

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia talks to The Telegraph’s Roland Oliphant (CREDIT: Heathcliff O’Malley for The Telegraph)

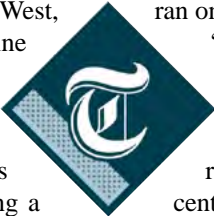
The Prime Minister Torn between Russia and the West

By Roland Oliphant

YEREVAN (The Telegraph) — He is in the middle of delicate peace talks, trying to please Russia and the West, and sits on a geopolitical fault line where wars in Ukraine and the Middle East overlap.

So it is no surprise that Nikol Pashinyan chooses his words with the care of a man handling a box of matches in a petrol station.

“Fear is not the right word,” the Armenian prime minister says when asked about mounting concerns of a new war in the South Caucasus.



“The Republic of Armenia is a democratic and developing country,” he told The Telegraph in an interview in his Yerevan office. (The interview ran on February 11.)

“And the Republic of Armenia is implementing wide-scale reforms for improving our country’s resilience. By the way, in recent years, I think that the international community and our society have seen that our country’s resilience has improved significantly.”

Nonetheless, he concedes: “Of course, anyone with common sense

would have such concerns.”

Pashinyan, a former newspaper journalist, came to power in 2018 on the back of anti-corruption protests that ended with the country’s first free and fair elections.

His pitch then, as now, is that democratic reform and a pro-European path would make the country not only more prosperous but more secure.

Since then, the country has indeed crept up international indexes on press freedom, democracy and transparency. He won re-election in 2021 suggesting he still has a mandate for that strategy.

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Baku Slams EU Monitoring Mission In Armenia

By Gevorg Stamboltsian

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry summoned the European Union’s ambassador in Baku on Monday, February 12, to denounce a monitoring mission launched by the EU along Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan a year ago.

In an ensuing statement, the ministry questioned the impartiality of the mission and warned it against causing “damage to Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.”

In particular, it linked EU monitors to a Czech national who was arrested by Azerbaijani security services on February 3. Baku claimed that the still unidentified man illegally entered the country from Armenia.

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Armenian Envoy Blasts UN for Failure to Prevent Ethnic Cleansing In Nagorno Karabakh

NEW YORK (Public Radio of Armenia) — Despite a multitude of clearly detectable early warning signs and calls for intervention, the United Nations fell short of addressing the egregious violations committed in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia’s Permanent Representative to the UN Mher Margaryan said on February 8 in a statement on the Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization.

“Not only does this failure constitute a breach of the fundamental principles, upon which this very Organization was established, but it also signifies, in no uncertain terms, a major departure from the internationally endorsed commitment of the Responsibility to Protect populations from atrocity crimes, including genocides and ethnic cleansings

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Ambassador Mher Margaryan

Massachusetts Governor Healey Nominates Appeals Court Associate Gabrielle Wolohojian to State Supreme Judicial Court

BOSTON – Governor Maura T. Healey today nominated Massachusetts Appeals Court Associate Justice Gabrielle R. Wolohojian to serve as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court. This is Governor Healey’s second nomination to the state’s highest court.

“There is no one more qualified or better prepared to serve on the Supreme Judicial Court than Justice Wolohojian. She will bring over three decades of broad trial and appellate experience, including sixteen years on the Appeals Court,” said Governor Healey.

“Justice Wolohojian has served on the Appeals Court with distinction and her work is widely respected by members of the bench and bar. She has an exceptional understanding of the law and a strong commitment to the administration of justice. I thank the Supreme Judicial Nominating Commission for their work throughout this process and I am grateful to the Governor’s Council for their careful consideration of her nomination.”



Gabrielle Wolohojian

“Justice Wolohojian cares deeply about improving the work of our courts and ensuring that the judiciary serves the public as best it can,” said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll. “From chairing the Supreme Judicial Court’s Standing Advisory Committee on the Rules of Appellate Procedure, to overseeing the training and mentoring of all new judges on the Appeals Court, Justice Wolohojian has shown an unwavering dedication to improving the functioning of our courts. Governor Healey and I look forward to the Governor’s Council’s consideration of Justice Wolohojian, who, if confirmed, will be a critically important addition to the Supreme Judicial Court.”

“Justice Wolohojian is uniquely qualified to join the Supreme Judicial Court at a time when it enjoys and is committed to maintaining its reputation as one of the most respected state supreme courts in the country,” said retired Associate Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Geraldine S. Hines. “This is a difficult job that demands intellectual vigor, respect for the rule of law, an unwavering commitment to equal justice under the law, and an impeccable work ethic. From our time together on the Appeals Court and from my conversations with colleagues who have continued to serve on the court, I can say that Justice Wolohojian is richly blessed with these qualifications, as exemplified in her record of achievement as a lawyer and jurist. She has also mastered the under-appreciated but important skill so critical to appellate judging: the ability to accept and

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YEREVAN

How a 1,600-year-old Alphabet Shaped Armenian Identity



BOSTON

A Call to Action for A Boy’s Recovery Following the Artsakh Explosion



LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles Celebrates TUMO Center’s Groundbreaking





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Foreign Ministry Denies Deleting Karabakh Section From Website

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The website of the Armenian Foreign Ministry currently does not contain the page about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict but a spokesperson explains the disappearance of the page by a “technical problem.”

Armenian media reported on February 12 that the page has been removed from the website but a press secretary for the Foreign Ministry said there were other pages that had gone down too.

Armenia Joins European Prosecutors’ Group

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Prosecutor-General’s Office of the Republic of Armenia has been included in the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE) as an observer, it was announced on February 12.

Armenia is now the only country in the region to have an observer status in ENPE.

ENPE seeks to support the operative work of environmental prosecutors; promote the exchange of information and experience of the enforcement and prosecution of environmental crime between members, among others.

The network has more than 60 members.

France Affirms Unconditional Commitment To Armenia’s Sovereignty

PARIS (Caucasus Watch) — French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Stéphane Séjourné, met with Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan in Paris on February 12. The French Foreign Ministry reported Séjourné’s indication of France’s unwavering support for Armenia’s sovereignty and resilience, emphasizing it as unconditional and steadfast.

“The ministers discussed the priorities for strengthening our bilateral cooperation projects, particularly the development of infrastructure projects in the fields of transport, energy, and water. They also spoke about bolstering relations between the European Union and Armenia. Furthermore, France is continuing to step up its humanitarian support for Armenia and the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, with aid now amounting to 29 million euros in 2023 and enabling us to support actions by NGOs, the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross], the Armenian Red Cross, and the United Nations agencies to welcome and take social, medical, educational, and financial care of these especially vulnerable people,” the French ministry said in its readout.

The ministers also discussed efforts to normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. France reiterated its support for the mediation efforts of the European Union and the United States, emphasizing that just and lasting peace depends on respecting international law, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of both states’ borders.

Four Armenian Soldiers Killed by Azerbaijani Forces in Syunik Province

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — Four soldiers were killed on February 13 as a result of shelling by the Azerbaijani armed forces of Armenian positions in the southern Syunik province, near the village of Nerkin Hand.

According to the Ministry of Defense, they are Eduard Harutyunyan (b. 1974), Gagik Manukyan (b. 1982), Arsen Hambardzumyan (b. 1979) and Hrachya Hovhannisyan (b. 1957). Another soldier was injured.

The wounded serviceman’s health condition is currently assessed as moderate, with no immediate threat to life.

The Foreign Ministry of Armenia issued

in stability and security in the South Caucasus to resume negotiations aimed at the normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

“We strongly condemn these actions of Azerbaijan resorting to military provocations, we call to refrain from steps that destabilize the situation and return to negotiations. Once again, we reaffirm the proposals previously voiced by the Armenian side to implement reliable measures aimed at increasing border security.”

Azerbaijan confirmed that its troops deployed in the area opened fire early in the morning. Its State Border Service claimed to have destroyed an Armenian army post

live in a safe environment, to education and other fundamental rights of the civilian population were violated.”

The residents told the defender’s staff that the shots were clearly heard, as a result of which they were scared and in a state of uncertainty.

“The HRD especially emphasizes that the actions of the Azerbaijani military represent a real threat from the viewpoint of ensuring the right to life and security of people, education, as well as other fundamental rights. The work of monitoring and collecting facts related to human rights continues in the Office of the Human Rights Defender,” reads the statement.

Calls for Restraint

Various leaders called for restraint in the situation.

Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinović Burić expressed her concerns.

“Concerned about reports of exchange of fire along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Call on both sides to abstain from the use of force. Dialogue is the only way to lasting peace,” she posted on X on Tuesday.

Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov said Moscow hopes the peace process will continue and denounced the incident.

“Such incidents do not contribute to the advancement of this process, the negotiation process, or the approaching moment of signing a peace treaty. But we hope that this process will continue,” he said.

“Of course, this is alarming news coming from the contact line. We urge both sides to show restraint and avoid in every possible way other actions that the other side may consider provocative. We will follow [the situation] very carefully.”

The U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Kristina Kvien, expressed her condolences regarding the casualties caused by the shots fired by Azerbaijan towards the Armenian combat position.

“We express our deep condolences to the families of those killed on the border in Syunik province, and wish a speedy recovery to those wounded,” reads the condolence message posted on the US Embassy’s Facebook page both in Armenian and English.

(Stories from Panarmenian.net, Armenpress, news.am, Panorama.am, RFE/RL to compile this report.)



the following statement: “On February 13, another provocation and use of force by the Azerbaijani armed forces in the area of Nerkin Hand of Kapan Municipality, Syunik region, resulted in casualties of 4 killed and 1 wounded. Despite the statement of the competent authorities of the Republic of Armenia on February 12 stating that the footage published by the Azerbaijani media on the same day and the information that the border guards of the Republic of Armenia wounded an Azerbaijani serviceman in the Kapan area are being investigated, the Azerbaijani side carried out aggressive actions on the morning of February 13. This indicates that Azerbaijan is looking for pretexts for escalation on the border.

“These actions of use of force were preceded by bellicose statements by the military and political leadership of Azerbaijan, as well as information and propaganda preparatory work in recent days. The leadership of Azerbaijan is constantly trying to disrupt the efforts of actors interested

which fired at its positions and wounded one of its servicemen the previous evening.

For its part, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry accused Armenian forces of also violating the ceasefire at another section of the long border late on Monday. The Defense Ministry in Yerevan denied the “disinformation.”

Tuesday’s fighting was the most serious truce violation reported from the border in the last five months. The situation there was relatively calm amid growing fears that Azerbaijan will also invade Armenia after recapturing Nagorno-Karabakh in September.

Last month, the European Union twice warned Baku against taking such military action in response to renewed Azerbaijani demands for Yerevan to open an extraterritorial corridor to the Nakhichevan exclave.

Human Rights Defender Anahit Manasyan said, “As a result of the fire of the Azerbaijani armed forces in the direction of Nerkin Hand, the right to life, to

Armenian Envoy Blasts UN for Failure to Prevent Ethnic Cleansing

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As we address the annual report of the UN Secretary-General, we trust that, moving forward, the Organization will acknowledge the gravity of these violations and reflect on the failure to prevent them,” he said.

“The blockade and starvation of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, with the barbaric siege of its only transportation lifeline, which started in December 2022, and culminated in September 2023 with the use of deadly military action against innocent civilian population is one explicit example of pre-meditated ethnic cleansing, which was gradually perpetrated under the watch of international community. It has resulted in widespread forced displacement of the entire ethnic Armenian population, immense sufferings caused to the civilians, and, indeed, a most brazen and blatant vi-

olation of international law – including the very Charter of this Organization,” the Ambassador stated.

Margaryan noted that in the period from 2021 to 2023, the International Court of Justice issued eight provisional measures against Azerbaijan, including the legally binding obligation to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions, as well as the obligation to ensure that persons who have been forced out of Nagorno-Karabakh after 19 September 2023 are able to return in a safe and unimpeded manner.

“Compliance with the decisions of the ICJ is fundamental in ensuring that justice can be served and that breaches of international law can be essentially prevented in the future, whereas failure to do so only serves the interests of those who seek to

undermine the viability of international law and to challenge the integrity and credibility of the international legal system. The United Nations, through its respective actions and mandates, has a distinct responsibility to ensure that the rule of law prevails over violence and aggression, and that justice and accountability remain essential in guiding the work of the Organization. Armenia is committed to promoting accountability and fighting impunity, as demonstrated by our recent accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, effective since 1 February 2024,” the Armenian envoy said.

“As ever, Armenia remains steadfast in supporting efforts for strengthening the efficiency of the Organization, its resilience and integrity in the face of the current and evolving challenges,” Margaryan concluded.



ARMENIA

How a 1,600-year-old Alphabet Shaped Armenian Identity

By Sugato Mukherjee
Features correspondent

YEREVAN (BBC Travel) — The Armenian alphabet is not just a writing system: it's also a numerical system used for mathematical calculations and recording calendar dates, as well as a national point of pride.

It was a late autumn morning when we set off from Yerevan, Armenia's capital city. After driving for about half an hour through the Armenian highlands, the driver stopped the car and Sofya Hakobyan, my guide, signalled for me to come out of the vehicle.

On my left, the snow-capped, four-peaked massif of Mount Aragats loomed in the distance, its contours indistinct in the hazy sun. Grassy uplands rolled out from the edges of the highway right up to the base of Armenia's highest mountain. The landscape looked bleak — a sandy-brown stretch of wind-pummelled uplands dotted with withering bushes — but a number of human-sized stone sculptures set on the gentle slopes lent a mysterious touch to the desolate expanse.

"We're at Alphabet Park. This was constructed in 2005 to mark the 1,600th anniversary of our Armenian alphabet," Hakobyan said.

The statues, carved out of faded pink, pastel yellow and light black stone, were etched with flowers and symbols. Some of them were in clusters, others were in solitary stances, and Hakobyan led me to a U-shaped statue with a dainty flourish on the bottom right. "This is our Armenian 'A' in uppercase," she said with a sweeping movement of her hand. "What you see around us are the other letters of our alphabet, which was invented by that man — Mesrop Mashtots — [a little more than] 1,600 years ago.

I followed her gaze to a stately sculpture of a bearded old man. Draped in a flowing robe, the rose-tinted, larger-than-life statue wore the expression of an ascetic: tranquil, and slightly jaded. I remembered the man. Two days ago, I had seen his statue at the entrance of Matenadaran.

Perched on a hill at the northern edge of Mashtots Avenue in Yerevan, the imposing basalt structure of Matenadaran has a fortress-like appearance, but it is actually a scriptorium (a library of ancient manuscripts) that doubles as a research institute. I had tiptoed through the hushed solemnity of the halls that showcased permanent exhibits arranged in thematic divisions, including translated literature, philosophy, theology, trivium and quadrivium with mathematical sciences and humanities, poetry, law, history and the arts.

Emma Horopyan, Matenadaran's head of PR, told me that the manuscript library is one of the world's largest repositories of valuable archival documents and early printed books. A diverse array of medieval manuscripts in languages including Greek, Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Latin, Ethiopian, Georgian and Hebrew have been carefully preserved here.

"This is hallowed ground for us," said Grigor Stepanian.

