

Aliyev, Pashinyan Meet in Germany

MUNICH (Combined Sources) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Munich on Saturday, February 17, for talks hosted by Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Scholz, who also held separate meetings with Aliyev and Pashinyan earlier in the day, tweeted that “both sides agreed to resolve open issues without new violence.” He said he reaffirmed Germany’s and the European Union’s readiness to make more peace efforts.

An Armenian government statement on the trilateral meeting said Aliyev and Pashinyan agreed to “continue the work on a peace treaty” between their countries. It announced no other understandings reached by them.

The Azerbaijani news agency APA reported that Scholz left the meeting room about an hour after the start of the negotiations and they continued in a bilateral format. It said Aliyev and Pashinyan instructed their foreign ministers, who were also present at the meeting, to “continue negotiations” on the peace treaty and the delimitation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The Armenian side did not immediately issue a statement on the bilateral discussions.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz hosts talks between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Munich, February 17, 2024.

Azerbaijan had for months refused to hold further Western-mediated talks with Armenia, accusing the European Union and the United States of pro-Armenian bias and seeking direct contacts between the two conflicting sides.

By contrast, Yerevan insisted on continued Western mediation which has also been strongly criticized by Russia. It accused Baku of walking away from

understandings reached by Aliyev and Pashinyan during their earlier encounters organized by the EU.

Azerbaijan criticized Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and again demanded major legislative changes in Armenia on Monday two days after his talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hosted by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Munich.

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Making Sense Of Armenia’s Quagmire

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — The stakes for Armenia seem to be high, less than four years after the disastrous second Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) war in 2020, this time waged unilaterally and with lightning speed by Azerbaijan, resulting in not only ethnic cleansing and the reclamation of Artsakh and the lands that victorious Armenia had held as an insurance policy, but an incursion of more than 200 kilometers (124 miles) by Azerbaijani forces into Armenia proper.

And this victory seems to have only whetted their appetite for more in Azerbaijan.

Prof. Anna Ohanyan, Professor of Political Science and the Richard B. Finnegan Distinguished Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Stone Hill College in Easton, Mass., in a recent interview offered some insights about the situation. Ohanyan, a native of Armenia, has written and edited several volumes on the Caucasus and the role of Russia. In an extensive interview last week, she offered her insightful analysis of the perils and opportunities Armenia is facing, as well as a new post-Ukraine era in the region.



Changed Orientation

Since the end of the 44-Day War in 2020, Armenia’s government seems to be shifting its orientation toward the West, with a particular soft spot for France, rather than Russia and its subsidiary defense collaboratives, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which did not lift a finger to help Armenia when it was attacked.

Ohanyan said it is better to characterize such a foreign policy change as a tilt rather than a pivot.

“I would describe it as a tilt or strategic tilt, diversification of its foreign policy. And it’s overdue. I am really excited about that,” she said.

Instead, she explained, what happened in the immediate post-USSR period marked a pivot. “The pivoting was happening in the 1990s. Both Georgia and Ukraine integrated their demographic transitions and were heavily geopoliticized. Not only the West and Russia were kind of forcing it and pushing it ...

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Armenian PM Admits ‘Tensions’ With Iran, As He Meets with Blinken, MI6 Chief

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan appears to have acknowledged that Armenia’s deepening ties with the European Union and the United States are causing unease in neighboring Iran.

“Our relations with Iran are deep and Armenia remains committed to those relations,” Pashinyan said during a weekend visit to Germany. “But this is one of those cases where not everything is clear.”

“Our good relations with Iran are causing tensions in some places, while our good relations with other countries are causing tensions in Iran,” he added without elaborating.

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Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan in Iran, meeting with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi

(ARSHALUYS BARSEGHYAN PHOTO)



Protests outside the Russian Embassy in Yerevan

Anger and Grief as Russians in Armenia And Georgia Mourn Navalny’s Death

By Tata Shoshiashvili and Arshaluys Barseghyan

Hundreds of protesters gathered in Armenia and Georgia following the announcement by Russian authorities that the Russian opposition leader, Aleksey Navalny, had died in prison.

The Russian Penitentiary Service announced that Navalny, who survived poisoning with the Russian nerve agent Novichok before he was imprisoned in 2021, had died on Friday, February 16.

Demonstrations marked by tears and anger were organized by Russians in Tbilisi, Batumi and Yerevan on Friday evening, just hours after the news broke.

