesque dancers, on other occasions it can feature a famous regular, like Jamie Foxx, grabbing the mic for an impromptu set. "Friends just pop up," Terzian said. "We generally have no idea."

Of course, you need to count Grammy-winning artists among your friends for surprises like that to happen. To that end, a few years ago, inspired by Zappos's teams of customer service "ninjas," Terzian created the X Team, a brain trust of 10 staffers that go above and beyond for h.wood's V.I.P. guests. "Doesn't mean that they're a celebrity," Terzian said. "They might be friends, they might be business people. They can use the X Team like a concierge — transportation, housing, security, private planes."

Can he share the names of anyone who avails of the X's Team's expertise?

"No," he said.

He's similarly coy about the Bird Streets, a West Hollywood members-only club that opened last year, that Jenner and Bad Bunny were spotted leaving one night in March. "It's for everyone that needs actual privacy," he said, "that doesn't have it outside of their own home." What does membership offer? "Next level hand-holding," he said. "It's a full concierge." What can he share about how members are chosen, dues, the maddeningly static website that is merely a curlicue B and S?

He laughed. "I get a lot of comments on the website."

Not Your Normal Tent

Down the street from the Beverly Hills Hotel is h.wood Group's corporate office, where 50 of the company's 1,000 or so employees ideate on how to further surprise and delight. On a recent afternoon, Terzian gathered around a long conference table with five members of the X Team and three more staffers to discuss h.wood Group's next frontier: Super Bowl LVIII, to be held in Las Vegas on Feb. 11. On the agenda: How to cultivate the "intimate vibe" coveted by regulars like Ms. Jenner in a 35,000 square foot tent.

"It's not your normal, basic tent," said Jake Nussbaum, a founder of Uncommon Entertainment, which h.wood hired to oversee three nights of parties.

"It can't be corporate event-y," Terzian said. "Can we talk about the table setup?"

Quantities of stanchions, velvet ropes, and security guards were debated. The notion of eliminating 12 "regular" tables — which will sell for \$100,000 each — to give the V.V.I.P.s at the "whale tables" more room to mingle was briefly raised and quickly dismissed. More important: How were all these very important people going to get in?

"It's hard to have a V.I.P. entrance," said Tracey Manner, a founder of Sequel, which h.wood hired to oversee its publicity, "because everyone in your world thinks they're a V.I.P."

"Should we just not have one?" Terzian asked.

"You have to have one," Ms. Manner said.

Terzian nodded knowingly. "As long as it's not a scene," he said. Save those for inside the party, off-camera.



A group photo of the guests attending the Basquiat x Warhol exhibit at Brant Foundation in New York City

AMAA Fundraiser for Displaced Families of Artsakh

GIVING, from page 6

as shown in this special exhibit. The artists used mediums such as silk screen ink, acrylic, synthetic polymer paint, watercolor, and oil stick on linen, canvas, wood panels, and even on punching bags.

After being treated to an exceptional experience, the guests had the opportunity to pose questions and be privy to Fasani's and Agopian's expert elucidation.

According to the Brant Foundation, the "Basquiat x Warhol" is an exhibition of works from the artists' influential collaboration in the early eighties. Curated by Dr. Dieter Buchhart and Peter M. Brant in collaboration with Dr. Anna Karina Hofbauer, this is the first time this iconic col-

laboration has been the subject of a major New York exhibition in over twenty-five years." Peter Brant is one of the most important collectors in New York who started collecting contemporary art at 19, focusing on young emerging artists and supporting them, upon the recommendation of eminent art dealer since the 1960s, Leo Castelli.

Those in attendance included members from the NY/NJ Evangelical community as well as the NY/NJ Armenian Relief Society (ARS), The Tekeyan Cultural Association, the ADL, the daughters of Vartan, The Diocese, the Prelacy, and guests from California, Colorado, and Chicago.

After the tour, the attendees gathered at

the Yara Lebanese restaurant in New York City in a convivial atmosphere of fellowship. The festive dinner of Middle Eastern delicacies was preceded by a thoughtful prayer filled with expressions of gratitude by Jennifer Telfeyan-LaRoe.

True to her magnanimous nature, Vicki Hovanessian spoke of the impetus for the event and had a kind word to say about each guest. The attendees echoed co-chair Seta Nalbandian's remarks about chairlady Vicki's phenomenal contributions and myriad accomplishments amid further testimonials and appreciative applause.

An impromptu birthday celebration for committee member Dr. Celeste Telfeyan Helvacian was a much-appreciated gesture



AMAA NY/NJ Orphan & Child Care Committee Chairs Vicki Hovanessian and Seta Nalbandian

before everyone departed the venue with hearts filled with the spirit of giving and a sense of benevolence.

Thank you for all the important news you bring to our doorsteps. Merry Christmas and Happy New year.

Jirair, Ani and Haig Hovsepian
Belmont, MA

Thank you to the Mirror-Spectator staff.

Dr. Sam Mikaelian
Chicago, IL

Merry Christmas to everyone and thank you, Mirror-Spectator!

Barbara Soghigian
Middleton, MA

Congratulations on your 90th and a Merry Christmas with many healthy, Happy New Year for all!

Dr. Myron and Mrs. Ruth Allukian Jr.
Boston, MA

Merry X-Mas and Happy New Year to my relatives and friends

George W. Haroutunian
Stoneham, MA

On behalf of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, I would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! We appreciate all that you do for the AMAA and the community at large.

Zaven Khanjian, CEO
Armenian Missionary Association of America

We wish you a Merry Christmas and we hope 2024 will be your best year ever.

Mr. Osep and Dr. Nadya Sarafian
Northville, MI

A joyous Christmas and Happy Healthy New Year to all our relatives and friends!

Crosby and Flo Goshgarian
Canton, MA

Let There Be Peace. "Hadjin Strong"
Ara and Pamela Gechjian and family
Lincoln, MA

Best Wishes for 2024

Heratch Doumanian
Chicago, IL

We Armenians had more than our share of challenges this year; our wish is for peace, hope and better days in 2024!

Dr. and Mrs. Gary Zamanigian
Bloomfield Hills, MI

Merry Christmas
Ruth and Wil Swisher
Newington, CT

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home
Watertown, MA

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Avedis and Houry Boyamian
Winchester, MA

Merry Christmas

HAPPY NEW YEAR

After 90 years of service to enhance the knowledge, the wisdom and spirit of Armenians in the Diaspora, the Mirror-Spectator deserves to take a bow for its very wise leadership, as it prepares the foundation of the next 90 years. Congratulations. Merry X-Mas and Happy New Year!

Ernest M. Barsamian, MD, an Sonig Kradjian
Boca Raton, FL

Christmas Blessings
Arlene Avakian
Boca Raton, IL

Best wishes at Christmas and for the New Year.

Harry and Janice Mazadoorian
Kensington, CT

Prayers for a better life for the Artsakh Armenians and Armenia

Knarik O. Meneshian
Glenview, IL



Christmas!

AND

NEW YEAR

Let there be peace on earth, kindness among humans, political stability in Armenia and prosperity for Armenians.

Kevork Keushkerian
Pasadena, CA

Merry Christmas
Toufayan Bakery
Ridgefield, NJ

Keep it up and be well.
Hayg Boyadjian
Lexington, MA

Merry X-Mas and Happy New Year
Jeffrey Barasatian
West Chester, PA

Celebrate the Season with Hope, Happiness and Peace. Merry Christmas.