I'd run into Stepanian while marvelling at a hand-drawn map of the ancient Armenian kingdom in Matenadaran's grand Central Hall, and now the affable architect from Yerevan was walking me around the rectangular facade of the five-story structure, adorned with statues of medieval philosophers, poets and scholars who have collectively shaped Armenia's literary and cultural legacy.

"But he remains the most important of them all," Stepanian said.

The immaculately carved stone statue of Mashtots stood at the entrance, his hands raised in the timeless posture of a master elucidating a point to his disciple — a smaller stone statue — listening attentively at his feet.

I was curious to know why Mashtots' invention of the Armenian alphabet is among the most important events in Armenian history. "Mashtots designed the alphabet so that it could be used to translate the Bible into Armenian," Stepanian explained, as we sipped on thick and strong Armenian coffee at a nearby cafe.

In 301 CE, Armenia became the first nation in the world to embrace Christianity as its official religion. But almost for a century after that, the methods of converting its citizens, who had a long nature-worshipping past, were often vicious, Stepanian said. Mashtots was working as a translator in the Armenian royal

chancellery in the final years of the 4th Century CE. He had witnessed the coercive and often violent ways to force the people of this Caucasian nation to adopt the state-sponsored faith that was markedly different from their polytheistic belief system.

"What Mashtots did was fairly ingenious," Stepanian said. The linguist understood that his countrymen's aversion to Christianity stemmed from unfamiliarity: the Greek and Syriac translations of the Christian liturgy and theology, including the New Testament, were very foreign to the Armenians, who had been introduced to the Bible and the liturgy orally during religious services held by targmanicks (a term that meant translator and commentator).

The letters were designed in very distinctive shapes, with an independent character, very dissimilar to the lettering of other written languages of the time

Mashtots created his new alphabet in a phonetic style so it was easy for the Armenians to adapt to the written form of a language they were already speaking, Stepanian explained. "The letters were designed in very distinctive shapes, with an independent character, very dissimilar to the lettering of other written languages of the time," he added.

Their language thus gave a new identity to the Armenians.

Over the next 1,500 years, the alphabet would remain a national point of pride at the

core of Armenian cultural identity, an emblem of solidarity for the war-torn land that was almost continually ruled and colonised by foreign forces — the Romans, the Byzantines, the Persians and the Ottoman Turks. This almost-continuous and unrelenting saga of oppression and subjugation would finally end in 1991, when the 69-year-old Soviet regime collapsed and Armenia became an independent republic.

"We would have been a lost race without our alphabet," Stepanian said.

Hakobyan agreed. "Our country has been encroached upon, fragmented and plundered, over and over again," she told me as she steered me through the maze of letters laid out amid the wilderness like a giant, haphazard jigsaw puzzle. "But one of the reasons we could hold on was perhaps because we always knew that we have a beautiful language, encased by a beautiful set of letters."

As we walked through Alphabet Park, the mid-morning sun shone bright on the delicate curves of the letters, hand-carved from volcanic tuff rock. Together, Hakobyan told me, the richness and flexibility of this beautiful set of letters has helped sustain an uninterrupted literary tradition since the inception of its written form.

I knew that the aesthetically eloquent shapes of Armenian letters, with their long usage in folk art and calligraphy, have made it onto Unesco's Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage. But I had no idea that the dainty, artistic designs are also imbued with secret codes and cryptographs, and endowed with hidden properties.

"To start with, the alphabet formed the structure of a complex, but sophisticated numerical system," Hakobyan said, explaining how the Mashtotsian letters were also used for mathematical calculations.

As well as being part of the alphabet, all the original 36 letters also have an assigned numerical value based on their order in the alphabet. When arranged in four columns and nine rows, the letters in each column respectively represent digits in singles, tens, hundreds and thousands. They can even be used to determine dates according to the Armenian calendar, Hakobyan said.

We ended up back near the statue of Mesrop Mashtots. Raised on a small mound, the wise old man was looking at his feet, his kind, contemplative gaze remarkably life-like.

It was time to resume our journey. A strong wind blew in over the sun-lit valley and we slowly retraced our steps towards our car parked on the side of the highway. Before getting in, I looked back, thinking about the incredible legacy of this ancient alphabet. Thick puffs of clouds were clambering up the snowy slopes of Mount Aragats. An Armenian family had just arrived at the park. Two young girls, dressed in lemon-yellow jackets, flitted playfully amid the giant letters — a linguistic and cultural legacy they have inherited from a sagacious polymath, whose statue stood just a few meters away from them in the wind-swept landscape.

Prominent Government Opponent Ejected from Yerevan City Council

By Ani Avetisyan

Hayk Marutyan, the ex-mayor of Yerevan who was defeated in his bid to return to that post in last September's city council election, was ousted from his city council seat on February 5.

Later that day he announced his intent to seek the premiership in the next parliamentary election.

"If there are no snap elections, we will participate in the 2026 parliamentary elections. And since I will be the head of the party, I will naturally be a candidate," Marutyan said. The ex-mayor currently leads a small party called National Progress but has mooted the possibility of starting another one.

Marutyan and two of his allies were ejected from the council on the basis of a regulation that allows for the removal of members who fail to show up for more than half of votes or sessions. The removal proceedings were initiated by the ruling Civil Contract party, which holds a plurality of seats on the council. Marutyan and his allies have boycotted all 42 votes held by the current convocation of the council. They demand the resignation of incumbent member and Civil Contract member Tigran Avinyan, who they say was elected unfairly.

Marutyan called the expulsion "politically motivated" and claimed that he should not be deprived of his seat as he is performing his duties outside of the sessions.

Marutyan's career in politics was initiated and backed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who founded Civil Contract.

Marutyan won election to the council and the mayoralty (the council chooses the mayor from among its members) by a landslide in December 2018. At the time he was a well-known comedian with no political experience. After his election, he became one of the ruling team's most prominent and popular faces.

He fell out with Pashinyan and the ruling party in late 2020, after Armenia's defeat to Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War.

Ruling party council members removed him a year later, after he delivered a litany of accusations against the ruling elite, including misappropriating funds and issuing illegal construction permits.

After he left office, he returned to comedy, performing a stand-up routine titled "The Mayor" about his experience in power and his problems with the ruling team.

He launched his return to politics ahead of last September's council election. For a while during the campaign, he seemed to pose a serious challenge to Civil Contract's domination of top elected posts in the country and was clearly seen as a threat by the ruling party.

Now, in his quest to become premier, he could have the advantage of being seen as a "third force" in Armenian politics — an alternative to both the government of Prime Minister Pashinyan and the discredited mainstream opposition. The authorities are tainted by the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and their appeasement strategy towards Azerbaijan while the largest opposition parties carry the stink of corruption from when many of its leading figures were in power (1998-2018).

(This article originally appeared on Eurasianet.org on February 9.)



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But the entire premise of that project has come under unprecedented stress.

In the past three years Armenia suffered attack and defeat in a 2020 war with Azerbaijan, the humiliating loss in September 2023 of the Armenian backed, self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh republic, and effective abandonment by Russia, its principal military ally.

Concessions in Pursuit of Peace

Since then Pashinyan's willingness to make concessions in pursuit of peace, including recognizing Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Karabakh, has caused public anger at home and a wave of protests he claims were designed to oust him from power.

However, it has not yet produced a peace treaty.

His search for a more reliable security partner has strained relations with Moscow without winning concrete commitments from the West.

And to cap it all, many in Yerevan fear that Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's strong-man president, is laying the pretext for a third offensive – this time to conquer land inside Armenia proper.

Azerbaijan's 24-hour reconquest of Karabakh five months ago extinguished a 30-year old Armenian-backed republic that broke away from Azerbaijan in a brutal and bloody six-year war in the 1990s.

More than 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled in what the European Parliament condemned as ethnic cleansing, and Pashinyan was forced to face down angry protesters in Yerevan who accused him of abandoning the region.

It also closed the central dispute in a conflict that has blighted Armenia and Azerbaijan since their independence.

For a while, both leaders appeared keen to seize the opportunity to make peace.

At separate meetings with Emmanuel Macron in Prague and Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Pashinyan and Aliyev agreed to renounce the use of force, respect one another's territorial integrity and using the Almaty declaration, the document that saw the Soviet Union's republics declare independence, as the basis for border delimitation.

By the end of October 2023, "the architecture and principles for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan have been agreed upon. And at the end of last year, it seemed to us that we were very close, finally, to a final text of agreement," he said.

But on Jan 10, Aliyev appeared to walk back those commitments, warning in a rambling interview with local media that he would take military action if Armenia tried to rearm.

He also said he would not remove Azeri troops from several areas they have occupied inside the Armenian border, and rejected using late Soviet maps for a peace deal "precisely because our historical lands had already been given to them."

Azeri officials strongly deny planning

a new war or harboring territorial claims against Armenia, and have blamed delays in the peace process on Armenian intransigence.

In Yerevan, the remarks sounded very much like the pretext for a land grab.

"One may not say that these assessments are groundless," Pashinyan said when asked if he feared such a plot. "I publicly have said this is a blow to the peace process."

"When these events are seen side by side, there are some analysts in Armenia who think that all of this indicates that Azerbaijan is step-by-step refusing and walking away from the agreements reached among us and international platforms."

"But so long as Azerbaijan has not declared that it is withdrawing its signature from the Sochi and Prague declarations, then it's very clear that Armenia and Azerbaijan recognize each other's territorial integrity based on the 1991 Almaty declaration, and any statement that contradicts this logic is not legitimate."

That is a long winded way of saying Aliyev ought to keep his word. Does he trust Aliyev to actually do so?

"I put my trust in God. And I think that every country that respects itself must follow the commitments it has undertaken."

Much of the tension focuses on Nakhichevan, an Azerbaijani enclave bordering Turkey, Iran and Armenia.

Baku wants to create a road and rail link to Nakhichevan along Armenia's 25-mile border with Iran exclusively under the "neutral" control of Russian border guards.

Armenia, which has promised to provide access between Nakhichevan and mainland Azerbaijan, fears a trap that would force it to relinquish control of its southern border.

Pashinyan has made a counter offer based on a general reopening of all transport corridors in the region. So far, Aliyev has dismissed the proposal as unworkable.

The peace process here has implications for dozens of small countries in the new age of great-power confrontation.

Before the 2020 war, Armenia assumed that its membership of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) would keep it safe.

But Russia did not come to Armenia's aid in 2020, and Russian peacekeepers also failed to stop Azerbaijan blockading a road into Karabakh in the aftermath. They stood aside again when it launched its final assault on the area in September 2023.

Pashinyan insists Russia remains a valued security partner but he has barely concealed a sense of betrayal.

He has publicly said the country can no longer exclusively rely on Russia and should forge security relationships with the United States and France as well.

The realignment has drawn stern rebukes from Moscow.

In October 2023 the Russian state news agency TASS even quoted an anonymous official comparing Pashinyan to Ukrainian

president Volodymyr Zelensky (Pashinyan said he had not seen that report and would not comment on anonymous threats).

"We Are not Russia's Ally"

He insists that does not mean making a choice between Russia and the West, despite the fallout of the war in Ukraine.

"Look, when the Ukraine war had just started I was interviewed by CNN and I said, in the Ukraine situation, we are not Russia's ally. And that's the reality. But I want to also tell you that with the US or France or other partners, our security cooperation is not targeted against our other security sector partner."

"Now, our partners may have concerns about the relationship with them, or how the relationship with them could influence their security agendas. And that's an issue we're trying to manage by utmost transparently speaking with our partners about their shared agendas," he said.

NATO membership, an obvious red line for Russia, "is not a question we have discussed or are discussing."

He also suggests Armenia may rethink its membership of the CSTO. "There are some discussions in Armenia as to whether or to what extent the alliance-based strategy is consistent with Armenia's longer term interests," he said.

Particularly contentious is the Armenian parliament's ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which finally came into force on February 1.

Russia called the move an "unfriendly" step and it is not hard to see why: the ICC has issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin over war crimes allegedly committed in Ukraine.

Pashinyan declined to say whether Armenian police would act on the warrant if Putin happened to visit.

The decision to join the Rome Statute "serves to improve the level of security of Armenia. As to the legal subtleties. I cannot at the moment carry out legal analysis because that's the job of the lawyers," he said.

"Let me break a secret to you. After 2018 Armenia has had extensive democratic reforms. And I don't decide whom to arrest and whom not to arrest."

"And as I said, Armenia as a responsible state must remain committed to all of her international commitments, including the commitments that it has in the relationship with the Russian Federation and commitments that the country has in international relations," he said.

But in this era of realpolitik, Armenia has painfully few cards to play.

Moscow may be the regional super power and traditional ally but is militarily overstretched in Ukraine and diplomatically isolated abroad to prioritize enforcing its CSTO commitments.

More important to Putin is his relationship with Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Azerbaijan's key backer and also the only NATO leader in a position to cause him se-

rious trouble on the Black Sea.

Turkey's foreign minister said last week that Putin was expected to visit Turkey soon to discuss the Ukraine grain initiative. It would be his first visit to a NATO country since he launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago.

The West may be the natural protector of a pro-European democracy under threat, but it too is preoccupied, and Washington and Brussels value their ties to Aliyev and Erdogan.

In July 2022, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Union signed up to buy more gas from Azerbaijan. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, praised Aliyev's government as a "reliable" and "crucial" partner.

Aliyev has also made himself useful in the grand standoff with Iran – so useful that Israeli firms reportedly supplied much of the weapons used in the final blitz on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023.

It is an unenviable position for any leader to be in.

It gives Pashinyan a unique perspective on the era of great-power confrontation and he has a warning for the rest of the world.

Critical Security Problems

"I don't want to give the impression the government of Armenia does not grasp how critical its own security problems are," he said.

"We're living in a world where no one can say what will happen tomorrow morning. If anyone were to think that in the global world they are more relaxed, or they should be any more relaxed than the government of the Republic of Armenia or the citizens of Armenia, they would be significantly wrong," he warns.

"I'm saying this with full seriousness. In the last two years, and currently, the international community is discussing whether or not there will be a nuclear war," he adds.

"My position is such that I have interactions with several potential sides to such a nuclear war. I think I know what a serious topic it is."

"In that sense, at least, Armenia is significantly safer and more secure, because I don't think anyone is intending a nuclear strike on Armenia."

Which brings us to his basic pitch: it is in everyone's interests, regardless of where they stand on the world's other grand confrontations, to make the peace process in the South Caucasus work.

"I know how hard it is, I know how difficult it is and what difficulties need to be overcome. And I will do my best for peace to be established in our region. And I will do that share of the work that concerns us. I'm hopeful that the other countries in our region will do the same."

"For some of our partners, we have some confidence that they will do that and for others, there isn't so much confidence, but the core goal of our foreign policy is that."

Parliament Speaker Simonyan's Sister-In-Law Set Free

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A senior executive of a major software company and her former colleague related to parliament speaker Alen Simonyan were released from custody on Monday, February 12, about two weeks after being arrested in a corruption investigation openly criticized by some Armenian officials.

But the founder and owner of the US-registered company Synergy International Systems, Ashot Hovanesyan, remained under arrest despite serious concern expressed by an association of Armenian tech firms.