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Pashinyan Thanks EU for Monitors

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Stefano Tomat, Commander of Civil Operations of the European Union External Action Service on February 19.

He welcomed Tomat's visit to Armenia and highlighted the activities of the EU civilian mission on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Nikol Pashinyan noted that the effective operation of the mission contributes to ensuring peace and stability in the region.

Pashinyan and Tomat referred to the results of the EU observation mission and issues related to its future activities.

Both sides emphasized the importance of continuous development of Armenia-EU multi-sectoral cooperation.

Armenian, Brazilian Officials Meet

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Armenian and Brazilian foreign ministries held political consultations in Brasilia on February 19.

The talks were chaired by Deputy Foreign Minister Paruyr Hovhannisyan and Foreign Ministry Secretary General Maria Laura da Rocha.

The two discussed readiness to intensify political dialogue, expand the legal-contractual framework, and further develop the trade-economic and interparliamentary ties was underscored.

The officials also discussed partnership within the framework of international organizations.

Ex-Minister Put Under House Arrest

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A court in Yerevan allowed law-enforcement authorities to put former Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan under house arrest on February 16, one day after indicting him in an ongoing corruption investigation.

Kerobyan, who spent the night in custody, denied the accusations of abuse of power leveled against him and said he will appeal against the court's decision when he spoke to journalists in the courtroom. He said he is not allowed to comment on the details of the criminal case.

The accusations stem from a procurement tender organized by the Armenian Ministry of Economy last year. Another Armenian court in June invalidated the ministry's decision to declare a major software company, Synergy International Systems, the winner of the tender. The decision followed a lawsuit filed by another bidder that set a much smaller price for its services.

The Investigative Committee said on February 15 that Kerobyan and four other ministry officials rigged the tender in a bid to grant a \$1 million procurement contract to Synergy "at any cost." It said nothing about the reasons for the allegedly privileged treatment of the US-registered company. None of the five indicted officials have been charged with bribery or embezzlement of public funds.

36th Anniversary of Karabakh Movement Marked in Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama/Panarmenia.net) — February 20 marks the 36th anniversary of the Artsakh movement, which for several decades symbolized the Armenian people's collective will and just aspirations to control their own destiny, as well as their determination to fight for national ideas, said MP Tigran Abrahamyan, the secretary of the opposition Pativ Unem faction.

On February 20, 1988, a special session of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) Council of People's Deputies passed a decision to appeal to the Supreme Councils of the Azerbaijani SSR and Armenian SSR "to demonstrate a sense of deep understanding of the aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and resolve the question of transferring NKAO from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR, at the same time to intercede with the Supreme Council of the USSR to reach a positive resolution on the issue of transferring the region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR."

"On February 20, 1988, the extraordinary session of the NKAO Council of People's Deputies adopted a historic decision expressing the Artsakh people's will for free self-determination and initiating the revival of Artsakh," Abrahamyan wrote on Facebook.

"This path was difficult and thorny, but the idea was so strong that many people gave their own lives on the way to achieve their goal. It created an opportunity for struggle and victory not only for Artsakh, but also for Armenia, as the Azerbaijani attacks targeted not only Artsakh, but also Armenia, from Meghri and Yeraskh to Tavush.

"In these challenging times for the Armenian people, this day should not be an occasion for despair or distress, but a testament that in the toughest times Armenians are able to consolidate around an idea and fight their decisive battle regardless of whether the enemy is inside or outside.

"Today's struggle is also a tribute to all those who sacrificed their lives defending

Artsakh and Armenia," the MP added.

On the same day, former chairman of the Karabakh parliament Artur Tovmasyan said the Nagorno-Karabakh National Assembly will continue to function.

According to Tovmasyan, in order for the Artsakh issue to always remain in the spotlight, it is necessary to have a "powerful Armenia and a powerful Diaspora."

"We have two paths: one is patriotism, the other is current realities. I think that we must be guided by current realities so as not to harm our compatriots in Armenia and Artsakh," Tovmasyan said.

"The National Assembly will function, although we will not make laws, but there will be decisions and statements," he said.

Regarding the return of Artsakh Armenians to their homes, Tovmasyan stated it requires international guarantees to safeguard people against security issues.

"The people of Artsakh cannot return as citizens of Azerbaijan, this is impossible," he added.