Konstantin Petrossian
Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Cultural Committee
Providence, RI

Thank You

- Arlene Avakian, Boca Raton, FL \$1,000
Norehad Charitable Foundation, Bay Village, OH \$1,000
Anonymous, \$500
Avedis and Houry Boyamian, Winchester, MA \$500
Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Watertown, MA \$500
Sonig Kradjian and Ernest Barsamian, Boca Raton, FL \$500
Aurelian and Anahid Mardiros, Lynnfield, MA \$500
Dr. Myron and Mrs. Ruth Allukian, Boston, MA \$300
Rita Balian, Arlington, VA \$300
Ruth and Wil Swisher, Newington, CT \$200
Dr. and Mrs. Gary Zamanigian, Bloomfield Hills, MI \$200
Heratch Doumanian, Chicago, IL \$200
Armenian Missionary Association of America, Paramus, NJ \$200
Madeline Melkonian, Forest Hills, NY \$200
George W. Haroutunian, Stoneham, MA \$200
Rosemond Shirinian, San Francisco, CA \$200
Nubar Aram and Aida Sethian, Monrovia, CA \$200
Harry and Janice Mazadoorian, Kensington, CT \$200
Toufayan Bakery, Inc., Ridgefield, NJ \$200
Harry and Hripsime Parsekian, Watertown, MA \$200
The Pattersons, Lexington, MA \$200
Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee, Providence, RI \$200
James Tashjian, Westborough, MA \$100
Ara and Pamela Gechjian, Lincoln, MA \$100
Crosby and Florence Goshgarian, Canton, MA \$100
Osep and Nadya Sarafian, Northville, MI \$100
Robert Ovoian, N. Attleboro, MA \$100
Jirair and Ani Hovsepian, Belmont, MA \$100
Kevork and Silva Keushkerian, Pasadena, CA \$100
Ellen Mugar, Cape Elizabeth, ME \$100
Theodore Touloukian, Boston, MA \$100
Robert Mirak, Winchester, MA \$100
Raffi Hagopian Dorian, Fresno, CA \$100
Noyemi and Hagop Isnar, Haworth, NJ \$100
Lisa and Joseph Dagdigian, Harvard, MA \$50
Armen and Martha Demerjian, Watertown, MA \$50
Dr. Sam Mikaelian, Chicago, IL \$50
Hayg Boyadjian, Lexington, MA \$50
Jeffrey Barasatian, West Chester, PA \$50
Barbara Soghigian, Middleton, MA 01949 \$25
Knarik Meneshian, Glenview, IL \$25





COMMUNITY NEWS



The scholars in Rome

Scholars Meet in Rome to Discuss St. Nersess Shnorhali

ROME/NEW YORK — Scholars from around the world met in Rome to discuss one of the greatest saints of the Armenian Church, in a gathering titled “Plenitude of Grace, Plenitude of Humanity: St. Nerses Shnorhali at the Juncture of Millennia.”

The conference, convening from November 30 to December 1, at the Vatican’s Pontifical Oriental Institute, commemorated the 850th anniversary of Nerses Shnorhali’s death by examining various aspects of his life and work: his place in history; his intellectual writings; his poetic and musical works; his role as a leader of

the institutional church and as a diplomat anticipating the “ecumenical spirit”; and his distinctive perspective on Christian theology, among other matters.

The impressive roster of scholars representing numerous disciplines and several church traditions included Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Archbishop Boghos Levon Zekiyian, Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Vahan Ter-Ghevondyan, Marco Bais, Azat Bozoyan, Valentina Calzolari, Benedetta Contin, Peter Cowe, Riccardo Pane, Sergio La Porta, Haig Utidjian, Armenuhi Drost-Abgaryan, Zarouhi Pogossian,

Armine Melkonyan, Edda Vardanyan and Erna Shirinian.

Scholars from the Eastern Diocese were well-represented at the conference, and included Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Abraham Terian, Roberta Ervine, and Jesse Arlen, director of the Diocese’s Zohrab Center.

The proceedings went forward with the blessings of Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the Pontifical Legate of Western Europe and Representative of His Holiness Karekin

II to the Vatican, conceived the commemoration of Shnorhali in Rome, and led the organizing process in tandem with the Pontifical Oriental Institute and a team of distinguished scholars and Armenian churchmen, with financial support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

The conference was broadcast live over the Internet, and recordings of the proceedings can be viewed online. Click the following link to find the full roster of speakers and presentations, as well as video links, on the website of the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center.



Tekeyan Cultural Association

Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

Since its inception in 2001, The TCA Sponsor A Teacher program has raised \$838,700 and reached out to 7,386 teachers and school staff in Armenia and Artsakh. **Yes, I would like to sponsor TCA school teacher(s) in Armenia, as well as teachers who fled Artsakh and continue teaching in Armenia schools, to continue helping them to work and educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher/s' name(s) and address/es.**



Your donation is tax deductible.

Yes, I would like to sponsor TCA school teacher(s) in Armenia, as well as teachers who fled Artsakh and continue teaching in Armenia schools, to continue helping them to work and educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher/s' name and address.

\$240 \$480 \$700 other _____

Name _____

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Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association
Memo: Sponsor a Teacher
Mail your check to:
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Arts & Culture

Nairi Bandari Receives Jury's Choice Award for 'Eyes on Artsakh' Documentary

SAN JOSE — Nairi Bandari received the prestigious Jury's Choice Award at the Golden Gate International Film Festival for her documentary film, "Eyes on Artsakh" in November. This short poetic documentary takes viewers on a captivating journey to Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh, providing a profound glimpse into the experiences and emotions of the region's inhabitants.

"Eyes on Artsakh" delves into the lives of ordinary people residing in the villages of Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh, following the 2020 invasion by Azerbaijan. The documentary showcases the resilience and spirit of these individuals as they rebuild their lives in the aftermath of a devastating war that claimed the lives of 5000 brave soldiers and civilians.

The film has not only captivated audiences with its poignant storytelling but has also contributed to the awareness and correct pronunciation of the region's name. Bandari expressed her satisfaction, saying, "Now more people can pronounce Artsakh correctly. I have accomplished my goal!"

The Golden Gate International Film Festival (GGIFF), powered by Net Effect Media Inc., is dedicated to showcasing the immense talent of filmmakers worldwide. The festival provides a platform for creative minds to exhibit their work in North America and across the globe. Net Effect Media (NEM), the organization behind GGIFF, was established in 2000 and has since distributed and marketed over 250 films through various mediums such as theaters, home video, television, pay-per-view, video-on-demand, and mobile applications. NEM has also ventured into offering pay-per-view services on its own platform. GGIFF strives to offer opportunities to content creators from all corners of the world, enabling them to reach the widest possible audience.

Bandari was born and raised in Iran, but always had an appetite to explore the world.

Upon completion of her studies at the French University of Armenia, she embarked upon a journey to the diverse city of Los Angeles, driven by her passion for visual arts and photography. Presently, she thrives as a student of documentary production at California State University of Northridge, simultaneously immersing herself in the creation of captivating films that embody the essence of truth.