Hovanesyan and the freed suspects, Lili Mkryan and Ani Gevorgyan, were charged with helping senior Ministry of Economy officials rig a procurement tender which was controversially won by Synergy but invalidated by a court last summer. Unlike them, the indicted government officials, including former Deputy Economy Minister Ani Ispiryan, were quickly freed or moved to house arrest. Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan insisted last week that the accusations of abuse of power brought against his subordinates are baseless.

On February 6, about 70 lawmakers rep-

resenting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party petitioned prosecutors to release the three suspects remaining in custody. One of the suspects, Gevorgyan, left Synergy last year. She is the wife of Simonyan's brother, Karlen.

The Office of the Prosecutor-General made a veiled reference to that petition when it announced and commented on the release of the young women. It said they both have testified about "circumstances of essential importance for the criminal proceedings" and are now less likely to engage in "inappropriate behavior."

Hovanesyan's lawyer, Gor Ohanian, said, meanwhile, that he hopes his client will be freed on the same grounds. The Synergy boss gave "quite extensive testimony" following his arrest, Ohanian said without elaborating.

Armenia's Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises (UATE) denounced Hovanesyan's arrest and demanded his release on February 4. It said that "unfounded" detentions of "business representatives and other prominent persons" are turning Armenia into a "risky country" for local and foreign tech. entrepreneurs.

INTERNATIONAL

Election Over, Aliyev Faces Some Reputational Challenge Abroad

By Lamiya Adilgizi

BAKU (Eurasia Review) — Azerbaijan’s snap presidential election has exacerbated an authoritarian conundrum for the incumbent, Ilham Aliyev. In moving to cement his legacy at home as Azerbaijan’s unifier and builder of a modern state, he has inflicted additional damage to his country’s image abroad, as reflected by a deepening feud with the Council of Europe.

Aliyev cruised to victory in a vote February 7 that watchdog groups said was never genuinely competitive. Local observers believe the presidential election was more about Aliyev’s desire to bolster his regime’s legitimacy and solidify his place in the history books than about obtaining a mandate for the future.

Aliyev did not make a secret of his motivation for moving the presidential election forward by a year: he wanted to take advantage of the popular euphoria generated by Azerbaijan’s Reconquista of Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan’s military completed in 2023. In an interview with pro-government television channels, Aliyev linked the early election to his “epochal” victory in the second Karabakh war, which he cast as unprecedented in Azerbaijan’s history.

Aliyev appeared to secure his domestic political objective with a convincing margin of victory in the election. The central question moving forward is: what will be the final cost of victory, in terms of Azerbaijan’s international reputation?

The run-up to the presidential vote was marked by what rights activists described as an unprecedented crackdown on independent media and free speech. The chief target of repression was a media outlet, Abzasmedia, which saw many top editors detained. No longer able to work inside Azerbaijan, the outlet shifted operations to Berlin.

“For Aliyev, following the Karabakh vic-

tory, securing a win in the presidential election seemed like the final piece in his quest for absolute control over Azerbaijan,” said Leyla Mustafayeva, acting head of Abzasmedia. “His nationalist rhetoric, which had rallied the nation since the 2020 Karabakh victory, was already losing its immediate effect and power, particularly after Armenians were expelled from Karabakh [last year].”

To ensure his desired outcome in the election, Aliyev needed to “shield himself from scrutiny,” Mustafayeva said. Accordingly, the government took action to silence all critical voices inside the country. Abzas’ astute use of social media, including TikTok, made it a particular target of government ire, said Cavid Aga, an Azerbaijani writer and chronicler of social trends.

The crackdown extended beyond independent media that specialized in exposing instances of corruption and other forms of malfeasance. Activists and politicians not in lock step with the government’s Karabakh policies, including Gubad Ibadoglu, were also subjected to harassment and repression in recent months.

“It was a time to clean house,” said opposition journalist Arzu Geybullayeva, referring to the pre-election crackdown. “You cannot have snap elections in the country when you are still having journalists bravely reporting on corruption.”

Opposition activist Afgan Mukhtarli, a former RFERL reporter who spent three years in prison after mysteriously disappearing from a Tbilisi street and showing up in Azerbaijan the next day, maintained the crackdown has backfired on Aliyev.

“The relentless media crackdown, especially against Abzasmedia, has exposed the regime’s true nature to European institutions that had previously overlooked Aliyev’s authoritarian excesses,” Mukhtarli said. He added that one of Aliyev’s top priorities in the post-election period is likely to be damage control vis-à-vis the EU.

“He will strive to have the outcomes of his presidency recognized,” Mukhtarli predicted. “He will be compelled to make certain concessions and will go to great lengths to return to the Council of Europe.”

In the days leading up to the election, Aliyev showed no signs of backing down in an escalating dispute within the Council of Europe over Baku’s rights record. On February 2, Aliyev threatened to withdraw from several European institutions, including the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights after the CoE’s Parliamentary Assembly indicated it would not recognize the mandates of Azerbaijan’s delegation.

Influential figures within the Council of Europe appear more tired of, than intimidated by the combative rhetoric coming from Baku. Frank Schwabe, a German MP who leads CoE’s socialists, democrats and greens group, characterized Azerbaijan as a classic “dictatorship,” featuring “great repression internally” while being guided by desire to “present a good image to the outside world.”

Schwabe’s uncompromising portrayal of Azerbaijan’s political practices suggests that Aliyev has a challenge on his hands if he wants to mend fences with the Council of Europe.

“We must describe the real situation and not remain silent in the face of the dramatic deterioration in the human rights situation,” Schwabe said in a statement given to Eurasianet, referring to the CoE’s dispute with Baku. “The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has made it clear that it does not want to be fooled any further. Azerbaijan is committed to transparency. Being able to see and say what is happening is the task of the Council of Europe. Azerbaijan must make this possible. No ifs, ands or buts.”

(Lamiya Adilgizi is a freelance Azerbaijani journalist.)

Portantino, Archuleta Call for Immediate Release of Armenian POWs

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Senate Joint Resolution 11, authored by Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D – Burbank) and Senator Bob Archuleta (D – Pico Rivera) was introduced on February 13, calling on President Joseph Biden to take immediate steps to address the ongoing illegal detention of Armenian POWs, civilians, and government leaders by Azerbaijan. The resolution is particularly personal for Senator Portantino, as several of those being held are friends and associates with whom he has met and socialized with, both in Artsakh and in his Glendale District Office. Senator Portantino had recently hosted former Artsakh Foreign Minister and Advisor to the President David Babayan in Glendale, after being briefed in Artsakh by Babayan shortly after the 44-Day War. Minister Babayan is one of the government officials being illegally held by Azerbaijan. Senator Portantino was invited to go to Artsakh after the 44-day war by the Human Rights Ombudsman Artak Beglaryan.

“It is unacceptable that we are allowing Azerbaijan to continue their genocidal policies and illegally hold and detain innocent Artsakh residents,” stated Portantino. “It is beyond sad that concrete steps have yet to be taken to address the ethnic cleansing of Armenians and the continued illegal detention of Armenian POWs, civilians and leaders. Azerbaijan and the Aliyev regime

must be held accountable for these atrocities and the US and the international community should and must be more strident in its defense of Artsakh and Armenians being illegally held.”

In September 2020, Azerbaijan launched a war of territorial expansion against the Armenians of Artsakh that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of over 70 percent of Artsakh territory. Azerbaijan perpetrated widely documented human rights abuses, including the unlawful targeting of schools, homes, hospitals, and churches with prohibited weapons. For more than eight months, Azerbaijan held 120,000 people under a blockade, in isolation from food, water, medical supplies, fuel, electricity, and other basic needs. Following the illegal blockade, the Armenians of Artsakh endured a large-scale assault by the genocidal Aliyev regime in September 2023, resulting in the forced exodus of more than 100,000 people.

Currently, dozens of Armenian prisoners remain in Azerbaijani custody, with more than 80 Armenian soldiers and civilians still missing. Additionally, Azerbaijan has held eight former military and political leaders of Artsakh captive since September 2023. According to the Third Geneva Convention, to which Azerbaijan is a signatory, the release of POWs and captured civilians upon the cessation of hostilities is required. Azer-

baijan has still not fulfilled its international legal obligations.

SJR 11 calls on the Biden Administration to urge Azerbaijan to immediately return all Armenian POWs, hostages, and other detained persons. It also calls on Biden to impose Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act violations on Azerbaijan for the illegal detention, torture, and extrajudicial killing of Armenian POWs and hostages.

SJR 11 calls on the Biden Administration to suspend all United States military and economic assistance to Azerbaijan and to collaborate with the international community to ensure the protection and preservation of Armenian cultural heritage sites now under Azerbaijani control.

Portantino chairs the Senate Select Committee on California, Armenia, and Artsakh Mutual Trade, Art, and Cultural Exchange, which was first established in 2017 at his request to expand business opportunities through trade, economic development, cultural awareness, and education between California, Armenia, and Artsakh. California has the largest population of Armenian Americans in the country, with the 25th Senate District having the largest concentration. In 2014, the California State Legislature adopted AJR 32, which recognized the Republic of Artsakh as a free and independent nation.

INTERNATIONAL

Ambassador to Colombia Appointed

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Upon the nomination of the Prime Minister of Armenia, President Vahagn Khachaturyan signed a decree on appointing Armen Yeganyan concurrently as the Ambassador of Armenia to Colombia, the president’s office announced on February 12.

Yeganyan is already serving as Ambassador of Armenia to Brazil.

His respective diplomatic residence will continue to be in Brasília, the capital of Brazil.

Hungry, Armenia Work on Healthcare Cooperation

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenia and Hungary are developing an agreement on healthcare cooperation, Minister of Healthcare Anahit Avanesyan has said.

Avanesyan visited Hungary February 5-7 as part of President Vahagn Khachaturyan’s delegation.

In Budapest, Avanesyan met with Minister of Interior Sándor Pintér to discuss partnership and prospects of signing a memorandum of cooperation.

“During the meeting with my counterpart we discussed all the issues of mutual interest. We agreed to work together on the text of a bilateral agreement. I hope we will sign it in the coming months after finalizing it. I am happy that we are restarting the highly important dialogue and work with Hungary in healthcare,” Avanesyan said.

The minister pointed out the enhancement of Armenian-Hungarian cooperation in pharmaceuticals, education and health insurance sectors.

EU Gives Additional 5.5 M Euros for Refugee Aid

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On February 13, the European Commission is allocating an additional 5.5 million euros in humanitarian aid to support the Armenians displaced from the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the EU Delegation to Armenia said in a press release.

“Many of the people who fled to Armenia during the last year’s mass exodus took little to no belongings with them, leaving them dependent on emergency aid.

“Through its humanitarian partners, the EU aims to support people in need with access to food, shelter healthcare, mental health services, and protection,” the statement said.

Stressing the EU’s humanitarian support to Karabakh Armenians, Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarcic, said: “This is the first winter for thousands of Karabakh Armenians who fled to Armenia last Autumn. In these challenging times, it is our humanitarian duty to provide protection and assistance to the people most in need. With this new €5.5 million funding, we will aim to further strengthen the existing EU humanitarian response to the displaced people in Armenia, by providing them with access to basic services.”

INTERNATIONAL

Southeast European Countries to Create New Export Route for Azerbaijani Gas

By David O'Byrne

Countries in southeastern and central Europe have begun working together to create a new gas transit route to help compensate for the loss of Russian gas exports to Europe following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

If realized, the "Vertical Corridor" would offer Azerbaijan a new route to export its gas to east and central European markets and, as such, could help Baku to meet its pledge to the European Union to double its gas exports to Europe to 20 billion cubic meters a year by 2027.

The planned new route would mainly utilize existing pipelines connecting the gas transit systems of Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine but would require capacity expansion of some sections and of the cross-border connections.

As such the "Vertical Corridor" would be able to provide valuable new sources of gas for Moldova and Ukraine, which since the Russian invasion have experienced problems meeting domestic demand.

No less significantly it would also be able to feed gas into Ukraine's existing major east-west gas transmission system which has been largely unused since Russia's invasion of that country in 2022 and the subsequent halting of gas transit to Europe.

The project was kick-started at a January 19 meeting in Athens of energy ministers from southeastern and central Europe under the European Union's Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity

initiative (CESEC).

The meeting, which was attended by EU energy Commissioner Kadri Simson saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the gas transmission operators of EU member states Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, as well as those of Ukraine and Moldova, aimed at creating a north-south gas transmission corridor between the seven states.

Commenting on the agreement Simson said that the vertical corridor will: "[E]nable bi-directional flows of natural gas from North to South and back," which would "help ensure energy supplies to Ukraine and Moldova and enhance the overall energy security of the region."

New Corridor, Old Infrastructure

The new agreement proposes upgrading and expanding the existing gas transit infrastructure of the seven countries to create a new higher-capacity gas transit corridor which would reverse the direction of gas flow in some sections and allow larger volumes of gas to be transported from Greece and Turkey to Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.

Ukraine's own existing transit pipelines could then carry the gas directly to Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, and on to other European markets further west.

The new corridor would be able to carry gas imported into Greece and Turkey by ship as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and also gas from Azerbaijan imported through Turkey to Greece,

The first step towards realizing the vertical corridor was taken on February 1 with Bulgaria's state-owned gas transit operator Bulgartransgaz EAD launching the EU-required public consultations for the capacity expansion, in parallel with the state operators of Greece, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.

The final capacity for the new corridor has yet to be decided, but according to Ukrainian state gas transit grid operator GTSOU, there is sufficient demand from European gas buyers for a capacity of as much as 21 million cubic meters a day through Moldova to Ukraine. That's double the existing capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor which currently carries all of Azerbaijan's gas exports to Europe.

It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the existing Southern Gas Corridor, more specifically its final stage, the TAP pipeline. TAP is owned by a consortium that includes Azerbaijani state oil company SOCAR and BP, which operates Azerbaijan's biggest gas field, Shah Deniz, from which the bulk of Azerbaijan's gas exports are produced.

TAP has a nominal maximum capacity of 20 billion cubic meters a year but has been operating at around 10 billion cubic meters a year, pending a decision by the partners of the TAP consortium to make the necessary investment to add new compressors to allow the pipeline to carry more gas.

In January last year the consortium announced it would expand capacity by 1.2 billion cubic meters a year by 2026, but has yet to indicate when or if it will invest to

boost capacity to the full 20 billion cubic meters a year.

The creation of a new vertical corridor could make that extra expansion unnecessary - unless and until new sources of gas become available which could fill both corridors.

As it stands, the only sources of gas available are LNG - imported via terminals in Greece and Turkey, and gas transited by pipeline from Turkey, of which currently only gas from Azerbaijan is available.

Efforts to boost Azerbaijan's own gas production are well underway.

BP announced January 30 that it expects to begin production of gas from a new "deep" gas field early in 2024 while France's TotalEnergies, which last July began producing gas from Azerbaijan's Absheron gas field, has confirmed it plans to boost production from 1.5 billion cubic meters a year to around 5.5 billion cubic meters a year.

Baku continues to claim that it is on target to meet its promise to deliver 20 billion cubic meters a year to Europe by 2027, but doubts remain as to whether it can meet that target without imports from its neighbors, Turkmenistan and Iran.