Aliyev, Pashinyan Meet in Germany

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The Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders sounded satisfied with the results of the talks, with Aliyev calling them "constructive and useful." Meeting with members of the Armenian community in Munich on Sunday, Pashinyan confirmed that the foreign ministers of the two South Caucasus states will meet soon for further discussions on a bilateral peace treaty.

He also said that both sides remain committed to their understandings on the basic parameters of that treaty reached during their earlier contacts organized by the European Union. Earlier this year, Yerevan accused Baku of walking away from those understandings and laying claim to Armenian territory.

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry said on Monday that Armenia itself has territorial claims to Azerbaijan. The ministry spokesman, Aykhan Hajizade, pointed to Pashinyan's Sunday remark that "Karabakh's right to self-determination is not supported by the international community." He said Pashinyan should have said instead that the Armenian "claims to Azerbaijan's territory are groundless."

"This once again indirectly proves that the demands of the Armenian side are continuing," added Hajizade. "In this regard, the claims to our territorial integrity and sovereignty reflected in the Armenian constitution and legislative acts should be removed."

Aliyev said on February 1 that Armenia should remove from its constitution a reference to its 1990 declaration of independence which in turn mentions a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and the then Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. He reiterated on February 14 that he will not sign the peace treaty "if Armenia does not bring its legislation to a normal state."

Pashinyan rejected those demands the following day. The Armenian premier himself declared last month, before Aliyev's statements on the issue, that Armenia needs a new constitution reflecting the "new geopolitical environment" in the region. He



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz hosts talks between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Munich, February 17, 2024.

went on to criticize the 1990 declaration.

Pashinyan warned that Azerbaijan could be stalling peace talks in order to launch a "full-scale war."

While opening a government session on Thursday, Pashinyan referred to the escalation along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border earlier this week, labelling it 'another manifestation of Azerbaijan's unconstructive policy'.

He said Azerbaijan could be avoiding measures to stabilize the situation on the border to begin military operations 'with the prospect of turning the military escalation into a full-scale war against the Republic of Armenia.'

'This intention can be noticed in all statements and actions from official Baku,' said Pashinyan.

Last week, four Armenian soldiers were killed when Azerbaijan attacked an Armenian position on the border.

During his speech in the aftermath of the attack, Pashinyan said that he had the impression Azerbaijan lacked interest in maintaining border stability, and was pursuing a policy of "give me what I want through negotiation, otherwise I will take it with war."

He said Armenian suggestions, including demarcating the border one section at a time, had been rejected by Baku.

Pashinyan also said on Friday that it was their policy to "do everything possible to prevent such developments" by engaging in active negotiations.

Referring to statements from Azerbaijani officials, Pashinyan said it was "a violation of our country's sovereignty and interference in our country's internal affairs."

He added that Armenia recognized the territorial integrity of all its neighbors and had no goals outside its territory, which he said was their long-term strategy.

Following this week's violence, the Chief of the Russia-centered Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Joint Staff, Colonel General Andrei Serdyukov, stated that the alliance saw "high potential for conflict" on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and that a peace treaty was required to normalize the situation. Serdyukov also accused "individual states" of attempting to strengthen their positions in the South Caucasus, an apparent reference to Armenia's growing ties to Western countries.

(Stories from Azatutyun and OC Media were used to compile this report.)



ARMENIA

AGBU Distributes 14,000 Heaters to Artsakh Families

YEREVAN — Five months after AGBU launched its massive warm meal distribution effort for Artsakh refugees in partnership with World Central Kitchen (WCK), it has expanded its humanitarian outreach with a warm winter initiative. With the distribution of 14,000 portable space heaters in January alone, 60,000 displaced individuals can find added comfort in their new dwellings.

“Now, as the seasonal frost sets in, especially in the regions of Armenia, we are rushing to lend another helping hand to ease the day-to-day burdens of the Artsakh community,” explained AGBU Director of Humanitarian Programs Inessa Margaryan, based in Yerevan.

Margaryan went on to say, “When the humanitarian crisis started last September, we prioritized food insecurity by preparing over 400,000 warm meals and 28,000 food boxes for those who had endured dire living conditions and malnutrition for over nine months prior to Azerbaijan’s final phase of ethnic cleansing in Artsakh. Now that many evacuees are situated in various types of shelters, many with inadequate heating, the need for supplementary sources of warmth is more acute.”