Bandari extends her gratitude to the following individuals and groups who supported her in the making of "Eyes on Artsakh": Christina Khachatryan, Dzia Vartabedian, Hermine Avagyan, Maria Karapetyan, She Loves Collective



Bob and Muriel Mirak at the entrance to the village of Tsack (now Inn Köy), where their mother, Artemis Yeramian, was born

Tales of the Mirak Family Appear in Print

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

Two Mirak siblings, Bob Mirak and Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, just published a 92-page volume, *Tales of the Mirak Family* (Arvest Press, 2023) containing stories about the lives of three generations of the Mirak family in the United States. The perspective is that of the two siblings, who separately penned the 18 chapters comprising the book. While based on actual events, with one exception, as noted in the introduction, "where memories are faulty, the authors relied on imagination judiciously used."

Little is related about the family's life prior to arriving in the United States. The great-uncle of the siblings, Garabed "Sport Charlie" Mirakian, was born in the village of Mashgerd, near the town of Arabgir, which is in the area called Dersim. He came to the US to the Boston area prior to World War I. He left behind his wife Anna and three children, planning to bring them later, but the children were killed in the Armenian Genocide. In the 1920s, Anna joined Garabed, bringing with her nephews Zaven and Vartges.

The story of the Miraks in the US, at least for the first two generations, is that of hard-earned success. The orphan Zaven, under the American name John, "graduated from the school of hard knocks," trying various types of jobs, but found success in the automobile business and real estate. He purchased a bankrupt Chevrolet dealership in 1936 which became the forerunner of Mirak Chevrolet of Arlington, Mass.



John, his uncle Garabed, his aunt Anna and his cousin Hovsep in the United States in 1923.

is also one chapter devoted to the family parakeet, Susie. John's deer hunting (and butchering thereafter), fishing, painting and other home maintenance, and horseback riding are some of the other topics of the chapters.

The book closes with a whimsical fictional tale that Bob Mirak used to tell younger family members as entertainment on trips: "Lardo and the Bean Story."

This volume is primarily intended, at least according to its introduction, to preserve memories for Mirak family members. It does not detail the achievements of the various Mirak family members, such as the preservation of what became the Armenian Cultural Foundation in Arlington, nor the publications by Bob and Muriel, of various articles and books on Armenian-related topics. Some of this is covered, at least concerning John Mirak and his wife, in Bob Mirak's 2014 book, *Genocide Survivors, Community Builders: The Family of John and Artemis Mirak* (Armenian Cultural Foundation). The current volume offers a broader audience some insights into the life of one family of successful Armenian-American immigrants in a personal and at times entertaining way. It is a private publication, and if there are any comments or questions, they should be addressed to the Armenian Cultural Foundation (441 Mystic St., Arlington, MA 02474).

'Amerikatsi' Review:

Armenia's Oscar Submission Is A Wayward, Blackly Comic Tale Of Hope

By Damon Wise

LOS ANGELES (Deadline) — There's a lot to take in and even more to process in American-Armenian director Michael Goorjian's ambitious period piece: What he's tilting at here is not beyond the realms of comedy, as Armando Iannucci proved with his 2017 jet-black satire *The Death of Stalin*. But tone is crucial, and *Amerikatsi* has a waywardness that too often undermines its intent — there's a lot that works here and so much that doesn't. There are moments that are sensitive, thoughtful, and really quite moving — in an elegant, silent-movie way — but the framing is so dark in its humor that many viewers may never make it to them.

In Eastern European literature, the greenhorn caught in the crosshairs of bureaucracy has long been a staple, and "Amerikatsi" pushes that tradition by placing an emigrant American at the heart of its drama. The film opens in 1915, in what was then the Ottoman Empire, and a young boy named Garo is sent away in the thick of what he will later come to know as an adult, in fevered flashbacks, as the Armenian Genocide.

The story itself, however, begins 30 years later, following Josef Stalin's invitation to survivors of that dark period of history to return home, now that Armenia is part of the Soviet Union. After the death of his wife, Garo — now Charlie (Goorjian), a New Yorker from Poughkeepsie who never quite settled there — sees his chance to figure out who he really is and sets off to his homeland. By chance, after saving her son from a mob that swamps a passing bread van, the first person Charlie meets is Sona, the wife of a high-ranking Soviet general, who invites him to dinner with her husband Dmitry. Dmitry indulges his wife, promising to help Charlie find a good job and housing, too. Instead, the jealous apparatchik secretly arranges to have Charlie arrested, on the grounds that he is a spy, and sent back to America after a bit of roughing up.

Until now, there's a goofy quality to "Amerikatsi" that's reminiscent of the self-awareness that sprang up after the fall of the Berlin wall, like the fake supermarket posters in Prague's Museum of Communism that say, "We don't have it, we're not open, go and bother someone else." Charlie, on account of his "very fancy tie," is indicted on grounds of spreading propaganda and the more speculative charge of "cosmopolitanism." There's a lot of dim-witted box-ticking going on ("Filling quotas is always good"), and the visual presentation — a fusion of Aki Kaurismäki, with its deadpan performances, and Wes Anderson, in its stylized use of movie grammar — has a lot of fun with that.

see REVIEW, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

Christmas Pageant at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont

BELMONT, Mass. — On December 17, under the auspices of Bishop Mikael Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of our Lady of Nareg in the USA and Canada, a festive Christmas Pageant took place at the Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont.

More than 200 attendees gathered at the sanctuary, which was decorated for the occasion beautifully.

The curtain opened up to reveal the Meghedi children's vocal ensemble, who under the skilled directorship of Dr. Marina Margarian, and the accompaniment of the talented musician and pianist Gegam Margarian, performed many favorite Christmas songs. The concert started with Robert Amirkhanyan's *Ding Dong*, and continued with many other popular songs such as *Silent Night*, *Sourp-Sourp* (Holy-Holy), *Joy to the World*, and many more, all the while the nativity scene unfolded.

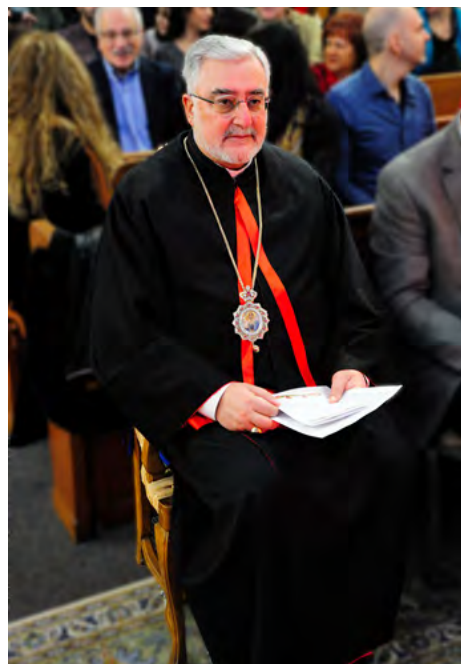
Shant Der Torossian and Karina Hananian gracefully narrated in Armenian as well as in English the history of the nativity, while the children re-enacted the story.

During the program, Father Ghazar Bedrossian, pastor of the Holy Cross Church who is also an accomplished tenor, mesmerized the audience with his captivating and enchanting performances of *Ave Maria*, *O Holy Night* and *Angels we Have Heard on High*.