Gas from Turkmenistan could become available for either or both corridors if negotiations between Turkey, Turkmenistan and Iran to deliver Turkmen gas to Turkey via Iran bear fruit.

(David O'Byrne is an Istanbul-based journalist who covers energy. This article originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on February 12.)

Mirzoyan Meets with EU's Borrell in Brussels

BRUSSELS (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia and the European Union have decided to launch work on an ambitious new partnership agenda, EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Josep Borrell said at a joint press conference with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan in Brussels on February 13.

"This decision sends us a strong signal of mutual interest in a new strategic phase in our relations and will provide a clear roadmap and vision for the way forward," he said, adding that "the future starts today."

Borrell welcomed the steps taken by Armenia in the fight against corruption and urged Armenia to further address the challenges in the fight against discrimination, hate speech and disinformation.

He also congratulated Armenia on becoming the 124th state party of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, describing it as a "very important and courageous decision."

"We discussed options to start visa liberalization dialogue," Borrell said, encouraging Armenia to step up reforms to progress in the issue.

He reiterated EU's commitment to support Armenia's participation in the Black Sea Electricity Cable project and other regional connectivity projects.

Referring to regional security issues, the EU High Representative said the latest shooting at the border was deplorable. "It again illustrates the urgent need for the distancing of forces, something the European Union has been advocating for a long time," Borrell said.

"Today I have to reiterate the European



Ararat Mirzoyan, left, with Josep Borrell in Brussels

Union's full commitment to supporting a sustainable and lasting peace based on the principles of sovereignty, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity. The EU Mission in Armenia has recently been reinforced and will continue to contribute to ensuring an environment conducive to normalization efforts," he stated.

The High Representative noted that the EU will continue to support Armenians displaced from Nagorno Karabakh, adding that the Commission has announced an additional €5.5 million in humanitarian aid.

The course of implementation of the Ar-

menia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), democratic developments in Armenia, as well as the joint steps implemented for developing partnership in new directions and the existing prospects were also discussed.

The security issues in the South Caucasus were discussed.

During the visit to Brussels, Mirzoyan also met with Gert Jan Koopman, the Director-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission.

(Armenpress contributed to this report.)

Baku Slams EU Monitoring Mission

MONITORING, from page 1

The statement also condemned the monitors for escorting "official and unofficial European delegations" to border areas during their visits to Armenia. Such visits are used for spreading "anti-Azerbaijani propaganda," it claimed without giving details.

French Gendarmerie General William De Meyer was one of the European officials who inspected a section of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border earlier this month. Azerbaijani state television claimed afterwards that France is helping Armenia prepare a military operation against Azerbaijan.

Later on Monday, Baku said that an Azerbaijani border guard deployed on the Armenian border was wounded in an Armenian ceasefire violation. The Armenian military said it is "investigating" the report.

Azerbaijan as well as Russia have repeatedly criticized the EU monitoring mission over the past year. Despite the criticism, the 27-nation bloc decided late last year to deploy more observers in Armenia.

Last month, the EU twice warned Azerbaijan against invading Armenia following Baku's renewed demands for Yerevan to open an extraterritorial corridor to the Nakhichevan exclave. Its foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said this and other statements made by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev earlier in January amount to territorial claims to Armenia.

"Any violation of Armenia's territorial integrity would be unacceptable and will have severe consequences for our relations with Azerbaijan," Borrell warned on January 22.



Community News

On ABMDR's 25th Anniversary, Arch. Derderian Pledges Continued Support

LOS ANGELES — On January 31, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, received a delegation from the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR).

During the meeting, which was held at the Diocese, in Burbank, California, Derderian extended his warm congratulations to the delegation on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of ABMDR.

As delegation members thanked the Primate for his support, they informed him that ABMDR aims to recruit a minimum of 2,500 potential stem cell donors this year, not only in honor of the organization's 25th anniversary, but also in order to bolster donor ranks following the devastating loss of ABMDR donors who lived in Artsakh.

Derderian pledged his continued assistance to ABMDR, as a pan-Armenian organization dedicated to helping patients across the globe. Specifically, the Primate said, he will facilitate several donor recruitments in the course of 2024, both in the United States and Armenia.

Derderian also informed the delegation that on March 17, prayers will be offered at the Diocese's Saint Leon Cathedral for ABMDR patients and families.

"We are deeply appreciative of Archbishop Derderian's leadership in facilitating our outreach and recruit-



Arch. Hovnan Derderian with ABMDR Board members Armond Mehdkhiani and Dr. Frieda Jordan.

ment efforts, and for helping raise public awareness of our life-saving mission," said ABMDR president Dr. Frieda Jordan. "As we discussed with the Primate during our meeting, one of our major goals at present is to inspire Armenian communities throughout the world with renewed hope and solidarity, in the wake of last year's horrific losses."

Established in 1999, ABMDR, a nonprofit organization, helps Armenians and non-Armenians worldwide survive life-threatening blood-related illnesses by recruiting and matching donors to those requiring bone marrow stem cell transplants. To date, the registry has recruited over 33,500 donors in 44 countries across four continents, identified over 9,000 patients, and facilitated 41 bone marrow transplants.



Vahe visiting the Yerablur Military Memorial Cemetery in Yerevan

Armenian Soldier's Sight Saved With Help from AECP

SAN DIMAS, Calif. — When Azerbaijan began their attacks on Armenia in 2020, Vahe Poghosyan was one of many brave young men in Armenia who volunteered to join the Armenian army to protect their homeland. He was sent to the border, an area constantly under heavy attack by Azerbaijan. During one of these attacks, a rocket hit the truck Vahe was riding in. Fourteen Armenian soldiers were killed that day; only three survived. One of those survivors was Vahe.

"I was covered in blood," remembers Vahe. "I couldn't see anything as there was shrapnel in both of my eyes." Vahe spent the next eight and a half terrifying hours lying on the battlefield, bleeding and unable to see, until it was possible for someone to rescue him.

With only a few minutes left to live, Vahe was rescued and rushed to a hospital in Yerevan, where he was treated for almost one month. His eyesight was gone and all he could see was a sliver of light. Vahe thought he was going to be blind for the rest of his life. After escaping one traumatic experience of going through the war and losing his friends, Vahe was now experiencing another agonizing prospect: believing he would never be able to see again.

"I remember so vividly the effects of the first Karabakh war in Armenia," recalls Dr. Roger Ohanesian, founder and president of the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECPP). "It was the unrest during that time that led to the beginning of the Armenian EyeCare Project. Now, 30 years later, I am happy to say that because of the AECPP's emphasis on medical education and training, doctors in Armenia are capable of performing complex surgeries and offering top-of-the-line eye care to their countrymen."

Dr. Georgi Grigoryan, one of AECPP's very first fellows, successfully performed two complex surgeries on Vahe's eye, removing the shrapnel and replacing the lens. This allowed Vahe to be able to see again. "I can see my daughter's beautiful smile now," says Vahe with immense gratitude. After regaining his sight, life has drastically improved for Vahe as he is now able to work, drive and support his family once again.

"I am deeply grateful to all the donors of the AECPP for saving my sight and allowing me to see again, to raise my child, to grow my family and to reach all my dreams," says Vahe with a smile.

As Vahe walks up the hill to Yerablur, the burial site of Armenian soldiers who died protecting their homeland, the song praising the bravery of his fallen friends can be heard far and loud. He joins in on singing along to the patriotic song, honoring his fellow soldiers and feeling grateful to be alive.



Vahe with his wife and daughter

Koutoujian Appointed Vice Chair of Council Of State Governments Justice Center Advisory Board

NEW YORK — The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center welcomed Cam Ward, director of the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles, as the organization's new Advisory Board Chair and Middlesex County, MA, Sheriff Peter Koutoujian as Advisory Board Vice Chair. Ward, nationally recognized for his leadership on criminal justice reform, is set to lead the organization's next phase.

"I am honored to work with this outstanding, bipartisan organization," said Ward. "I believe our work is vital to the national effort to enhance public safety, promote best practices in the criminal justice system, and save taxpayer dollars through meaningful rehabilitation programs. I look forward to serving as chair of the CSG Justice Center Advisory Board."

Additionally, Koutoujian, with his distinguished track record in law enforcement and criminal justice policy, brings a wealth of experience to his new role as vice chair. "The CSG Justice Center has a vital mission and stands as the premier association of its kind in the country. Its efforts to improve public safety and justice across the United States are essential now more than ever," said Sheriff Koutoujian. "I have seen firsthand the high level of professionalism and expertise that the CSG Justice Center can bring to states and communities, and I am excited to work with Director Ward and the Advisory Board members to build upon these tremendous successes and further evidence-based programs across the nation."

These leadership changes come at a vital time in the national conversation about what works to keep communities safe and ensure that our justice system is effective and fair. Megan Quattlebaum, director of the CSG Justice Center, praised the new appointments, stating, "Director Ward and Sheriff Koutoujian are incredible leaders who have shown what is possible when policymakers bring urgency and optimism to the table. The innovations they have made in their own states have become national models. We are very fortunate to have Director Ward and Sheriff Koutoujian as part of our team as we continue to support effective, evidence-based policies and practices. Both of these positions reflect the organization's commitment to leadership that is bipartisan and well-versed in policy development, system oversight, and the advancement of justice reforms."

The CSG Justice Center also welcomes Marsha Curry-Nixon to the executive committee. Founder and director of AMiracle4Sure, Inc., her work with individuals who are reentering their communities after incarceration, her roles on various boards, and her academic achievements in public service leadership make her an invaluable addition to the team.

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OBITUARY

Jirair Avanian

Entrepreneur in Armenia and US, Opened Dolmama Restaurant

YEREVAN — Jirair Avanian passed away, surrounded by his family, on January 20, 2024. He was 71.

Jirair was born December 8, 1952 in Yerevan. He attended Yegishe Charents school, gaining fluency in English. With his family, he emigrated to New York City in 1970.

He developed his business skills with his mentor, Galoust Galo, managing one of the Galo Shoes Manhattan locations. He subsequently opened a successful art gallery in the East Village, seeing its potential well before the area became hip, and later another on prestigious Madison Avenue.

In 1993, Jirair decided to move back to Yerevan, pulled by the desire to help his homeland and seeing opportunity in the newly freed economy. He believed that “my presence here was much more important than in the United States.”

In 1994, in partnership with locals, he

opened the city’s first supermarket, the cafe Havaboun (Hen House), then Salt Shack craft shop.

Jirair’s most monumental achievement has been the exquisite Dolmama restaurant on Pushkin Street, which just celebrated its 25th anniversary. After the Soviet era, Dolmama’s mission was to “revitalize Armenian indigenous cuisine and be creative about it”. It has gained international renown, with luminary guests such as presidents from 15 countries, not to mention celebrities ranging from Michael Caine to Kim Kardashian.

In his quest for cultural preservation, Jirair battled for years to prevent the demolition of the historic building in Yerevan where Dolmama is located.

Jirair constantly sought new business opportunities. He exported Armenian cuisine to the Dolmama franchise in Moscow. Seeing the beauty and potential of Dilijan,



especially after the transfer of the Armenian Central Bank to Dilijan, he opened the Flying Ostrich by Dolmama restaurant in 2014 and most recently, Im Toon inn.

His business ventures will continue thanks to his family and many loyal, wonderful employees.

Jirair inspired everyone whose life he touched. Within hours of his death, social media was brimming with inspiring stories from his life. In just one example, Khoren Harutyunyan wrote on Facebook, “In November 2020, after discussing restaurants

and menus, Jirair said to me, ‘think of something interesting, it’s time to start your own business.’ And it was those words that inspired me, in that terribly difficult period, to create value for Armenia and Yerevan, and we opened Zanfo.”

Jirair is survived by his wife, Aida; her daughter Marianna and grandchildren Lea and Mikayel, in Yerevan; his two sons, Shaant Avanian and 3 grandchildren Anya, Alex and Aram in New York City; and Andrew Avanian in Boston. The whole family is grateful to have just celebrated Christmas together in Spain. He is also survived by his former wife, Alice, whom he had married in New York.

As Marianna said, “The heritage of his love and light is so vast that he’s going to live in everybody’s heartbeats and in every beautiful thing he has left in this world.”

Services were held at St. Sargis Church in Yerevan.

(Some background info from Armenia-pedia.org and Armenian General Benevolent Union.)

Joy Renjilian-Burgy

Longtime Wellesley College Professor

BOULDER, Colo. — Joy Renjilian-Burgy, longtime Professor of Spanish Language and Literature at Wellesley College, author, editor, teacher-trainer, and social activist, passed away peacefully on January 14, 2024, at Boulder, where she had retired to be near her twin sons, Sarkis and Lucien.



ally, and friend to generations of students and alumni, and a tireless advocate for educational equity.

The recipient of dozens of awards, fellowships, and grants, including the Harvard Foreign Language teaching prize, Prof. Renjilian-Burgy held leadership positions in several associations, including the AATSP (American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese), NECLAS (New England Council for Latin American Studies), and MaFLA (Mass. Foreign Language Association).

An educator of wide interests, Renjilian-Burgy was also active in the Armenian-American community, holding several leadership positions in the Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA), where she was a former president, treasurer, member of the finance, international conference, and publications committees; recently she had been most active with the AIWA Scholarship Committee, where she funded for several years a scholarship dedicated to her mother, Aznive Melidonian. She was also an enthusiastic supporter of the Armenian Museum of America, where she served for many years as a trustee.

The member of a large, extended family, Renjilian-Burgy is survived by her husband of many years, the artist Donald Burgy, her twin sons, Sarkis and Lucien, and her sisters, Josh, Sally, and Margaret.

An online celebration of life for Joy Renjilian-Burgy is scheduled for Sunday, February 18, at 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time on Zoom: <https://github.zoom.us/j/3039077249?pwd=bTZrVWhHbkZTRkFDRVFRZVcx-WDBIdz09&omn=96315108188>

Born in Holyoke, Mass., in 1924, she was the daughter of Sarkis Renjilian and Aznive Melidonian, both survivors of the Armenian Genocide. After graduating from Mt. Holyoke High School and Mt. Holyoke College, she continued her higher education in education and Spanish language at Harvard University, where she also taught Spanish at the Extension School for several years.

Prof. Renjilian-Burgy retired in the summer of 2022 after 42 years of service as one of Wellesley College’s leading experts in foreign language and literature pedagogy, a brilliant instructor of Spanish, a mentor,

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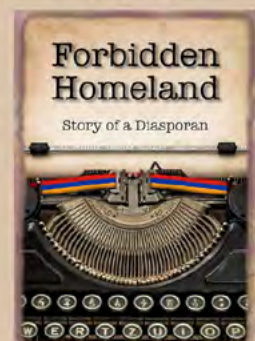
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Tekeyan Cultural Association
Metro Los Angeles Chapter

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OBITUARY

Joyce Lynne Sulahian

Longtime UN Employee, Diocese Supporter

NEW YORK — Joyce Sulahian, a leader of the Armenian Church community, passed away on Saturday, February 10. She was 79.