Distribution centers are organized in collaboration with local municipalities and town halls across Armenia, where beneficiaries can pick up the heaters on a first-come, first-served basis. Among the beneficiaries is 44-year-old Liana Israelyan from Stepanakert. She expressed her gratitude for AGBU’s efforts, saying, “We are a family of 12, and the new place is extremely cold. The heaters help us withstand the winter.”

Between November 29 and February 3, 25 volunteers from all around the world joined forces through AGBU ACT (Armenians Come Together), a service program that attracts diaspora Armenians who wish to help uplift Armenian lives through humanitarian expeditions. The volunteers helped distribute some of the heaters during two sessions of ACT.

ACT participant Stacey Terterian from the U.S. shared her thoughts: “It is deeply rewarding for me to have the chance to engage with these families, to hear their stories, and demonstrate to them that they are not alone during this critical time in their lives. I believe we provide them not just physical aid in the form of tangible goods, but also the warmth of human interaction



At the heater distribution (Kamo Vardanyan Photo)

and compassion.”

Due to the outpouring of donations to the AGBU Global Relief Fund, the organization not only has the capacity to provide practical solutions to evolving needs on the ground, but also to implement a multifaceted approach to sustainable settlement for

Artsakh Armenians in Armenia. This currently includes free health care and mental health assessments, job placement assistance, adult education and skills training, plus therapeutic retreats for traumatized children and their parents at AGBU Camp Nairi.

Another Armenian Bank Set to Change Hands

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A leading Georgian bank announced on Monday, February 19, a \$303.6-million deal to buy Armenia’s Ameriabank partly owned by Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian billionaire jailed in Azerbaijan after a sham trial along with several other former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The deal requires the approval of the

Bank of Georgia’s multiple shareholders and the Central Bank of Armenia. In a statement, the bank’s British-registered parent company, Bank of Georgia Group (BOGG), said it would “significantly enhance the Group’s presence and growth opportunities within a fast-growing and attractive market.”

“This transaction is a significant mile-

stone for the Group and a new chapter in our strategic development,” the BOGG chairman, Mel Carvill, was quoted as saying.

“Ameriabank has a well-regarded and experienced management team, and I am delighted that they will stay on after the transaction is closed,” added Carvill.

Ameriabank is one of Armenia’s largest

banks with total assets worth \$3.4 billion, compared with \$11.7 billion held by the Bank of Georgia. Vardanyan owns, through a trust fund, almost 49 percent of Ameriabank, making him its biggest shareholder.

The tycoon, who had made his fortune in Russia, briefly served as Karabakh’s premier in late 2022 and early 2023. He and seven other former political and military leaders of Karabakh were arrested by Azerbaijani security services last September during the mass exodus of the region’s ethnic Armenian population which followed an Azerbaijani military offensive. Armenia has demanded their immediate release.

“Ruben Vardanyan has nothing to do with the possible sale of the bank,” Mesrop Arakelian, an Armenian opposition figure linked to him, wrote on Facebook.

Arakelian said takeover talks between BOGG and Ameriabank began in 2022. But he did not clarify whether Vardanyan approved the resulting acquisition of his bank.

Ameriabank is the second Armenian bank which will likely change hands in the coming weeks or months. Two weeks ago, HSBC, Europe’s biggest bank, announced the sale of its Armenian subsidiary to Ardshinbank, the largest in Armenia.

HSBC said the deal, also subject to Armenian regulatory approvals, stems from its “strategy to redeploy capital from less strategic or low-connectivity businesses into higher-growth opportunities globally.” Reuters reported last May that the British bank is considering a possible exit from as many as a dozen countries after earlier announcements about selling off parts or all of its activities in France, Canada, Russia and Greece.

Established in 1996, HSBC Armenia is the only local commercial bank controlled by a major Western banking group.

The 18 banks operating in Armenia nearly tripled their combined profits, to a record 253 billion drams (\$626 million), in 2022 amid a dramatic increase in cash flows from Russia resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The figure reportedly fell by 9 percent in 2023.

Armenian PM Admits ‘Tensions’ With Iran, Meets with Blinken

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In recent months, Iranian leaders have repeatedly told their Armenian counterparts that Tehran strongly opposes the geopolitical presence of “extra-regional countries” in the South Caucasus. Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi conveyed the same message to Armenia’s Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan as recently as on February 15. Any intervention of “outsiders” in regional disputes could only exacerbate, rather than resolve, them, Raisi said in a clear reference to the US and the EU.