Alla Petrosyan, a 10th grader at Newton Country Day School, who is currently in



Bishop Mikael Mouradian at the performance



Bishop Mikael Mouradian

Voice Certificate Level 4 at New England Conservatory of Music as well as a member of their Youth Chorale Ensemble and a member of Boston Children's Chorus,

charmed the audience with her melodious and angelic voice as she performed *Away in a Manger*, *O Come All Ye Faithful* and a beautiful Armenian duet with Father Bedrossian called *Nenchia Vortiyag*.

Towards the end, Bishop Mouradian addressed the audience and congratulated all the performers. He also stressed the importance of the work being done by educating and preparing our young generation, all the while creating this beautiful atmosphere and bringing the whole community together in tradition and faith. The concert concluded with all the performers joining their voices to the tunes of *Feliz Navidad*. After the concert, the audience congregated in the Atinjian hall, where an elaborate Christmas bake sale was organized by the church's ladies' guild members.

We once again congratulate all the performers and volunteers, including Mary Demirjian for the costumes and Jirair Hovsepian for the photography.

Special thanks to Father Bedrossian for his devoted service and contribution, as well as to Dr. Marina Margarian for her

continuous dedication to our community and commitment to our young generation.
—Maral Der Torossian



The performers and the church dignitaries, including Rev. Ghazar Bedrossian



Alla Petrosyan performing



Dr. Marina Margarian leading the Meghedi ensemble

ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Jiving with Hrayr Varaz's- #jivjiv #ճիվճիվ գիրք

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

A unique pocket-sized sliver of a book, #jivjiv provides evidence that Western Armenian may be experiencing a renaissance of sorts. This compendium of Twitter poems penned by poet and linguist Hrayr Varaz, then posted by him on Instagram was composed starting in October, 2020 during the 44-day attack on Artsakh. As a rule on Twitter, each tweet must be 280 characters or shorter, with every letter, number, symbol, space one character long (emojis and some complex punctuations count as two characters.)

A graduate of UCLA's Chamlian and Holy Martyrs Ferahian Day Schools (both his parents attended Jemaran in Beirut), Varaz is a shining example of why donors should continue to support Armenian schools and expand on the current limited number of these institutions in America: "I consider myself an ideal product of the Western Ar-



Hrayr Varaz

menian community. I went to Armenian school full-time and got used to typing Armenian in high school thanks to my classmate Ara Kazandjian, who put me in charge of the Armenian submissions for the school's literary magazine." Varaz also took Armenian courses as a UCLA undergrad; later on at MIT he studied patterns which occur across languages, as they relate to Western Armenian. A first example of the touching and sometimes humorous poems included in #jivjiv:

"In the pool of love around you/hearts unload, cleanse, replenish."

A certain amount of joy in creating is evident throughout the volume — it's entertaining rather than serious, colloquial rather than literary: "Part of the fun is innovating by expanding, adding, crushing, squeezing, forming the current language as if it were clay and I were creating unique ceramic pieces. I am disappointed that Western Armenian got slapped with the endangered label by UNESCO, but I think it helped jolt some people to action."

The first volume of #jivjiv — a second volume is soon to be in the offing — includes 29 pieces divided into four broad categories: Armenian culture, Armenian language, Night sky, Queer. Topics include Armenian food and holidays, specific people, coffee-cup readings.

The true genesis of the book lies in Varaz's desire to demystify Western Armenian for learners of all ages, who are sometimes afraid of making mistakes to the extent of being unable to form even basic sentences, something referred to in the linguistic parlance a *xenoglossophobia*: "I wanted there to exist a Western Armenian book that showed the written form as it came out of the writer, before the spellcheck/revision process. I wanted an Armenian book with spelling mistakes, to encourage others to write and not worry about spelling as they create," explains Varaz: "I found that creation for me required putting aside the worry and shame of spelling mistakes and the 'correct form' of a word. I allowed my language to flow and write freely. This is why at the bottom of every page of my book I put 'written with spelling freedoms' (ուղղագրական ազատութիւններով գրված - ughakragan azadutyunnerov kervadz)."

#jivjiv's innovations extend beyond the simple fact that Varaz, who holds a PhD in linguistics from MIT, purposefully writes things the way he wants, ignoring traditional orthography and grammar at will. He also mixes Eastern and Western Armenian, following neither Western nor "reformed" Eastern orthography rules, often writing things simply the way he says them — implicitly inviting readers to do the same. T

his may hopefully free the often crippling fear of not speaking "*makour Hayeren*" i.e. "clean" or perfect Armenian that many people experience.

Hence the writer is more likely to create and explore while "expanding the reader's possible worlds with connections to my life." The process was liberating for the author as well: "*For my language streams to flow, i've*



been ignoring the pressures of 'correct' 'pure' 'non-foreign'. This made it possible to create with Armenian, instead of worrying about what the dictionary spelling or the 'more-Armenian' version of a word is. it's extra. If we allow ourselves to put this aside, we'll get new-ities from the different Armenian communities. The important part is to use the language. By using the language, ripples will reach others. You CAN write, withOUT worry." The book's physical typography also innovates, with accessibility and approachability the author's main concerns. The layout looks something like this:

"First off the word 'jivjiv' means:
A short poem in the Twitter universe

Yes I "made it up"
Follow me@ramgnr"

Varaz explains: "This allows the reader to experience the sound and poetic play I do with Western Armenian. The Armenian-lettered English pronunciations located under the English balances out the left and right sides. It also provides a fun way to learn/practice the Armenian letters. By using Armenian letters for the pronunciation of the English, I am able to get speakers of English to figure out the sounds of the Armenian letters."

#jivjiv may not be everyone's idea of proper literature but then again Varaz never meant it to be. Though slightly disorienting at first due to its format and the grammatical liberties that the author takes, it ultimately delivers a rewarding read. The book displays the type of linguistic innovation that points to a language — Western Armenian — still in full evolution. An extra bonus: Amy Kazandjian's playful graphic illustrations. As a parting note, Varaz emphasizes that he composed #jivjiv while living in Yelamu, known as San Francisco, on the historic lands of the Ramaytush Ohlone First Peoples.

Armenia's Oscar Submission Is A Wayward, Blackly Comic Tale Of Hope

REVIEW, from page 13

But instead of being let go, Charlie, after a near-miss with a firing-squad, gets sent to Siberia for 10 years hard labor. As he and others are about to get their marching orders, an earthquake hits Armenia and the prisoners are reprieved, but only so they can rebuild the prison walls. The mood is much darker now; Charlie is beaten, has his head shaved, and is sent back to his cell with a noose "for the dumb American." The damage means that Charlie now has a view; looking out of his prison bars he can see into the home of an Armenian couple nearby. Living vicariously through their mealtimes, parties and arguments, Charlie is now inured to the brutality of his everyday existence and becomes intoxicated by theirs, living a proxy version of the authentic life he came for.

His Russian captors call him Charlie Chaplin, and with good reason, since the better part of the film is largely silent, as Charlie absorbs and gorges on the outside world much like Chaplin did as *The Little Tramp* in "The Gold Rush." Goorjian is at his best in these scenes, which are the most effective at expressing the film's themes of diaspora and identity. The brutality and cruelty, however, are hard to laugh off, and while it's clearly not the film's intention that we should ever do so, Goorjian's film asks a lot of its audience to stay with it as a vehicle for his no doubt heartfelt thoughts of hope and reconciliation.