Joyce Lynne Sulahian was born and raised in Watertown and educated in the city’s public schools. She was the daughter of Garabed and Eugenie Sulahian. The Sulahian family was extremely active in the Armenian Church and community, going back to the family’s roots in Syria and Lebanon, and including several generations of clergy in the Apostolic and Protestant traditions. The family had taken up the same ethic of service when settling in the United States. Her father Garabed “Charles” H. Sulahian was an important leader of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) and chairman of its Eastern District Committee of the United States and Canada for many years. He was one of the leaders of the campaign to establish the Baikar Building in Watertown, where the ADL’s

Armenian-language newspaper of the same name was published.

Joyce herself became intimately involved in the church at age 16, when she joined the choir at Watertown’s St. James Church. She attended Concordia College, in Bronxville, NY, and began a professional career in administrative positions, first for Harvard University’s Dean of Engineering, and subsequently for the head of the university’s Computer Laboratory and Statistics Department.

In 1969, Joyce took up a role with the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America in New York. These were the early days of the St. Vartan Cathedral Complex, and then-Primate Archbishop Torkom Manougian was seeking out talented, committed individuals to fill key roles on his staff. Joyce joined as the administrative assistant to Archbishop Torkom, whom she had known since childhood as a close friend of the Sulahian family.

In 1974 she began a long career at the United Nations, first serving in the Department for Political and Security Council Affairs, and later promoted to a post in the Department for Disarmament Affairs, where she spent 15 years in the office of the UN’s Undersecretary General. In that post, she traveled extensively throughout the world, organizing and administering international conferences on disarmament-related topics, side-by-side with world experts in that crucial field as well as leading government officials of the day.

Joyce completed her 30-year UN career in the Office of General Assembly Affairs, where she took on the demanding, consequential role of creating and administering the speaking roster for the UN General Assembly: the annual gathering of the world’s presidents, prime ministers, and foreign min-



isters that meets in New York each autumn. Throughout this entire period, Joyce Sulahian was deeply involved in the mission of the Eastern Diocese, volunteering to serve on countless committees, offering valuable counsel on church and community activities, and often acting as an indispensable liaison between the Armenian Church and the diplomatic world.

In 1997, Joyce made her first trip to Jerusalem, and it proved a turning point in her service to the Armenian Church and people. Several years earlier, Archbishop Torkom had been elected as the 96th Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, and as in the early days of his tenure as Diocesan Primate, he needed dedicated, trustworthy souls to assist him in his efforts. Joyce would visit the Holy City several more times through her work for the UN, before taking a year-long leave of absence from that organization to work at the Jerusalem Patriarchate as Patriarch Torkom’s administrative assistant.

In 2004, following her official retirement from the United Nations, Joyce returned to Jerusalem to work with the Patriarch for another two years. Having worked most of her life among diplomats, Joyce now became an unofficial ambassador herself, promoting and supporting the age-old Armenian presence in Jerusalem and the work of its greatest institution. Her association with the Patriarchate continued into the tenure of Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, a friend of Joyce’s for over 50 years.

For the past 17 years, Joyce resided primarily in New York, punctuated by intermittent periods spent in Florida enjoying her condominium overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Her death on February 10, 2024, brought to a close an admirable life of humble and honorable service, generosity, and faith. She will be dearly missed by the many people throughout the city — and across the world — who valued Joyce Sulahian as a family member, colleague, and friend.

She was a fixture at St. Vartan Cathedral since its earliest days, and was dearly loved by the Diocesan Center’s staff, clergy, and visitors over the course of six decades. During that time, the lovely music of her voice and her warm smile would be eagerly welcomed whenever Joyce’s presence graced the cathedral complex. But she also brought her wise counsel, attention to detail, and disciplined work ethic to numerous Diocesan activities and committees on which Joyce served as a volunteer.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan presided over the funeral service at St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral (630 Second Ave., New York City), on February 15.

The burial service will be conducted on Tuesday, February 20, at Ridgelawn Cemetery in Watertown, MA, following services at the city’s St. James Armenian Church.

In-lieu-of-flowers donations in Joyce’s memory may be made to the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (630 Second Ave., New York, NY 10016).

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Thursday 21.03

Friday 22.03

Saturday 23.03

Sunday 24 to 26.03

Wedn. 27.03

Thursday 28.03

Good Friday 29.03

Saturday 30.03

Sunday 31.03

Monday 01.04

Tuesday 02.04

Wednesday 03.04

Rep Meet, assist at Cairo international airport & transfer to Sonesta Hotel. Gogonian club at night

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Free days to enjoy the beach, the red sea & the resort.
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Breakfast, check-out and Hurghada flight to Cairo, bus trip to Alexandria, check-in Romance Alexandria hotel, bus tour & free time

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

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

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

Easter at church, Armenian cemetery and KEF night at HMEM

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

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

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COMMUNITY NEWS

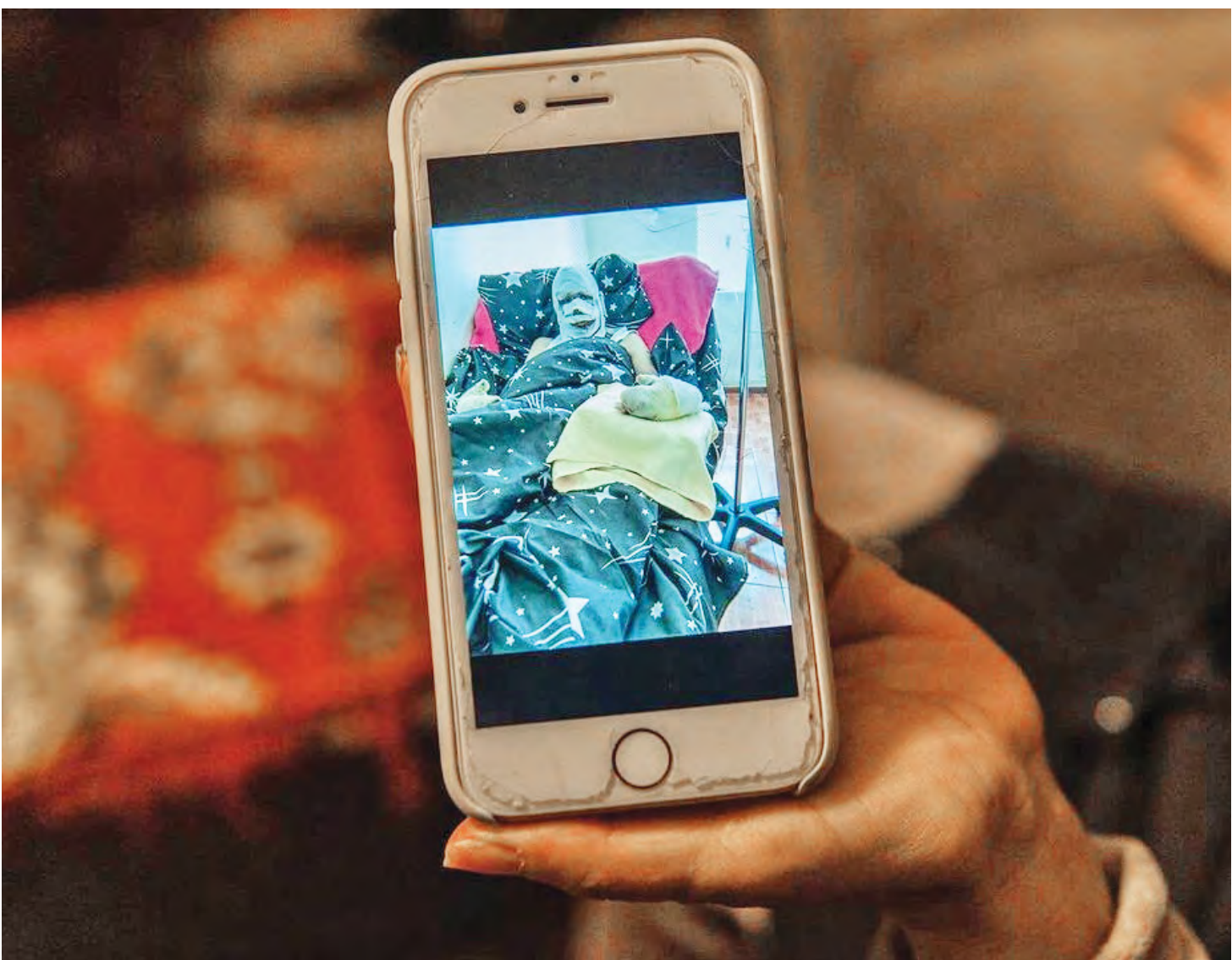
Nelson’s Boston Miracle: A Call to Action for a Boy’s Recovery Following the Artsakh Explosion

WATERTOWN — In a heartrending call to action, a GoFundMe campaign was launched on February 11, to support Nelson, a 17-year-old survivor of a catastrophic explosion in Berkadzor, near Stepanakert, amidst the recent aggression and ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijan against the Armenian population of Artsakh. This tragedy, part of one of the most significant humanitarian crises in modern Armenian history, forcibly displaced over 100,000 people, including Nelson and his family.

The explosion on September 25, 2023, claimed the lives of at least 220 people and resulted in over 300 injuries, leaving Nelson as the sole surviving male of his immediate family. Nelson sustained life-threatening injuries and spent two months in a hospital in Yerevan with severe wounds on his hands and face. Through the efforts of volunteer Stepan Chiloyan of Watertown and the Armenian American Medical Association (AAMA), Nelson was able to receive care at Shriners Hospital in Boston, where he continues his recovery.

“Nelson’s story is a stark reminder of the personal toll behind the headlines,” said Chiloyan, who also initiated the GoFundMe campaign. “After the loss of almost his entire family and his own severe injuries, we are calling on the global community to help Nelson and his family rebuild their lives.”

On Jan. 5, 2024, Nelson and his



A picture of Nelson after he suffered his horrific injuries (David Ghahramanyan photo)



Nelson’s injured hands (David Ghahramanyan photo)

mother arrived at Shriners Hospital in Boston, where he underwent major surgery to reconstruct his hands and face. The campaign seeks to provide financial support for Nelson, his mother, his two sisters, and his aunts as they strive to heal and move forward after being forcibly displaced from their homeland.

“Your contribution embodies the spirit of giving and compassion, offering not just financial support but also a message of hope and solidarity to Nelson and his family during this incredibly difficult time,” Chiloyan added. “Every donation, no matter the size, makes a significant difference.

The dedication and expertise of the care managers, nurses, and doctors at Shriners Hospital have been instrumental in Nelson’s recovery process. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Gennadiy Fuzaylov; Dr. Salpy Akaragian, President and Founder of the Armenian International Medical Fund (AIM Fund); and Dr. Hovig Chilitian, President of the Armenian American Medical Association (AAMA), for their vital roles in bringing Nelson to Shriners Hospital. This effort showcases the power of collaborative care and the commitment to providing the best possible support for those in need.

The campaign underscores the importance of humanity coming together to uplift those suffering in times of need. To support Nelson and his family, visit the GoFundMe page and donate: <https://gofund.me/e9439aab>.

Massachusetts Governor Healey Nominates Gabrielle Wolohojian to Supreme Judicial Court

NOMINATION, from page 1

coax consensus from the inevitable debates that arise when seven justices with diverse background, life experiences and judicial philosophies are called upon to decide the difficult and complex issues of law presented to the court.”

The Supreme Judicial Court is Massachusetts’s highest appellate court, consisting of the Chief Justice and six Associate Justices. The seven Justices hear appeals on a broad range of criminal and civil cases from September through May and issue written opinions that are posted online.

Justice Wolohojian is nominated to fill the seat vacated by Justice David A. Lowy, who retired from the Supreme

Judicial Court in February 2024.

About Justice Gabrielle R. Wolohojian

Gabrielle Wolohojian was appointed to the Appeals Court in February 2008. Since her appointment, she has sat on over 2,700 appeals and authored over 900 decisions. She serves as the Chair of the Supreme Judicial Court’s Advisory Committees on the Rules of Appellate Procedure, and the Chair of the Appeals Court’s Committees on Judicial Mentoring and Training, Education, Policies and Practices, and En Banc Rehearings. Justice Wolohojian is

a regular speaker on appellate practice.

Born in New York, and the granddaughter of Armenian immigrants, Justice Wolohojian received a B.A., magna cum laude, from Rutgers University in 1982; a Ph.D. in English language and literature from the University of Oxford in 1987; and a J.D. from Columbia Law School in 1989, where she was an editor of the Columbia Law Review. After graduation from law school, she served as a law clerk, first to Judge Rya Zobel of the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, then to Judge Bailey Aldrich of the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

COMMUNITY NEWS

AMAA James G. Jameson Essay Contest
Open to High School and College Students

PARAMUS, N.J. — The James G. Jameson Essay Contest, sponsored by the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), runs every academic year and is financed from the income of a special fund established by Mr. and Mrs. James G. Jameson of Brookline, MA.

All Armenian and part-Armenian students attending schools in North America are eligible. Only unpublished essays are accepted which are written in English and have a length of 1,000 to 2,000 words.

The topics of the contest are required to touch upon some aspect of Armenian heritage and experience, such as religion, his-



tory, culture, literature, language, art, architecture, geography and economics.

Essays are judged based on merit in such criteria as content, style, logic and reasoning, coherence and usage.

Awards for the Contest are made in two categories: College/University contestants, and High School contestants.

The deadline for entries is May 1, 2024.

Entries and/or inquiries should be directed to: James G. Jameson Essay Contest, c/o of The Armenian Missionary Association of America, 31 West Century Road, Paramus, NJ 07652 or e-mailed to lucyr@amaa.org.

Koutoujian Appointed Vice Chair of Council of
State Governments Justice Center Advisory Board

KOUTOUJIAN, from page 7

The diverse perspectives that these new members bring to the table will enrich the Advisory Board's deliberations and ensure the CSG Justice Center continues to be positioned to advance consensus around successful approaches to safety and justice. The Advisory Board will be convening in the Spring of 2024, in Washington DC for its first committee meeting.

The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center is a national, non-profit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, serving state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities. For more information about the CSG Justice Center, visit www.csgjusticecenter.org.

Armenian Armed Forces Day Marked at
US Embassy Reception in Washington

WASHINGTON (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Armenian Embassy in the US in January hosted a reception on the occasion of the 32nd anniversary of formation of the Armenian Armed Forces.

The event was attended by representatives of the US Department of Defense (Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency, Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, National Guard Bureau, Joint Staff), State Department,



Ambassador to the United States Lilit Makunts



Deputy Secretary of Defense of the United States Laura Cooper

Military Diplomatic Corps. A delegation of the Kansas National Guard also arrived in Washington to participate in the event.

After the national anthems of the Republic of Armenia and the United States, speeches were made by the military attaché of the Republic of Armenia to the United States, Colonel A. Mkrtchyan, the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States Lilit Makunts, and the Deputy Secretary of Defense of the United States Laura Cooper.



Tekeyan Cultural Association
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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, educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher's name and address.



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Arts & Culture

Kurghinyan and Galentz joint Exhibition for Berlin residents

By Gayane Arakelyan
BERLIN (orer.eu) — On January 26, the “Facing Together” exhibition opened in Berlin’s “Toolbox” gallery, in which two Armenian artists, Archi Galentz and Gagik Kurghinyan, participated.