This was interpreted by some Armenian commentators as a fresh warning to Yerevan which has been seeking closer security ties with the Western powers amid its unprecedented tensions with Russia. The latter has openly denounced Western efforts to broker an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal, saying that their main aim is to drive Moscow out of the region.

Both Russia and Iran have criticized Armenia for hosting a US-Armenian military exercise last September. The Islamic Republic is also believed to share Russian concerns about the EU’s monitoring mission along Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan launched a year ago.

Pashinyan and his political team say they are “diversifying” Armenia’s traditional foreign and security policy in response to what they see as Russia’s failure to meet its security commitments to its South Caucasus ally.

Armenian opposition groups say Tehran’s stance is another reason why Yerevan should exercise caution in its dealings with



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meet in Munich, February 17, 2024.

the West. They argue that unlike the West, Iran could intervene militarily to prevent Azerbaijan from opening an extraterritorial corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave through Syunik, the only Armenian region bordering the Islamic Republic.

Iran regularly warns against attempts to strip it of the common border and transport links with Armenia.

In Munich, Pashinyan met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with the head of Britain’s foreign intelligence agency, Richard Moore.

In a one-sentence statement on the meeting, Pashinyan’s press office said nothing about the agenda or other details of their conversation.

Moore, who runs the Secret Intelligence

Service (SIS) also known as MI6, previously met with Pashinyan during a surprise visit to Yerevan in December 2022. The Armenian government said at the time that they discussed “processes taking place in the South Caucasus.”

The British spy chief flew to the Armenian capital four days after meeting with Armen Grigoryan, the pro-Western secretary of Armenia’s Security Council, in London. Shortly after that visit, Pashinyan’s government pushed through the parliament a bill on the creation of an Armenian foreign intelligence service.

US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns visited Armenia and held talks with Pashinyan in July 2022. Few details of those talks were made public.



ARMENIA



The rock-hewn tomb in Ohanavan

Medieval Rock-Hewn Tomb Discovered in Armenia's Ohanavan

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — A medieval rock-hewn tomb has been uncovered in the area of Ohanavan community, the Kasakh Gorge, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport reported on February 15.

A resident of the village discovered the monument when he was digging on his property.

The incident was recorded by the Aragatsotn regional service of the Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum-Reserves SNOG and the work was halted.

The necessity of handing over the archaeological objects to the state and the need for urgent excavations were discussed. The newly discovered monument will be certified in the near future.

Specialists of the Historical and Cultural Monuments Protection Department of the Ministry of Culture, the Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum-Reserves and the Historical and Cultural Heritage Scientific Research Center toured the site of the newly discovered tomb and a number of other historical and cultural monuments.

Pashinyan Calls Out Russia, Azerbaijan at Munich Press Conference

MUNICH (Armenpress) — On February 19, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan took part in a press conference with members of the local Armenian community after participating in the Munich Security Conference. He addressed a variety of issues, including Russian inaction during the Karabakh war, Azerbaijani aggression and the state of the Armenian refugees fleeing their homes in Karabakh (Artsakh).

He blamed the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh for failing to protect the Armenians there.

“Article 9 of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement doesn't contain anything on any corridor through Armenia, it's impossible to find it,” Pashinyan said, speaking about the Azeri narrative on the so-called Zangezur corridor and the 2020 ceasefire agreement. “There is nothing about some other country controlling any territory of Armenia. It is about the regional connections. You are aware that we developed and proposed the Crossroads of Peace project in order to fully present our stance. That's our vision.”

Speaking about dangers, he said that the narrative used by Azeri leader Ilham Aliyev is a signal on present dangers.

“How should we withstand these dangers? First of all this should be managed in our international relations. What's one of the reasons behind creating the Crossroads of Peace project? Azerbaijan was trying to create an impression that we don't want to provide a road to anyone. What's being talk-

ed about is that Russia is supposed to control something in our territory, and there's no such thing in article 9, not to mention all the remaining articles of the trilateral statement which were basically torn and thrown away by Azerbaijan and Russia. Referring to article 9 is no longer relevant because both Russia and Azerbaijan have completely violated their obligations under the remaining articles, no Armenians are left in Nagorno-Karabakh today. And this is also the responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh, the goal of which was supposed to be the protection of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh,” Pashinyan said.