("Amerikatsi;" Distributor: Variance; Release date: September 1, 2023 (Limited); Director/screenwriter: Michael Goorjian; Cast: Michael Goorjian, Hovik Keuchkerian, Nelli Uvarova, Mikhail Trukin; Running time: 1 hour 56 min)



A scene from "Amerikatsi"



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Lena Tashjian's Pickled Cabbage Soup (Krchik)

"Do you want something to eat? said my grandmother. I have cabbage soup and bread."

— From *The Living and the Dead* by William Saroyan

LOS ANGELES — Released in January 2020, *The Vegan Armenian Kitchen* Cookbook is a self-published project from Lena Tashjian, the author and recipe developer, and Siroon Parseghian, a Los Angeles-based photographer specializing in commercial, food, and product photography. With over 115 taste-tested recipes, the cookbook highlights the many plant-based and Lenten staples in Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora, and includes a variety of easy to prepare, healthy veganized classics.

"Armenian cuisine is associated with an endless sense of abundance, generosity, and often a grandmother, mother or aunt who takes it upon herself to lovingly (or forcefully) make sure everyone is well-fed," says Lena. "The photos we use are depictions of exactly how your dish will turn out. Siroon grew up in a family of photographers in Los Angeles. By pursuing her talent and creativity in photography, she has achieved an incredible standard, thus making this cookbook a visually appetizing triumph."

Lena spent six years in Armenia traveling from rural to urban areas, observing traditional dishes created by locals while relishing Armenia's unending hospitality. During her stay, she honed her culinary skills and recorded each experience while experimenting with a range of different vegan dishes and ingredients. Growing up in Toronto, Canada, and a graduate of Sourp Khatch and ARS Armenian schools, she had a profound love for food from her early childhood and family life that was enhanced by her trip to Armenia.

She enjoys preparing the plant-based dishes she grew up with as a child, and making them "just like my mom's." Lena's recipe for Krchik, or Pickled Cabbage Soup, is featured on the Tazah/Karabetian Import & Distribution, Inc.'s website. Krchik, she says, "is a comforting dish that will keep you coming back for seconds (and thirds). The varied flavors — thanks primarily to the tanginess of the pickled cabbage and savouriness of the tomato and red pepper pastes — come together to create a result everyone will enjoy. Armenians are serious about cooking with fresh vegetables — including cabbage."

One of the most popular Armenian dishes — dolma, is widespread in the Middle East, Russia and Caucasus, she adds. Like everywhere in the Middle East, cabbage is eaten raw, dried, pickled and marinated, and cabbage is an obligatory ingredient for making soups and main dishes. The recipe for Bitlis Tutoo (Sour Cabbage Stew) is featured in *Breaking Bread* with William Saroyan (Heliograph Publishing, September 15, 2016). Author Janice Stevens captures the essence of Saroyan's love for his Armenian culture through excerpts of his written word and carefully selected authentic Armenian recipes. (Tutoo means sour in Armenian, and the stew can really live up to its name. The recipe includes both fermented cabbage and the brine used to pickle the cabbage.)

Karabetian Import & Distribution, Inc. is a family-owned and operated company established in 1987 with the mission of providing unique products with authentic taste made only with premium ingredients. "We are the exclusive, direct importers and distributors of fine Middle Eastern, Iranian, Greek, Armenian, Russian, and Mediterranean delicatessen, food products, cultural gifts, pipe tobacco, souvenirs, specialty beauty, kitchen and houseware products. Our line of innovative items from the historic past have been tailored to fit today's contemporary lifestyle. Quality is our top priority, which is why we travel across the world and import only the finest products in the market," the website says.

"This is one of my favorite vegan soups that makes about 6-8 generous servings so you can enjoy leftovers," adds Lena.

INGREDIENTS:

3-4 cups pickled cabbage, chopped
1 large onion, chopped
2 medium potatoes, cubed
1/2 cup coarse bulgur*
2 tablespoons Tazah Tomato Paste
2 tablespoons Tazah Red Pepper Paste
3 tablespoons Tazah Extra Virgin Olive Oil
5-6 cups boiled water
Salt, black pepper, and red pepper, to taste
Fresh chopped parsley as garnish, optional

PREPARATION:

Heat the oil in the pot and sauté the onions. Once the onion is cooked, add the tomato paste and mix well. Add the pickled cabbage, stir, and allow it to heat up for a few minutes. Add the potatoes and enough boiled water to completely cover the vegetables, about 5 cups.

Cook on low-medium heat, covered, until the potatoes soften completely, around 15 to 20 minutes. Add the bulgur, spices and another cup of boiled water, if necessary, and cook for 5 to 10 minutes, covered. Turn off the heat and allow the soup to sit for 5 to 10 minutes. Garnish with chopped parsley.

Serves 6-8.

*Note: Making wheat into bulgur is an ancient process that originated in the Mediterranean region and has been an integral part of Middle Eastern cuisine for thousands of years. In approximately 2,800 B.C., the Chinese emperor Shen Nung declared it one of five sacred crops along with rice, millet, barley and soybeans. Biblical references indicate it was prepared by ancient Babylonians, Hittites and Hebrew populations some 4,000 years ago, and Arab, Israeli, Egyptian, and Roman civilizations record eating dried cooked wheat as early as 1,000 B.C. See: <https://sunnylandmills.com/>

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Los Angeles, CA 90039
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The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Tote Bag and Cookbook

ORDER TODAY, go to: <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/product/vegan-armenian-kitchen-cookbook/>

The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook is an all-in-one resource for Armenian cooking which is intertwined with its rich culture and heritage. From food idioms and detailed explanations on dishes, names and customs, to pantry staples, menu

pairing and holiday planning, *The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook* is an invaluable tool that will serve not only to educate and fascinate readers on Armenian cuisine and history, but also inspire them to create the plant-based and veganized dishes in their own kitchen. "We continue to donate all proceeds from our signature tote bags to initiatives and organizations supporting the people of Artsakh, and donate a portion of proceeds from the cookbook to Centaur Animal-Assisted Therapy & Rescue Center in Ushi, Armenia," says Lena.

REFERENCES:

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COMMENTARY

Erevan Chorale's Annual Christmas Concert Again Delights Audiences

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — The Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra ushered in the Christmas season with its Annual Christmas Concert on December 10, 2023, in the Sanctuary of the Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston. The collective, founded in 1966 by Very Rev. Oshagan Minassian, and directed by composer Konstantin Petrossian since 2009, is the only one of its kind in the diaspora, and is a great promoter of Armenian music. Thanks to the group's longstanding relationships with Armenian composers and performers, many pieces authored by Armenians were premiered and popularized outside of Armenia by this very collective.

The concert began with the Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra. In its usual style, the group's repertoire consisted of a wide and rich palette. The audience was treated to a high-level performance of Christmas carols, as well as traditional Armenian sacred music.