Kurghinyan presented his paintings, and Galentz mainly presented collage works created from 2004 to 2023.

The artists together created a graphic work that touches on the idea of unity, the need to help and protect each other back to back.

“We decided to draw a circle inside which we are, like in old fairy tales, when you made yourself invisible from evil forces by taking yourself inside that line. Although I have known Gagik for a long time, he recently moved to Berlin and he really needs that help,” Mr. Galentz said to us.

Gagik Kurghinyan was born in 1953 in Yerevan. At the age of 9, he moved to Ukraine with his family. He is a doctor by profession and has been painting since childhood. He attended an art school during his school years. Over time, he became a master and even became a member of the Union of Artists of Ukraine (1990 to the present day). He moved to Berlin in 2022 due to the Russian-Ukrainian war.

“Our city, Zaporizhia, is now under shelling. I don’t know what will happen next, will we stay here or return. But I brought some of my works with me. I left about 400 important works for me in Kyiv, at my son’s house. Here I continue to create, I love painting,” Kurghinyan said.

As Galentz recalls, the works he brought to this exhibition are born of the emotions of the moment. They symbolize certain manifestations of human life and situations.

“These stamps were a package, they were sent to me from Moscow. I cut a part, this work was born. The image of today’s Moscow expresses how much unnecessary, time-consuming, pointless work is done. Sometimes you can express more in this way than with paint and brush or words. Anyone who looks closely at this case will notice the senseless waste of those forces, contempt for people and resources. The burned money is called “Hourly Pay”. It’s a found object, I didn’t set it on fire. Each one has a fascinating history of its creation,” says Mr. Galentz.

This joint exhibition went on through February 16.



Archi Galentz, left, with Gagik Kurghinyan at the exhibit in Berlin



Alla Vats

Preacher of Oriental and Chinese dances

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator
YEREVAN/CAIRO — Alla Vats is a renowned Russian dancer, teacher and choreographer. She was born in 1985 in Yerevan. When she was 8, she and her family moved to St. Petersburg, where she graduated from high school. From 2002 to 2007, she studied at the department of Oriental Cultural Studies (Chinese Studies) at the Faculty of Philosophy of St. Petersburg State University. In 2011, her monograph, *Dance Art of China: History and Modernity*, was published. In 2012, she defended her thesis on “Religious and Ritual Aspects of Chinese Dance Art.” She has won a number of prizes at international dance festivals and participated in dance competitions as served as a member of the jury. Alla is the holder of official title of Vice-Miss Belly Dance St. Petersburg; she is a prize-winner and winner of various competitions both in Russia and abroad, including Cairo Mirage (Moscow) and Ahlan Wa Sahlan Festival Winter Teachers Course (Cairo). She is the organizer of the Cairo Stars Cup Festival in China.

For the past three years, Alla has been living and working in Cairo.

Dear Alla, how would you assess the current state of Eastern dances for women in Russia?

The peak of the popularity of Eastern dance in Russia came after the TV series “Clone.” Crowds of girls, myself included, started to study belly dancing. A few years ago, interest in the dance began to wane, and the influx of new students decreased noticeably. And during Covid, in principle, there was a crisis in all dance styles. Now the situation has improved and there is a new influx of students.

By the way, dancers call this dance in different ways. Some do not accept the word belly dance. What term do you use?

Yes, you are right. We use such terms as belly dance, oriental dance. These are the most common names for this dance trend.

You are a specialist in Chinese dance. Have you also practiced them?

I have been practicing Chinese dance for a very short time just to have some idea about this style. Years ago, I wrote a book about Chinese dance, so it was interesting to learn about different subtleties of this direction in practice.

You also studied in China and opened a school there. Is it still open?

Yes, that’s right, I lived, studied and worked in China for eight years. During that time, I taught a huge number of classes there, gave masterclasses and organized my own festival. Many of my students have already opened their own schools. At the moment I come there periodically with my master classes.

There are many belly dancers with Armenian roots in the world. Even in Egypt, their current most famous Oriental dancer is Savinar, who hails from Armenia by the name of Tsovinar. Have you met any of your fellow Armenian dancers anywhere?

see DANCER, page 17

‘Solace in The Clouds’

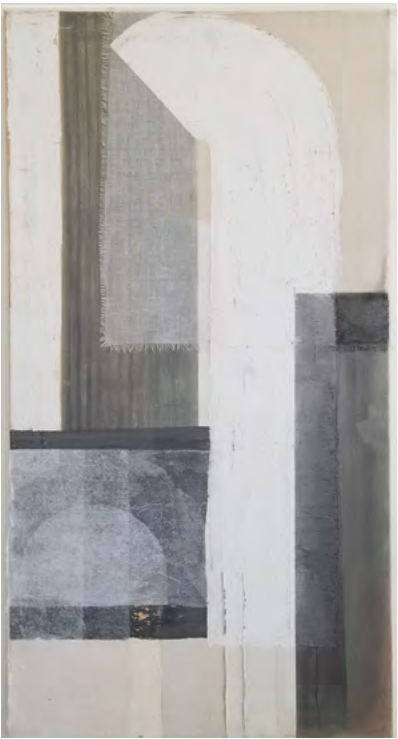
A Review of Meghan Arlen’s Obscured Geographies

By Troy Paul Bloom
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

There is a unique sensation one gets from riding the window seat of an airplane. You are granted a view that, up until about a hundred years ago, no mortal in history had previous access to. Above the clouds you are able to gaze outwards at the heavens, and up to an untouched sky. The sun’s rays cast mile-long shadows across thick, pillowy clouds that are too unfathomably vast. This is a God-like position.

From these heights you can, if the conditions allow, look down too. Vast swaths of land, stretching out as far as the eye can see, trick the brain by their apparent infinitude. Mountains are flattened. Lakes and rivers are compressed. The millions of people below, impossible to see, are squeezed into nothing. From forty-thousand feet the world becomes a sea of abstraction.

Meghan Arlen’s new show, *Obscured Geographies* at Atamian Hovsepian Curatorial Practice, mirrors the distinct sensation of gliding across the sky and awing at the world below. But while this sensation can manifest in feelings of serenity, it can also be



“Synonyms,” 2020, plaster, tarlatan, graphite powder, clay, paint and tissue on canvas, 18 x 34 inches

a potent reminder of humanity’s severe impact on the landscape. From this near transcendent perspective, so close to the heavens, Arlen reminds us of these very human concerns.

Through a variety of materials, mediums, and methods Arlen constructs modules of space that resemble patches of earth scarred by the marks of mankind. The world presented is not an idyllic Eden, unspoiled. These geographies are much more ambiguous.

Arlen presents what feels like both metropolitan and rural views from
see CLOUDS, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe
Corner



by Christine
Vartanian

(PHOTO COURTESY INTERNATIONAL CUISINE)



Syrian Nut Cake (H'risseh)

“International Cuisine is a culinary and travel adventure. We enjoy sharing recipes and travel tips from every country in the world, and exploring the world through food. Our mission is to promote cultural appreciation by cooking our way across the world, one nation at a time. To discover the struggles and joys that have influenced the people, to gain an appreciation of their land, culture and traditions, and to feel the hospitality that only sharing a meal can convey,” says Darlene Longacre, the food and travel blogger at International Cuisine.

Namoura cake, also known as Basbousa or Harissa, is a traditional Middle Eastern sweet dessert, made with semolina flour and topped with assorted nuts and a simple sugar syrup. “This cake is one of the most popular in the Middle East and North Africa, and also in some Balkan countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and in Turkey or in Armenia. It can be found everywhere, in restaurants, in bakeries, and there will always be someone to offer you a piece. Use coarse semolina flour (not fine) to achieve the proper texture. Additionally, it calls for superfine sugar. Rose water and orange blossom water are used in the syrup. The batter is made with butter and yogurt that results in a light, airy cake. Use whatever nuts you like, but the recipe calls for this cake to rest in a cool place for about 3 hours so be sure to plan ahead when you make it.”

“Syria is thought to be one of the original and oldest civilizations on earth and believed to be part of the Fertile Crescent, where the earliest people practiced cattle breeding and agriculture. Archeologists have uncovered skulls and bones of Neanderthals that date back roughly 700,000 years. Historically, the name



Darlene Longacre, International Cuisine/Food and Travel Blogger and Photographer (Photo courtesy International Cuisine)

Syria, referred to a much wider region than its borders of today. It was known as al-Sham in Arabic, which included: Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and much of Turkey and of course modern day Syria.”

“Interestingly, the name h’risseh (harissa) in Lebanon is a savory dish, a porridge made with wheat and meat. In Syria, however, there is no confusion, everyone knows this Syrian cake,” says Darlene. “This is the most famous treat in the city of Nabk in particular, and in the Damascene countryside in general. Its most important ingredients are semolina and ghee, or unsalted butter, and it is prepared in a special way where the dough is placed in a large tray and sprinkled with grated pistachios or walnuts. It is then baked and soaked in sugar syrup. The city of Nabk is known as a popular stop for travelers going to and from Damascus who look forward to enjoying the famous dish. This recipe is relatively easy to make. And because it’s soaked in syrup, it stays moist without drying out for about a week if stored properly.”

INGREDIENTS:

Batter:

- 1 1/4 cups semolina flour (not fine)
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1/4 cup superfine sugar
- 1 1/2 cups yogurt, whole milk
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1-2 teaspoons tahini for greasing the pan

Topping:

- 1/3 cup blanched almonds
- 1/3 cup pistachio nuts
- 1/3 cup walnut pieces
- 1/3 cup cashews, unsalted

Fragrant sugar syrup:

- 1 cup superfine sugar
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon rose water
- 1 tablespoon orange blossom water

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Grease a 10-inch round cake pan with tahini.

In a large bowl, combine the semolina, butter and sugar together with a spatula and blend together. Add the yogurt and baking soda, and mix well.

Spread the batter in the cake pan and smooth with a spoon. Cover with plastic wrap, and let it rest in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours.

Remove the batter from the refrigerator and scatter the nuts over the top. Bake until the cake is golden brown for about 40 minutes. While the cake is cooking, make the sugar syrup.

In a saucepan add the sugar, lemon juice and water and place over medium heat. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally until the sugar is dissolved. Let it boil for 3 minutes then add the rose and orange blossom water. Stir and remove from heat. When the cake is done pour the syrup over the cake and let it stand for 30 minutes. It may look like it is too much syrup, but it will be absorbed by the cake. Slice cake and serve with hot coffee or tea.

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.internationalcuisine.com/syrian-nut-cake/>

For more Syrian recipes, see: <https://www.internationalcuisine.com/about-food-and-culture-of-syria/>

See:

<https://www.internationalcuisine.com/recipes/>

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ARTS & CULTURE

‘Solace in the Clouds’: Meghan Arlen’s Obscured Geographies

CLOUDS, from page 13

above. The geometric lines in “Y-Y Diptych” (2021) feel like roads and highways, cutting across urban sprawl. The surface of “Instead I Got Got” (2023) feels like plots of land that have been wrung dry by neglect. Every terrain on display tells a unique story through the shapes, sizes and hues presented. Things are separated, fenced. The impact of constructed borders seems to be a key idea in this body of work.

These themes are accentuated by both Arlen’s choice of materials – many of which have been recycled and repurposed – and their distinct arrangements. Canvas and linen act as a kind of base for her topographical structures. Factory-made corrugated material sits next to paint, sits next to plaster, sits next to copper, sits next to iron. Materials overlap, intersect, but are often separated clearly by the artist’s precise hand. There is a palpable level of care in the work, bordering on the fetishistic. When inspecting each piece closely it is hard not to feel that I am confronted with objects born from ritual.

In what is perhaps my favorite piece, “Synonyms” (2020), grids are formed by intersecting and overlapping lines. Unpredictable shapes blend and blur into one another. A large, gestural flash of white pours up from the bottom, curves, and stops half-way. A sign of a jobsite abandoned. The ground is being worked over, patched, and worked over again, always in flux. The innate human desire to pacify an ever-changing environment is on full display.

While the mastery of materials and their arrangement here are impressive, for me, the real engine of these artworks’ lay in Arlen’s utilization of color. They are calming. Soothing. Arlen’s decision to work with a desaturated palette imbues the work with a more natural – and distant – quality. The colors presented feel like they’re seen through a layer of atmosphere. Her piece, “Promise?” (2023), is the clearest example of this sensation. Through the image I can feel the cabin pressure. I can hear the white noise of a plane at cruising altitude. I am calm, soothed, and I am en route.

The muted whites, blacks, blues, oranges, browns and greens evoke an organic world. Through them you can almost smell



Gallery installation view

the land, the dirt, the air. But there is a tension. The materials carrying these colors remind us that these are not things stripped from the forest floor or from freshly tilled soil. They are industrial, wholly manmade. Arlen’s variety of mediums are all born from the factory line.

Many of the pieces in Obscured Geographies border on the sculptural, breaking the simple flat plane of traditional painting. They are harder to categorize and feel nearer to the “Combines” of Robert Raus-

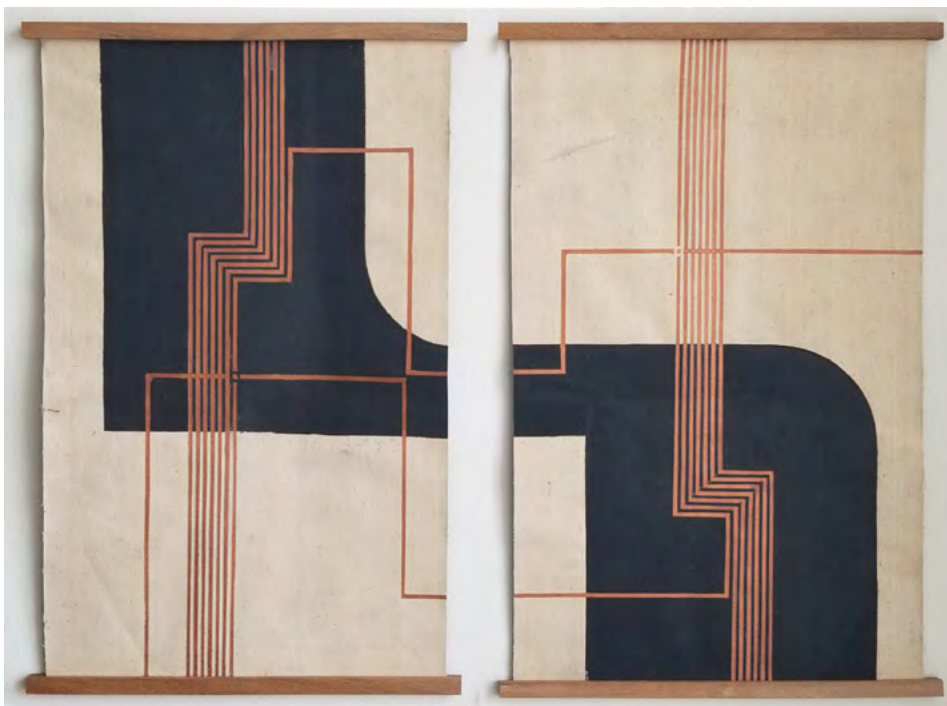
chenberg than to traditional painting. Rauschenberg, infamous for his combination of media and medium to ecstatic, maximal effect, seems to be channeled by Arlen, and cooled down. Arlen’s message is clear, restrained, and minimal.