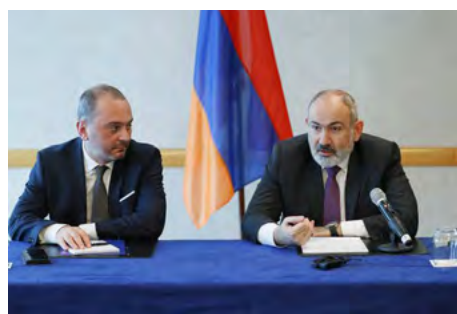
He noted that his government wouldn't want to see the forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh leave Armenia in case they don't have a desire or opportunity to return to their homes.

Pashinyan has also unveiled a new housing program for the forcibly displaced persons.

More than 100,000 forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh found shelter in Armenia after the September 2023 Azeri attack.

He was asked on the government's plans regarding the refugees, and whether the forcibly displaced persons would return to Nagorno-Karabakh or stay in Armenia.

“Our vision is as follows: if they don't have a realistic opportunity to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, it is our policy to do everything for them to stay in Armenia. Our



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressing members of the Armenian community in Munich on February 19

Western, foreign partners strongly encourage the fact that the government of Armenia was able to take in over one hundred thousand people within a week, and take them in without refugee camps. Secondly, we can say that most of the children now go to school. As of December 31, 2023, 10,000 forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh had already found employment in Armenia. This is good, but this isn't all, because this is perhaps thirty percent of the total number of employable people [displaced from NK]. All pensioners receive their pensions, and we are planning to launch a housing program soon, and we've made two important conclusions during its debates: first, this project must be accessible also for the citizens of Armenia, second, our brothers and sisters who were forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, who would want to use this program, would have to obtain citizenship of Armenia [as a

mandatory requirement of the program],” Pashinyan said.

He also addressed Russia's war on Ukraine, stressing Armenia is not Russia's ally in the conflict.

“The situation is difficult, and so is our stance,” Pashinyan said.

He added that the Alma-Ata Declaration is the basis for recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of the republics that gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“We recognize the Alma-Ata Declaration, but it's not just for us. Thirteen Soviet republics have acknowledged the Alma-Ata Declaration, including Russia and Ukraine. By the way, they are the ones who initiated it, because Russia, Ukraine and Belarus decided with the Belovezha Accords that the Soviet Union no longer exists, and that they become independent states and recognize each other's borders. Our perception in the matter of Ukraine is that the basis for recognizing the independence and territorial integrity of the republics is the Alma-Ata Declaration. In our logic, the same should apply in case of Ukraine, because that document pertains to us all. And if we tear it down, then we tear everything down. I've said this for a long time: Armenia is not Russia's ally in the matter of Ukraine, and this is our sincere stance. I said this for the first time two years ago, and we very much regret that we can't have any impact on that situation. The Ukrainian people are a friendly people to us,” Pashinyan said.



INTERNATIONAL

Ambassador Balayan Says Azerbaijan Ramping up Arms Purchases

By Rina Zhubi

BRUSSELS (Brussels Signal) — Azerbaijan is buying drones and military equipment from abroad amid heightened tensions with Armenia, a senior diplomat has claimed.

Speaking to Brussels Signal, Tigran Balayan, Armenia’s ambassador to the European Union, said on February 19 that his country has tracked suspected munitions purchases which have reportedly come in on military flights from countries including Israel and Turkey. These deliveries are suspected to include drones.

“Sixty percent or 70 percent of Azer-

baijani military hardware comes from Israel, then Turkey,” he said during an interview with Justin Stares, head of news at Brussels Signal.

He also noted that there had been increased military flights from Serbia, which, he said, had “just announced the agreement about selling some sophisticated artillery equipment to Azerbaijan.”



Ambassador Tigran Balayan

Elchin Amirbayov, envoy of Azerbaijan’s President Aliyev, tells Brussels Signal that Armenia has “violated the ceasefire” between the two nations after one of its snipers “heavily wounded” an Azerbaijani border guard.

(Watch the whole interview at <https://t.co/2ySaF36oBa> pic.twitter.com/9IwW-ZX5B4S)

Balayan’s claims come after a fatal border skirmishes between Azerbaijan and Armenia which left four Armenian soldiers dead and one Azerbaijani border guard injured.