In commemoration of the 850th death anniversary of St. Nerses Shnorali, his works were included in the concert pro-



The Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra with conductor Konstantin Petrossian



Rubik Mailian

gram, including *Aravod Looso* performed by the choir and orchestra. And, also for the first time his *Nor Dzaghik* and *Norahrash* chants were performed, specially arranged by Petrossian. The audience warmly welcomed the wonderful performances of soloists Rubik Mailian, lyric tenor from Detroit, and vocalist Astghik Martirosyan from New York. The famous guitarist John Baboian brought a special flavor to the performance. Erevan Chorale dedicated its performance of *Yeghghetzin Haygagan* to the memory of its founder, Very Rev. Minassian.



Guitarist John Baboian and Astghik Martirosyan

The repertoire was accompanied by new arrangements of Christmas hymns, as well

as the premier performance of the song *My Armenia* by Seyran Nazaryan, which was warmly received by the audience.

Students of the Holy Trinity Armenian School participated in the program with wonderful recitations dedicated to Christmas, New Year and Armenia. Finally, the festive concert ended with Handel's *Hallelujah*.

The evening passed in high spirits, as all the artists brilliantly performed a varied and interesting program. The Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra worked on the repertoire for several months, which undoubtedly contributed to the success of the evening, as did the creative work and dedication of artistic director and conductor Konstantin Petrossian and pianist Nune Hakobyan.

At the conclusion of the program, Rev. Vasken A. Kouzouian, pastor of the church, expressed warm thanks to Petrossian and all performers of the Christmas Concert.

The concert was attended by numerous community members and guests from other cities. The Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra's annual Christmas concert has been a gift to the community for 56 years and is a monumental event in Greater Boston celebrating Armenian culture.

— Karine Halajian

CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENTARY

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EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

CONTRIBUTORS

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

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

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

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA
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Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

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

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Christmas a 'Season of Grieving' In Bethlehem

By Ellen Teague, Bess Twiston Davies, Patrick Hudson

Bethlehem held subdued Christmas celebrations as it mourned the more than 8,000 children killed in the Holy Land since 7 October.

In his homily on Christmas Eve at the Church of the Nativity, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, noted that “when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem she gave birth to the Lord in a manger because ‘there was no room for them,’” while “this year there is no room for the people of Gaza...even though their suffering ceaselessly cries out to the whole world.”

“This is the situation in which the Palestinian people have been living for too long,” he said, “waiting for the international community to find solutions to end the occupation under which they are forced to live and its consequences.”

While acknowledging that “each of us is entrapped by our own pain,” he continued: “Christmas is precisely about this – God making Himself present in a human way and opening our hearts to a new way of looking at the world.”

On New Year’s Day, the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Cardinal Pizzaballa described the “courage” and “madness” of peace in his homily at Jerusalem’s pro-cathedral.

“I am more and more convinced that in this complex context, the main vocation and mission of the small Christian community is precisely this: to cherish the desire for encounter, to cultivate

South Africa’s bishops rejected these allegations, which were prompted by claims that the Pope had told the Israeli president Isaac Herzog that it was “forbidden to respond to terror with terror.”

In an open letter to Goldstein, the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference said: “The emotions with which you uttered these statements suggest that you believe that the Pope hates Jews, hence you call him to repent, [but] nothing could be further from the truth.

“Pope Francis began his papacy by visiting Israel in 2014. During that journey, he expressed joy about Catholics and Jews being ‘bound by a very special spiritual bond’.”

Israel’s ambassador to the Holy See Raphael Schutz also criticized the Pope’s comments on the war. In an interview with the news outlet Crux, he said that “no responsible leader in the free world” had described the war as “terrorism” as the Pope has done.

Schutz also accused the Latin Patriarchate of a “blood libel” in its statement following the deaths of two women in the Catholic parish in Gaza, which said they had been shot by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) “in cold blood.” The patriarchate had “lashed into publishing a text naming Israel as a country of murder,” he said.

The IDF conducted Christmas Day raids on Palestinian targets in the occupied West Bank, including in Bethlehem, Nablus, Jericho and Ramallah.

The UN has documented the killing of 300 Palestinians – including more than 50 children – by Israeli security forces and settlers in the West Bank since 7 October.

In Jerusalem, there was an attack on clergy and members of the Armenian community on 28 December. The Armenian Patriarchate reported that “over 30 armed provocateurs” broke into the grounds of the Cow’s Garden and injured priests, deacons and students of the Armenian Theological Academy.

“Israel is a state of law and order and such criminal behavior cannot be tolerated and go unpunished,” the patriarchate said in a statement.

Rabbis for Human Rights have been supporting communities in the West Bank with humanitarian aid. The group reported last week that “in addition to the economic concerns,

there is a deeply unsettling rise in settler violence and army aggression.”

On 5-26 January, the group will be planting trees every Friday with Palestinian communities in the Occupied Territories and in the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, “as a symbol of hope in a shared, just and peaceful future for us all.”

The World Council of Churches (WCC) used its holiday sermon to call on the world’s Christians to stand in solidarity with the people of Gaza.

“Since the shocking attacks of 7 October in southern Israel, in which Hamas militants killed 1,200 people – mostly civilians – and took 240 others hostage, Israel’s military response in Gaza has become tantamount to a war not only against Hamas but against all the people of the territory,” it said.

It lamented the displacement “of a staggering 1.9 million people, more than 80 per cent of the population,” and the destruction of essential services such as healthcare and education.

“We pray that the people of the region will be liberated from the suffering imposed on them by vengeful violence and illegal occupation,” said the WCC, “and there must – as an essential basis for any future sustainable peace in the region – be full accountability for crimes committed by Israeli armed forces and settlers as well as by Hamas militants.”

In Lebanon, up to 90 percent of the population of southern Lebanon’s Christian villages have reportedly left their homes since October, seeking safety from daily rocket fire exchanged on the Israel-Lebanon border by the IDF and Hezbollah.

(This piece originally appeared in *The Tablet*, the international Catholic weekly, on January 2, 2024.)



A view of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church's Nativity scene in Bethlehem. This year, it portrays a baby Christ born under rubble and wrapped up in a Palestinian keffiyeh. (Ayman Oghanna for NPR)

freedom in relation to all, to overcome ethnic, religious, and identity boundaries,” he said.

“It is my dream, and it is the madness that I would like to share with all this small and beloved church in Jerusalem.”

The Lutheran pastor Munther Isaac said that Christmas 2023 was “a season of grieving for Palestinian Christians.” His church in Bethlehem displayed a crib of “Jesus in the rubble.”

“This is what Christmas is in Palestine: displaced families, destroyed homes and children under the rubble,” he said. He mourned “the shattered lives on both sides of the Israeli-Hamas war” and criticized Western support for Israel’s operations in Gaza, saying it was “unfathomable to me.”

In their Christmas message, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem condemned all violence.

“We call upon the people of this land and around the globe to seek the graces of God so that we might learn to walk with each other in the paths of justice, mercy, and peace,” they said.

After the Angelus last Sunday, Pope Francis remembered the people of Palestine and Israel as he prayed for the thousands of lives shattered by violence and war in 2023 across the globe. He appealed to those who have a “stake” in armed conflicts “to listen to the voice of their conscience.”

Earlier in December, the chief rabbi of South Africa has claimed that Pope Francis is “colluding with the forces of evil” for his stance on the war.

In a video published on social media, Rabbi Warren Goldstein said: “In comparing Israel’s just war of self-defense to the barbarism of Hamas, Pope Francis repeats the sins of Pope Pius XII from the Nazi era of surreptitiously supporting the forces of evil who seek to annihilate the Jewish people.”