The human landscape is moving faster than ever before and our appetites have never been more insatiable. If we cannot course-correct, the negative side effects of runaway technological production may send our story backwards – or worse, to ruin. But the worlds Arlen is presenting are not merely obstructions to paradise. These are places where people work. Where people raise children. Civilization, for better or worse, sustains itself from these sites of production. This is where we live.

Sometimes the perspective from the surface can seem flat, oppressive. The path forward unclear. In a world that often feels on the brink of political, economic and ecological collapse it is all too easy to resign oneself to apathy and disillusionment. Arlen’s work, however, rejects this attitude by showing us a clearer, calmer perspective—one from above. The anxiety of cataclysm has been



“Instead I Got Got,” 2023, plaster, paper, tarlatan and paper towel on burlap, 20 x 30 inches



“Y-Y Diptych,” 2021, gesso and liquid copper on unprimed upcycled canvas 30 x 24 inches

transmuted into something reaffirming, and resilient. By rejecting the surface-level noise these objects hint that solace can be found higher up, in quieter places.

“Obscured Geographies” opened on January 18, and is on view until February 24.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Support Sought for Completion of Tekeyan’s Nonfiction Anthology in Armenia

By Ruben Mirzakhanyan

YEREVAN — Between 2022 and 2023, the first and second volumes of the set of Armenian-language articles authored by Vahan Tekeyan and compiled by Associate Professor Varduhi Davtyan, Ph.D., were published in Yerevan. In the first volume of that anthology, articles and editorials of the period between 1901 and 1910 were compiled (550 pages), and in the second volume, the

publications of 1911-1920 appear (719 pages). Vahan Tekeyan is known to the general public as an outstanding poet of Western Armenian literature. Thanks to the abovementioned multi-volume work, it becomes obvious that Tekeyan is also the greatest Western Armenian national publicist and analyst of the 20th century.

In order to make Vahan Tekeyan’s entire legacy accessible, it will be necessary to publish four more volumes. Work in this direction is already underway.

The first and second volumes were published due to the funds the Tekeyan Center Foundation of Yerevan provided. In order to continue this project, the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia has decided to create a fund for that purpose.

Interested supporters may obtain the first and second volumes by paying \$200. This sum will be redistributed in the following way: the author of the book will receive an honorarium payment of \$50, \$65 will cover the delivery of the first two volumes, and \$85 will go to the foundation for the publication of the third and fourth volumes. The participants of this initiative will receive the third volume for free (except for the shipping costs).

To participate, use the following site: <https://givebutter.com/bvgrq1>

By participating in the publication of Vahan Tekeyan’s publicist works supporters are investing in preserving an important part of the Armenian heritage.

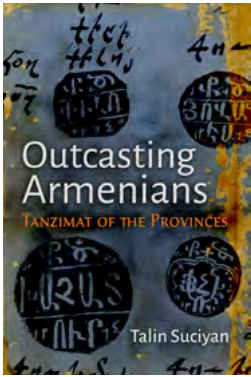
(Ruben Mirzakhanyan is the president of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia.)



Dr. Talin Suciyan Will Discuss New Book on Ottoman *Tanzimat* Policies

FRESNO — Dr. Talin Suciyan (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) will give a presentation on her new book, *Outcasting Armenians: Tanzimat of the Provinces*, on Tuesday, February 27, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus.

This lecture will discuss the Ottoman *Tanzimat* era through the lenses of the Armenian Patriarchate Archives along with the Ottoman Archives. It will argue that while *Tanzimat* has long been portrayed as a progressive period that granted rights to all peoples of the empire, when in fact it set the mold for policies of oppression which pushed Armenians out of their native lands and would be reutilized time and again. Among the various forms of oppression described by 19th-century Armenians from throughout the empire in the Patriarchate Archives, a prominent example is *angarya*, forced labor,



which was demanded by the local authorities and power holders. Coupled with abusive and oppressive taxation policies instituted during the *Tanzimat*, Armenian peasants were turned into migrant workers; a phenomenon that heavily affected Armenian families in the provinces for the worse. This talk will demonstrate that forced labor, coupled with abusive taxation, was a tool of Ottoman temporal and territorial governance that continued to be implemented throughout the 20th century.

Suciyan is Associate Professor (Privat Dozentin) of Turkish Studies at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. *Outcasting Armenians: Tanzimat of the Provinces* is her second book. She received her doctoral degree in 2015. Her first book was *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, History and Politics* (I. B. Tauris), which has been translated into Turkish (Aras Publ., 2018), German (De Gruyter, 2021) and will soon be released in Russian too.

The lecture is free and open to the public. The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.



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of Boston
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March
21
7 PM
THURSDAY

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CHEF DR. KNARIK ARKUN

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First in a series coordinated by Rita Balyozian

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\$25 per person
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TRIMMINGS PLUS
MA'MOUNIEH

Bring your family & friends

Together let's share stories
& form friendships over food.

12:30 pm

March 10, Sunday
\$25 per person

BAIKAR BUILDING
755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown

RSVP to Sossy 617 281-1647
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<https://www.facebook.com/TekeyanBoston>

ARTS & CULTURE

Alla Vats: Preacher of Oriental And Chinese Dances

DANCER, from page 13

Yes, I have come across our girls at competitions, at events. All the girls are very beautiful and talented. And due to their appearance, our girls always look harmonious and colorful in dance.

Alla, you were born in Yerevan, your mum’s last name is Asatryan. Were you interested in Armenian dances?

Yes, my mum is Armenian and many of my relatives live in Armenia. I try to go there as often as I can, because I love Armenia very much. My father is half Serbian and half Ukrainian, but he was born in Armenia too, he graduated from school and institute there. Unfortunately, I have never practiced Armenian dancing, I have never had the opportunity, to be honest. But maybe in the future I will be able to master Armenian dances too.

What do you remember from your childhood in Yerevan?

Oh, to be honest, my memories vary. My childhood was during the collapse of the USSR, when there was no water or light. I remember how we had to carry water in buckets up and down the floors. I remember how we used to heat the stove right in the flat. How we were happy and shouted when the light was switched on for a couple of hours. At the same time, these are memories of family and friends togetherness. When all the neighbors gathered to watch the TV series “Santa Barbara.” How joyfully and cheerfully all holidays were celebrated surrounded by relatives! How much everyone always laughed and never lost optimism in spite of everything!

There is a small Armenian community in Cairo: do you have contacts with them?

Unfortunately, no, I did not have any contacts - I only went to the Armenian church in Cairo. But I know that there is



a community here and there is even an Armenian school.

Thank you for your answers, Alla, and I really hope that in the near future we will see your performances in the place of your birth!

And thank you very much for your questions. I hope to see you soon in our homeland!



SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

The Armenian Students’ Association of America Inc. is now accepting scholarship applications for the 2024-25 academic year. Applicants must have completed at least one year of college by June 2024 and be of Armenian descent. The application deadline is April 1, 2024. We awarded over \$155,000 in scholarships to 32 deserving students last year. Please visit www.asainc.org for applications and further information.

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CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

FEBRUARY 24 — 129th Anniversary of the Lowell Aharonian Gomideh of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Dinner and Program featuring Gev Iskajyan, Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of Artsakh. Presentation on “Artsakh: The Inside Story. From Victorious Republic to Loss of Independence.” Jaffarian Hall, St. Gregory Armenian Church, 158 Main St., No. Andover. 6 p.m. Adults - \$35. Students - \$15. For reservations, please contact Armen at 978-265-9479, armenjeknavorian@gmail.com; or Ara, 617-803-2612, ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com. Portion of proceeds to benefit Artsakh refugees.

FEBRUARY 25 — Under the Snow Moon! Virtual program at 4 p.m. Welcome. Meet and Greet. Virtually walk the Labyrinth. Share wishes for the Wishing Tree. Enjoy a musical performances. For link to register, visit <https://www.armenianheritagepark.org/events>.

MARCH 4 — Monday, St. James Men’s Club monthly dinner and Fellowship gathering, Guest Speaker: Acclaimed Playwright author, and Oscar Winner [“On Golden Pond,” 1981] Ernest Thompson. The Oscar and Me; Reflections on Writer’s Life and the Madness of Hollywood. He will read from his latest novel, The Book of Maps: A Novel, Signing with the author, books will be available for purchase. Losh Kebab and Kheyma Dinner. Social Hour [mezza] 6;15 pm Dinner 7;00 pm, \$20 per person. Ladies Welcome.465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown.

MARCH 6 — Celebrating Art, Science, Service and Commerce: Leadership Sharing Experiences, 5 p.m., virtual, featuring Vicki Adjami, Communications via Design; Mahesh Daas, Boston Architectural College; Souren Etyemezian, Fastachi; Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB Channel 5, host; Rebecca Grainger, City of Boston Youth & Schools; Emmanuel Owusu, African Bridge Network. For link to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar

MARCH 10 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter is hosting a Sunday brunch with ful/fava beans and trimmings plus ma’mounieh. Bring your family and friends and let’s share stories. 12.30 p.m., Sunday. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. RSVP to Sossy, 617-281-1647 or syogurtian@comcast.net. <https://facebook.com/TekeyanBoston>. \$25 per person.

MARCH 21 — Armenian Cooking Demonstration: Kata, by Dr. Knarik Arkun. Learn how to prepare kata/gata/nazouk and afterwards enjoy samples with coffee/tea and socialize. 7 p.m., Thursday. First in a Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter series coordinated by Rita Balyozian. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. \$25 per person. RSVP necessary. Sossy, 617-281-1647 or email syogurtian@comcast.net

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

APRIL 11 — LET’S PARTY FOR THE PARK! InterContinental Hotel, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Meet & Greet. Enjoy Chef Didier Montarou’s Luscious Signature Plates. Tutunjian Family Vineyard Wines & Curated Silent Auction, all whole supporting the Park’s care. Advance Reservations only. For link to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar

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.

Requesting photos of survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide for an art book on the important topic designed to keep the memory of the victims alive.

Email one photo per email with escaped home and where they lived afterwards and their name to Armeniangenocidesurvivors1915@gmail.com But as many emails as you wish.



COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
— SINCE 1932 —



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No War, No Peace in the South Caucasus

By Benjamin Poghosyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Since 2020, the South Caucasus has entered an active era of turbulence. The primary reason was the Azerbaijani decision to use military force to “solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.” Azerbaijan started the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, launched incursions into Armenia proper in May, November 2021, and September 2022, and imposed a blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh in December 2022. The culmination of this strategy was the September 2023 military attack against Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in the forced displacement of around 105,000 Armenians and the dissolution of the self-proclaimed Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

Even after the complete takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan continues its policy of threats and pressure towards Armenia with an ever-changing shopping list of demands. Baku supports the concept of so-called “Western Azerbaijan” at the highest level. It expects an extraterritorial corridor from Armenia. It states that it will not pull away its troops from occupied Armenian territories, rejects Armenia’s offer to sign a non-aggression pact and continues to demand changes in the Armenian constitution and other laws.

The president of Azerbaijan publicly stated that international law does not work, and that hard power and use of military means are becoming the only way for states to achieve their goals. Immediately after his victory in the February 7, 2024 snap presidential elections, President Ilham Aliyev visited the Air Force military facilities and watched the flyover of the Akinci unmanned combat aerial vehicle, with a range of 7,500 km. and 5.5+ tons maximum takeoff weight, of which over 1,350 kg. is the payload.

The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war was a clear violation of one of the three principles agreed upon by Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs during more than two decades of negotiations – to not use force or the threat of force. The September 2022 incursion into Armenia was against the spirit of negotiations at the Brussels format, and the September 2023 attack against Nagorno Karabakh was a clear violation of EU and US public demands not to use force against Nagorno Karabakh. However, neither of the latter act on their public warning of repercussions to punish Azerbaijan for these violations. Rather, President of the European Council Charles Michel congratulated President Aliyev for his victory during the February 7 snap elections, thereby sending a message that the EU “has forgotten or forgiven” Azerbaijani behavior and is ready to continue the strategic partnership with the country.

After the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war, the Armenian government’s strategy was based on the logic of “not irritating Azerbaijan to avoid providing any justification for further Azerbaijani attacks.” Thus, the Armenian government continued negotiations with Azerbaijan after the May and November 2021 incursions into Armenia. In April 2022, Armenia stated it was ready to accept Nagorno-Karabakh’s autonomous status within Azerbaijan. After the September 2022 aggression, Armenia recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, dropping demands for any autonomy.

Armenia agreed to continue negotiations during the Nagorno-Karabakh blockade in the first half of 2023. It stated that

it was ready to sign a peace agreement with Azerbaijan by the end of 2023 without any mention of Nagorno-Karabakh, thus agreeing not to challenge the military takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh and forced displacement of all Armenians. When Azerbaijan canceled its participation in Western platforms of negotiations after September 2023 and offered to start bilateral negotiations, Armenia again agreed. As Azerbaijan suggested signing only a framework agreement dropping out issues related to border delimitation and demarcation and restoration of communications, Armenia said yes, too.

In January 2024, the Armenian government started to speak about the necessity of adopting a new constitution, arguing that the current constitution, with its reference to the 1990 Declaration of Independence, is an obstacle to establishing peace with Azerbaijan and Turkey. President Aliyev demanded a change of the Armenian constitution and other laws in 2021 and reiterated these demands in early 2024.

However, despite all Armenian efforts “not to irritate Azerbaijan and bring an era of peace to the region by accepting Azerbaijani demands,” the region is far away from stability. Azerbaijan continues to demand the establishment of an extraterritorial corridor via Armenia and the return of enclaves while hinting that if Armenia does not accept these demands, another military attack is likely.

Thus, neither the appeasement policy by Armenia nor the EU and US readiness to accept the results of Azerbaijan’s use of force has brought stability to the South Caucasus. In the current environment, the only way truthfully to stabilize the region is to decrease the military gap between Armenia and Azerbaijan. As long as Azerbaijan and everyone else is sure that Baku is likely to use force against Armenia and compel it to accept what it wants, there will be neither efficient negotiations nor stability.

In this context, India’s readiness to sell weapons to Armenia and France’s actions to increase Armenia’s defense capacities stands out as tangible steps to help stabilize the South Caucasus. India –Armenia and France – Armenia military cooperation cannot destabilize the South Caucasus because the region is already not stable, and it is not stable because of the opportunities lying in the military imbalance in favor of Azerbaijan. Thus, anyone interested in a stable South Caucasus should welcome Armenia–India and Armenia – France military cooperation and look around for other ways to decrease the military gap between Armenia and Azerbaijan and provide Armenia means to defend itself against further aggression.

The 2021-2023 developments have proven that neither negotiations nor concessions worked and the only way to ensure stability in the region is to increase Armenia’s defense capabilities. All statements, arguments, and analyses seeking to blame India and France for destabilizing the region by selling weapons to Armenia are not based on facts. They are simply propaganda tools to perpetuate Azerbaijani military superiority over Armenia and to perpetuate the instability in the South Caucasus.