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

President Aliyev's Son-in-Law Evacuates An Entire Village for His Business

There are endless scandals involving the Aliyev clan in Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev, who has ruled the country with an iron fist since 2003, took over from his father, Heydar Aliyev, who was the head of state from 1993 to 2003. To make sure that the Aliyevs rule Azerbaijan for several generations, Ilham Aliyev has appointed his wife as his vice president. I am certain that she will name one of her children to succeed her, thus prolonging the Aliyev dynasty in Azerbaijan.

The latest scandal in Azerbaijan was exposed by Ardi Pulaj, first published on the Abzas Media and an edited version republished by Globalvoices.org. The article is titled, "In Azerbaijan, an entire village was vacated for the President's son-in-law."

The village of Garachayli was initially owned by the Grand Mufti of Azerbaijan, Allahshukur Pashazade — the top Muslim cleric of Azerbaijan, who had leased the land to the villagers. Then, in 2007, the village was leased to Shabran Agrocomplex LLC for 49 years after which the company ordered the villagers to vacate the land. One of the villagers, Tahir Rasulov, sued the company for remuneration. But after two years, he lost his lawsuit. "They tortured and tormented me a lot. They threatened me with the police. They took me out of my ancestral home." The company surrounded the village with a wire fence. "We now look at our ancestral lands from outside the wires," said Rasulov.

The founder of Shabran Agrocomplex is Baku Agropark which belongs to businessman Samad Gurbanov who is married to Arzu Aliyeva, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev's youngest daughter.

Gurbanov's personal investment of \$6.9 million in the company was matched with an additional \$6 million loan for 10 years at 5-percent interest by the State Entrepreneurship Development Fund.

The article reported that "Gurbanov's company was exempted from paying for the electrical wiring installation during the construction of the greenhouse, which was done by a company named Retro Holding, owned by Arif Pashayev, Ilham Aliyev's father-in-law. Other investment favors included favorable loans for the irrigation infrastructure of the agrocomplex — all on the state's

dime."

Shohrat Gardashaliyev, a former resident of Garachayli village, said: "The gas line goes through here to Agropark and does not provide gas to the people. They give manure to the fields. It's true, they spend millions on manure, but the people don't have as much value as manure. We can't plant crops here. We don't have land, we don't own property. It's all the people's land, but look, they've invaded and taken it away.... I am simply told just fall down and die, let me kick you in the throat and die."

Tahir Rasulov said: "Names are mentioned here; the name of the president, the name of Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva (vice-president and wife) is mentioned. As soon as one of our cattle crosses to that field, we are told by the management that this is Mrs. Mehriban's place. So has Mrs. Mehriban appointed a representative here to kill, beat, torture or threaten a citizen?"

Since there are no employment opportunities for the villagers, the only possibility is to work for agrocomplex, which has either refused to hire them or has offered a monthly salary of only \$200. One villager described the deplorable situation as "modern day slavery."

Court documents showed that Baku Agropark paid "incredibly cheap rent for the land it leased in the village of Garachayli — an annual rent of \$1,500 for 4,300 acres of land." Rasulov said that he used to pay "a rent of \$45 per acre of that land. And yet, Baku Agropark pays less than \$2.2 per acre."

Samad Gurbanov also owns "the Baku Agropark Trading House, engaged in the wholesale trade of fruits and vegetables; Maxitrading LLC, engaged in the import and distribution of food products; as well as several other companies belonging to Mirlex Group (Mirlex Development and Mirlex Construction LLC), engaged in the sale of fire extinguishers, installation of automatic fire alarms, parking, and video surveillance systems. The offices of many of Samad Gurbanov's companies are located in Port Baku Towers, an elite business center owned by Pasha Holding [belongs to Mrs. Aliyev's father]."

When Abzas Media journalists tried "to speak with the managers of the agrocomplex in Shabran it was proved futile. The film crew was stopped by a security guard and told none of the managers were at the complex."

Sadly, "after the residents of the village were forced to flee, they left behind the village graveyard. Ever since the complex was built and their land was taken, they must seek permission from the agrocomplex management even to visit the graves of their late relatives."

It is very tragic that a government that earns billions of dollars a year from its vast oil and gas reserves is unwilling to share a small part of that wealth with the poor villagers in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani Regime Rushes to Cement Legitimacy as Internal Tensions Brew

By Bahruz Samadov

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's decision to call a snap presidential election for February 7 puzzled observers at home and abroad.

His current term had been set to expire in spring 2025. Some had expected him to move up the parliamentary elections, also scheduled for that year, or possibly hold a referendum on empowering local municipal governments.

But Aliyev, who has been in office since 2003 and is at now the pinnacle of his popularity following Azerbaijan's recent takeover of Karabakh, decided he needed to renew his own mandate instead.

Limited Time to Secure Legitimacy as Economy Stagnates

In authoritarian contexts, leaders' sources of legitimacy are either ideological or economic. In the case of Azerbaijan, Aliyev has proved his faithfulness to the Azerbaijani national cause by securing complete victory in Nagorno-Karabakh and the region's de-Armenization. In so doing he reached the peak of possible legitimacy.

Now is a prime moment to supplement this legitimacy with an electoral win, as the idea of "victorious president" will slowly lose its value over time.

For three decades "Karabakh grief" was the dominant unifying principle of Azerbaijani society, but now that the matter is settled, this source of legitimacy has been fully exhausted.

Meanwhile, on the economic front, Azerbaijan is stagnating. In its report on the period from January to November 2023, the State Statistics Committee says that GDP increased by only 0.8 percent compared to the same period in 2022 (growth from 2021 to 2022 was 6.2 percent for the same period) and the non-oil and gas GDP increased by 3.1 percent (compared to 9.6 percent for 2021-22). GDP per capita is up to 0.2 percent. In other words, there is practically no economic growth.

Similarly, the minimum wage, which is currently 345 manats (\$203) per month, is set to remain the same for 2024.

Risk of Internal Conflict

Current economic and social issues will lead to the emergence of new internal antagonisms. One source of antagonism bubbling beneath the surface is inter-regional

resentment.

The government has allocated billions for the restoration and construction of the newly created Karabakh Economic Region within the "Great Return" ideology that envisages the settlement of hundreds of thousands of people (and their descendants) who lost their homes in the First Karabakh War of the 1990s. Meanwhile, residents of other regions of the country increasingly feel the state is ignoring their social and economic issues like unemployment and poor education.

The government's special focus on Karabakh, to the detriment of other regions, is causing growing resentment. This can be seen in the popularity of a meme first posted by a satirical Facebook page that juxtaposes an image of a dilapidated secondary school in the town of Imishli, in south-central Azerbaijan, with a newly refurb-

ished barn on a goat farm featuring a piano in Lachin, in the reclaimed territories.

Members of Aliyev's rubber-stamp parliament appear to be acknowledging the looming threat of unemployment in rural areas and overall economic stagnation. The solution they're mulling so far is to "shift the burden of the state," i.e. devolve economic responsibilities, to municipal governments.

Repressive Elections

Under President Heydar Aliyev, the incumbent's father and immediate predecessor, Azerbaijan used to position itself as a rational state with a "balanced foreign policy." While under the current regime Baku still strives to balance disparate interests, the emphasis now is on an "independent" foreign policy.

This means that the country is now independent from Western democracy- and civil society-building efforts. In

this conception, Azerbaijan should have a transactional relationship with the West on economic matters while being free from Western political influence.

Recently, U.S. objections to Azerbaijan's military takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh led to a downturn in relations which in turn led to a wave of repressions against journalists, civil society representatives and opposition politicians who allegedly received funding from the U.S. A number of Azerbaijani journalists have been arrested amid state media rhetoric about an "American spy network." Abzas Media, so far the main target of the sweep, was explicitly identified by pro-government media as part of the supposed spy network.

Interestingly, the snap election was announced a day after the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien's visit to Baku, which

FOR THREE DECADES "KARABAKH GRIEF" WAS THE DOMINANT UNIFYING PRINCIPLE OF AZERBAIJANI SOCIETY, BUT NOW THAT THE MATTER IS SETTLED, THIS SOURCE OF LEGITIMACY HAS BEEN FULLY EXHAUSTED.

eased the bilateral tensions somewhat but did nothing to stop the repressive state machinery. On December 14, prominent opposition politician Tofiq Yagublu, was the 13th person to be arrested in the current wave. The US Embassy in Baku has called for his release.

It is clear that the government does not want to face any serious or even slight challenges during the pre-election period even as the main opposition parties have already announced that they're boycotting the polls. Activists on social media make dark jokes about those who have not been arrested "yet."

The Azerbaijani state faces growing internal tensions and is responding by becoming more repressive and staging an election with an entirely predictable outcome.

(Bahruz Samadov is a PhD candidate in political science at Charles University in Prague. This piece origi-

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Tigrane Kazazian

*To Embrace World Cultures
With an Open Mind*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Thirty-six-year-old Tigrane Kazazian is an oud player, multi-instrumentalist, composer and singer. He was born in Cairo, in the family of a musician and a historian. From the age of 5 to 17, he played tennis at a high-level in Egypt and France. He also started studying the violin and piano since he was a child, and at the age of 18, he learned to play the oud on his own. He studied at the American University of Cairo and Concordia University of Montreal. In 2012, he moved to Armenia to study at the Komitas State Conservatory. In 2018, Tigrane created the Kazazian Trio with duduk player Arsen Petrosyan and percussionist Eduard Harutyunyan. In 2021, Kazazian's album "Cairo Nights" was published by "Green United Music" company; in 2023, his second album "Still Love" was released by L'horizon Violet/Absilone. He plays avant-garde, folk, and world music-inspired original compositions; he has performed in a number of countries with a trio and concerts with various musicians. He also writes music for documentary films.

Tigrane, I congratulate you again for your performance with the Lucy Khanyan Trio on November 10, during which you performed your works, as well as one of your father's works. The combination of oud, electro-acoustics, bloul and piano was very original. How would you describe that unusual musical fusion?

It is very difficult to define genres and categories with words. They say avant-garde folk, world music, ethno-jazz, but none of the names are accurate.



(Davit Jotyan photo)

I think that you already have found your place there. Still, is it possible to live only with music in such an environment?

In any case, music cannot be related to only one place. As you said, it is possible to live only by music in Armenia, if you also work abroad. Of course, a musician working in a restaurant can live without cooperation with the wider world, but that is not my way.

Tigrane, my daughter plays the oud. What advice would you give her and those learning to play it?

I would advise all musicians to do their work creatively, instead of memorizing their musical language and just

lian music?

My paternal grandfather was from Tigranakert, now Diyarbakir. He did not want my father to go into music. My father left Egypt for England and he met musicians there and then studied music. He already knew how to play the guitar a little, and he started playing the oud at the age of 29. He has written music for several Egyptian films and has released 15 albums. My father's musical language is very free and unique. The musical world he created is very different, it has nothing to do with Arabic, Indian, Armenian or any other music. Listening to his music, I understood that someone was explaining life to me and for the first time in my life I understood what they were telling me, because before that I did not find my place, I did not understand the world.

In 2016, you and your father created the "Nour" (Pomegranate) project, which lasted for short period. Your performance of *The Dance of Fire* with two ouds was absolutely wonderful.

We wanted to share the dialogue between father and son. There were several concerts in Armenia, one in Egypt, but we did not continue because my father was in Egypt, I was here, and we were both busy with our own projects.

Unlike Armenians from Lebanon and Syria, Armenians from Egypt have not repatriated to Armenia recently. In the event that many Armenians find foreign roots in themselves and immigrate to other countries under that pretext, how did it happen that you, being half French, settled in Armenia?

It was very randomly, in four days. I called an Egyptian acquaintance from Canada with whom I had studied at the American University in Cairo. He said that he is in Armenia and intends to attend a two-week duduk course at the Yerevan Conservatory. I asked if there was an oud class, and receiving a positive answer, I expressed my desire to come and study in Yerevan. My friend said that I should come before October 10, but it was already September 30. After four days I was already in Armenia... and I stayed for 11 years. I immediately felt good here. For me Armenia occupies a place between Egypt and France. It was also the first country where people, knowing my name, did not ask where I am from, being sure that I am local.

As far as I know, the middle names of your two sons are Charents.

Before coming to Armenia, I did not even know who Charents was, but it turned out that I started a family in Armenia with the great-granddaughter of Yeghishe Charents.

What are your upcoming projects?

In January I am going to perform with the Tigrane Kazazian Trio in Paris and I will cooperate with French singer, songwriter Blaubird in the coming months.

It is wonderful that a half-Armenian young man born in the diaspora has repatriated, is in his chosen profession and has a family. Tigrane, thank you for the conversation; I wish you great creative success and happiness in the homeland, which, we hope, will find its dignified peace.

Thank you! I wish strength to Armenia and I highly hope that music will contribute to peace and love in the world especially in our troubled times.



(Davit Jotyan photo)

By the way, it is also difficult to define the genre of works of your father, Georges Kazazian.

He started with various Egyptian folk instruments, then switched to flamenco, jazz and finally to Indian music. All that is in his music, and I learned that from him — to embrace world cultures with an open mind. And the most important thing is to know what we are saying through that music.

While listening to your last concert, I was surprised to find that I felt better. After the concert, another listener, an artist, told me the same thing. Have you been told about the healing effects of your music?

Yes, once in a while they say that, thank you. On the other hand, I think that my music can also cause sadness in addition to calming. There are many sad things happening in our world today, which cannot but be conveyed through the music being written today.

The musical mosaic of Armenia is very diverse, and

using it, but to speak the language fluently, make it their own, so that they can convey what they have to say.

It so happened that before I got to know you, I knew about your parents from afar. Your mother, French historian Anne Le Gall-Kazazian, is the author of works on Egyptian Armenians. Is her interest due her marrying an Armenian from there?

Yes, my mother is from Brittany, 100-percent Breton. Her interest in Armenians started after meeting my father. My mother graduated from the philosophy department of the Sorbonne University, defended her thesis, after which she went to Egypt to study Arabic. She lived in Egypt for a long time as well as in other countries and she continues her Armenian studies, making researches in the archives. She speaks Armenian fluently and comes to Yerevan frequently.

Where was the Kazazian family from, and what place does Georges Kazazian occupy in modern Egypt?