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

Will Turkey Present Additional Preconditions to Armenia?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The events of the last few weeks turned out to prove the theses that I had put forward in my previous articles, particularly related to the preconditions sought by Turkey and Azerbaijan before normalizing relations with Armenia. In particular, I argued that Turkey will demand that Armenia amend its constitution, abandon the terms “Western Armenia and Eastern Armenia,” abandon state symbols, including the use of the image of Mount Ararat on the Armenian coat of arms, as well as adopt a new Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence is the founding document of the third Armenian Republic. If there is no Declaration of Independence, then there is no Republic of Armenia. That is why Armenian officials are talking about the necessity to form the fourth Republic of Armenia.

The Armenian government appears to have agreed to fulfill these preconditions.

It has even circulated theses that the coat of arms of Armenia does not express today’s realities and the nature of today’s Republic of Armenia. Moreover, the ruling party says that as Mount Ararat is not on the territory of Armenia today, it cannot be used in its official symbols. This is of course an absurd thesis. It is obvious that the coat of arms of today’s France, Great Britain or Russia does not correspond to the current realities of these powers.

Of course, the question arises whether the moon depicted on today’s Turkish flag is located in the territory of Turkey. The argument here is that the moon has an important religious significance for the Turkic world. Mount Ararat also has the most important religious significance for Armenia and the Christian world. According to the Bible, the humanity was reborn after Noah’s ark landed on Mount Ararat in this part of the world. In other words, if the rulers of Armenia wanted to present such justifications, they simply could do that and mention that symbolism cannot be considered

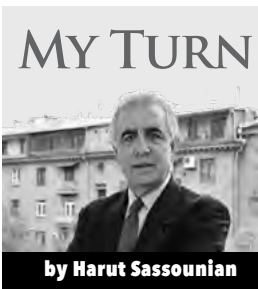
as a territorial claim against Turkey as they did not within the last 30 years.

In fact, after fulfilling all of these preconditions, new preconditions will be definitely set by Turkey. Turkey may demand that some political parties which could be considered anti-Turkish by their nature not be permitted on the territory of Armenia. In particular, Turkey quite possibly will demand that the activities of the traditional Armenian parties shall be suspended there, as they represent a threat to Ankara. Turkey may also demand the ban of any patriotic songs that were created during the Armenian Genocide which relate to the national liberation struggle of the Armenian nation. It is not excluded that there will be a demand to not only change the name of “Armenian history” to the “history of Armenia,” but also some pages of the history itself.

Yet another demand concerns the official anthem of Armenia. The Armenian ruling party says that the lyrics of the Armenian see PRECONDITIONS, page 20



COMMENTARY



We Must Keep the Memory and Dream Alive To Recover Artsakh And Western Armenia

There is a dispute among those who want to struggle for the recovery of Artsakh and those who say that Artsakh is lost forever and that we should forget about it.

The latter shameful position is promoted by the current regime in Armenia which is responsible for losing Artsakh and is now doing everything possible to bury its memory.

I would like to share with the readers my decades-long view on the recovery of Western Armenia and its parallels to actions we need to take for Artsakh.

After every lecture I have given around the world on the Armenian Genocide and Western Armenia, some of the attendees immediately ask: what is the point of pursuing such a lost cause, particularly since the powerful Turkish military is occupying our historic lands?

I respond by saying that the worst thing Armenians can do now is to forget about Western Armenia. That is the surest way of losing forever our Armenian territories.

In addition to doing everything possible now, Armenians need to transmit to the next generation our demands for Artsakh and Western Armenia in order to keep the dream alive. If we don't, our future generations, not knowing anything about our historic lands, will have no idea that they belong to us. Consequently, even if someday the geostrategic situation on the ground changes and an opportunity arises to recover our lost lands, our future generations will not show any interest in them.

Remember that for over 2,000 years, the Jewish people had lost their homeland and were dispersed throughout the world. The succeeding Jewish generations passed on the knowledge of their homeland to their offspring. For more than 2,000 years, parents transmitted the memory of Jerusalem and Israel to their children and they in turn passed it on to their children, and so on. They did not forget their roots and history while living in exile in Russia, Europe and elsewhere. They repeatedly told their children and grandchildren, "next year in Jerusalem!" Two thousand years later, when the opportunity arose

to recover their lands, they took advantage of it and realized their long-held dream. Palestinians, who were and still are forcefully displaced from their lands, are in a similar situation. They too are struggling to keep their dream alive and are proclaiming the right of return to their ancestral homes.

If Jewish people can keep their dream of returning to their homeland for 2,000 years, why can't Armenians keep their dream alive of returning to Artsakh and Western Armenia someday? Armenians should tell their children and grandchildren: 'next year in Shushi' and 'next year in Van'.

The question is: how can Armenians return to their lands someday if powerful enemies are occupying Artsakh and Western Armenia? We should not forget that nothing remains constant forever. There is not a single country in the world that has had the same boundaries since the beginning of history. Over the years, some countries have enlarged their borders, while others lost their territories. Some have become large empires, while others have disappeared from the face of the earth. But one thing is clear: No one can claim that today's boundaries of Azerbaijan and Turkey will remain the same forever. Just 100 years ago, the vast and powerful Ottoman Empire was reduced to the much smaller territory of the Republic of Turkey. Even though it is not possible to predict the exact date when the boundaries of Azerbaijan and Turkey will change, they will certainly not remain the same. How will such changes come about? There are several scenarios, such as regional wars, even world war, civil war, and nuclear or other types of disasters. Such events have happened in the past and will surely happen again in the future.

When changes on the ground do take place, will future generations of Armenians know and have the memory that Artsakh and Western Armenia are part of their historic homeland or will they be clueless, having never heard of Shushi and Van? If they are deprived of that knowledge, when opportunities arise in the future, even if an unlikely benevolent Azeri or Turkish leader returns those lands to our grandchildren, they will not be interested in them, since they had never heard of them.

In conclusion, my advice is to keep the dream alive. While we are deprived of our lands due to the actions of our enemies, it is up to us not to lose the memory and dream of someday returning to our lands. Let's pass on our demands to future generations. The enemy took away our lands, but did not and cannot take away our memory. By forgetting about our historic lands, we ourselves will be helping our enemies put the final stone on the grave of our cause!

Desperation for Peace Is the Best Guarantor of War

By Michael Rubin
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Talks continue quietly between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his Armenian counterpart Armen Grigoryan as the Biden administration seeks to conclude within months, if not weeks, a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken's motives are not altruistic. Both entered office with grand diplomatic ambitions: reconciliation with Iran, peace in Afghanistan, and an end to entanglements in the Middle East. Today, the Middle East is in flames and the Afghanistan remains a stain on America's reputation. In addition, the White House managed twice to be on the wrong side of the Ukraine War: First, Sullivan sought to convince Volodyrmyr Zelensky to flee into exile. Zelensky refused but as Ukrainians defied the odds and intelligence assessments, the White House scrambled to prevent any Ukrainian action that might cause Putin to lose too much face.

The current rush for peace in the South Caucasus fits a pattern in which incumbents rush initiatives as elections approach in order to redefine personal legacies. It is not just President Joe Biden. As the public turned on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, President George W. Bush rushed separate peace processes with North Korea and the Palestinians. Likewise, as Benghazi threatened to overshadow Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's legacy, she suddenly revived and rushed a flawed Somalia political process that now threatens to drag the Horn of Africa into war.

Peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan are advanced. Rather than agree on specific borders, Sullivan has proposed both sides agree on how many square kilometers Armenia and Azerbaijan will be, an idea that theoretically bypasses disputes over maps and the difficulties of demarcating borders. Such a formula would also facilitate eventual land swaps, especially among the many enclaves that former Soviet Premier Joseph

Stalin created.

Biden, Sullivan, and Blinken may want a quick deal, but there are three reasons why Armenia should not allow Washington to bully it to achieve one. First, too often, the State Department seeks to force concessions from democracies like Armenia, Cyprus, Israel or Ukraine because it is easier than forcing dictators to bend. Second, to be an even broker, the State Department inadvertently encourages extremism as dictators make ridiculous claims believing American mediators will split the difference. Finally, too many American diplomats still believe parties enter negotiations sincerely, rather than as a means to delay and distract.

THE CURRENT RUSH FOR PEACE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS FITS A PATTERN IN WHICH INCUMBENTS RUSH INITIATIVES AS ELECTIONS APPROACH IN ORDER TO REDEFINE PERSONAL LEGACIES.

Armenians are pro-peace, but peace must bring security. Armenian negotiators should demand the United States recognize both Armenia's borders and its total size. Russian President Vladimir Putin explained his inaction in the face of Azerbaijani aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh with reference to the 1991 Almaty Declaration in which the newly-independent states recognized both the "territorial integrity of each other and inviolability of the existing borders." Azerbaijan applauded. But if the Almaty Declaration is immutable, then Washington should not only demand the immediate withdrawal of all Azerbaijani forces from Armenian territory, but also recognize the Armenia-Azerbaijan frontier as laid out by the 1975 Soviet General Staff map. These should be prerequisites before negotiations begin rather than agenda items.

Both Armenia and the United States have ample reason to doubt Azerbaijani sincerity in negotiations. The

backstory to Acting Assistant Secretary of State Yuri Kim's September 14, 2023 declaration before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "We will not tolerate any attack on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh" just days before the Biden administration did just that was that she and Blinken believed Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's private assurances that he planned no military operations.

Given Aliyev's frequent lies, it is imperative that the United States guarantee Armenia a qualitative military edge over Azerbaijan. There are two ways to achieve this. First, the United States can augment weaponry available to Armenia. Concerns about leakage to Russia have little merit given both that Russia has already captured much the same weaponry from Ukraine and such concerns do not prevent weapons sales to India. Rather, the Pentagon can do as France does and deploy personnel to supervise the status and handling of such weapons platforms. Second, the United States should use diplomatic pressure to end Israel and Turkey's supply of high-end drones and weaponry to Azerbaijan. That Israel seeks an emergency supplemental from the U.S. Congress to help it defend itself from Hamas should only enhance American insistence that Israel keep Israeli weaponry inside Israel. Likewise, Turkey should receive no new aircraft so long as it arms Aliyev.

Finally, peace will be meaningless if Armenia's economy is left to wither on the vine. The end of Turkey and Azerbaijan's blockade must be hardwired into any peace agreement, with the United States and France — not Russia and Turkey — in charge of the customs systems and information sharing at the root of seamless travel from the Turkish-Armenian frontier to the Black Sea and onward.

Too often, the Armenian government acts passively as other powers impose disadvantageous terms upon it. That was the case after the November 2020 ceasefire Putin crafted as well as last September's end to the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Armenia's government should not allow Biden, Sullivan, or Blinken to act like Putin. Rather, democracies and allies should have each other's backs. Peace is crucial to the region's future, but it must be real, based on Armenia's security and economic needs and not simply on Washington political calculations.

(Michael Rubin is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.)



Los Angeles Celebrates TUMO Center’s Groundbreaking

NORTH HOLLYWOOD, Calif. (West-side Current) — Los Angeles city officials on Monday, February 12, celebrated the groundbreaking of the first TUMO Technology Learning Center in the United States.

TUMO, originally founded in Armenia, is a free-of-charge educational program that aims to maximize teens’ learning by building skills and self- confidence. The program offers educational and training opportunities in 14 different subjects, including music, filmmaking, robotics and 3D modeling.

“The creation of TUMO in the east San Fernando Valley will bring much needed creative and educational resources to low-income youth and teenagers that would otherwise not be exposed to the fantastic learning opportunities that TUMO creates,” Los Angeles City Council Pres-

ident Paul Krekorian said in a statement. “This center will shape the next generation of creative leaders that will keep our entertainment industry strong and thriving.”

During a morning conference, Mayor Karen Bass joined Krekorian, as well as former Assemblyman Adrin Nazarian and Sam Simonian, founder of TUMO, at the future site of TUMO LA, located at 4146 Lankershim Blvd. in North Hollywood.

“We are committed to empowering Los Angeles’ next generation of youth to gain skills that will prepare them for jobs in the technology industry,” Bass said in a statement.

She added, “This center will allow Los Angeles youth to maximize their potential by discovering their passions for creative technologies and building the cutting-edge skills essential for navigating the ev-



From left, Paul Krekorian, Karen Bass, Adrin Nazarian



From left, TUMO founder Sam Simonian, Mayda Kuredjian, Sylva Simonian, LA City Council President Paul Krekorian, and Shahnour Hovsepien. Kuredjian and Hovsepien participated as representatives of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

er-evolving digital world.”

According to Krekorian’s office, the center is expected to open in December 2024. It be located at an existing three-floor office space that requires remodeling.

The center was made possible through a \$23.25 million dollar grant from the state, secured by Nazarian. Additionally, \$3 million in federal funds also contributed to the project, thanks to efforts from Krekorian.

Last week, the L.A. City Council approved a motion seeking to allocate another \$2.5 million to create an amphitheater on the building’s roof.

Nazarian, who formerly represented parts of the east San Fernando Valley, said he was proud to support the TUMO center.

“The TUMO Technology Learning Center focuses on placing teenagers, aged 12 to 18 years, in control of their learning experiences and enabling them to unlock their full potential by identifying their passions and equipping them with the skills necessary to shape their future,” Nazarian said in a statement. “This center will create life-changing experiences for our children and build the next generation of leaders for our communities.”

Weightlifter Grigoryan Named Europe Champion



SOFIA (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian weightlifter Alexandra Grigoryan, 19, was crowned champion at the European Weightlifting Championships under way in Sofia, Bulgaria on February 13.

The Armenian snatched the gold in the 55 kg category with a total result of 196 kg. She also won a small gold medal in the clean and jerk event.

European bronze medalist Isabela Yailyan was the second in the same weight category. won the 7th place in the doubles with a result of 180 kg.

LETTERS

Thank You TCA Metro Los Angeles for Syria Program

To the Editor:

A big thank you to our friends in the Tekeyan Cultural Association’s Metro Los Angeles Chapter, among them Mihran Toumajan, for this important presentation by Damascus’ own Mrs. Sevan Boghos-Deirbadrossian, a name that rings a bell to so many Damascus Armenians in the Greater Washington, DC area.

Special thanks to Mrs Deirbadrossian for all the “ blood, sweat and tears” that she put

into this important reserach of Near East and Armenian diaspora history.

I take this opportunity to salute our distinguished compatriot, fellow Washingtonian, dear friend and native of Damascus, Jack Guiragossian, and thank him for his exemplary service to the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian nation over many years. Abris, Jack !

Noris Balabanian
Chevy Chase, Md.

Will Turkey Present Additional Preconditions to Armenia?

PRECONDITIONS, from page 18

official anthem contain words about the “enemy” and the anthem must be changed too. Now try to imagine the British Empire setting a precondition for the United States to edit its Declaration of Independence before recognizing the independence of the United States back in 1785, or to change the Constitution and abandon the patriotic song written by Francis Scott Key on September 14, 1814, during the War of 1812 with Great Britain before reestablishment

of diplomatic relations after the War of 1812. Would it not be absurd?

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