The ambassador blamed Azerbaijan for the attack, speculating that it was in response to increased Armenian cooperation with the European Union.

“That [attack] was a message, not only to Armenia, but also to Brussels,” Balayan said, noting that the incident took place several hours before an EU-Armenia Partnership Council meeting.

The attack represented an explicit “challenge” to EU “authority” in the region.

According to the Armenian ambassador, Azerbaijan has no intention to end the conflict with Armenia.

“Despite all the warning calls, Azerbaijan didn’t stop its aggressive rhetoric, aggressive actions, killing, and provocation,” he said.

The violence follows Azerbaijan seizing control of Nagorno-Karabakh last year. The three-day conflict saw the deaths of hundreds of soldiers, as well as the mass exodus of tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians from the region.



Azeri drone purchased from Israel

Anger and Grief as Russians in Armenia And Georgia Mourn Navalny’s Death

NALVANY, from page 1

In Yerevan, protesters gathered near the Russian embassy, after police prevented them from approaching the building.

The crowds chanted Navalny’s name, anti-war and anti-Putin slogans, “Russia will be free,” and more.

“I’m angry; I’m mostly angry, then sad,” one demonstrator named Nikolay told OC Media, adding that he was grateful that in Armenia he was able to express his feelings openly.

“We expected it, but the feelings are still anger, rage, grief,” said another demonstrator, Mikhail Yershov.

“We learned today with great sorrow about the terrible news that Navalny was killed in prison,” said another demonstrator, Darina Mayadskaya. “We could not stay home, and I think everyone else here realized that they needed to express their condolences and support to each other,” she added. “To me, as to many people, this seems like a last desperate step, appearing only in terrifying nightmares.”

In Tbilisi, a demonstration was held outside the Russian Interests Section at the Swiss Embassy. Georgia severed diplomatic relations with Russia after the 2008 August War.

One protester who asked to remain anonymous told OC Media that Navalny’s death came as a shock to her.

“What brought me [here]? It’s shock, because everything has its limits,” she said. “We Russians endure for a very long time, but there is some point of no return.”

She said that she was worried for the fate of other political prisoners in Russia.

“Navalny felt great just yesterday; on February 12 he met his mother and looked good, joked and so on. This simply means that he was killed, like Boris Nemtsov,” she said.

Boris Nemtsov was a liberal politician and ardent critic of Vladimir Putin who was gunned down in the street near the Kremlin in Moscow in 2015.

Political Reactions

Following news of Navalny’s death, Western leaders, including America’s Biden, the EU’s [Charles Michel](#), and Germany’s [Scholz](#), were quick to point the finger at Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Despite the growing rift between Armenia and Russia, Armenian authorities have so far remained silent, as have those in Azerbaijan.

In Georgia, President Salome Zurbishvili was quick to [speak out](#), calling Navalny’s death a “tragedy for all democracy and human rights defenders.”

The ruling Georgian Dream party, however, were less explicit. Asked by journalists if Navalny was the latest victim of Putin, Mamuka Mdinardze, the party’s parliamentary leader, answered that “of course” he was, before going on to speak about Georgia’s opposition.

“We should not forget that it reminds us, also very unfortunately, of the hundreds of prisoners who died in our prison before 2012,” he said.

Confronted by journalists, the speaker of

parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, [said](#) only that he “cannot have any comments on this issue.”

Opposition leaders in Georgia were more outspoken.

The [United National Movement](#) issued a statement praising Navalny for returning “to fight against Putin’s dictatorship and murderous regime” despite the danger to his life. “Putin is cowardly eliminating all his political opponents, thus killing any prospects of democracy in Russia,” they wrote.

The party’s founder, former president Mikheil Saakashvili, who is serving a [prison](#) sentence for abuse of power, [wrote](#): “Navalny is gone. Am I the next one on Putin’s death row?”

“I often disagreed with him, and Putin often compared us and hated both of us equally,” he added.

The leader of the opposition Droa Party, [Elene Khoshtaria](#), wrote on X that Navalny’s death was a “testament to the true, brutal, callous nature of #Russia and #Putin.”

Giorgi Gakharia, a former Prime Minister and now leader of the For Georgia [party](#), expressed condolence to Navalny’s family and friends writing that his death in prison was a “poignant symbol of #Russia’s enduring modernized #totalitarianism.”

“It kills, both at home and abroad. It is danger to both human and international security,” he wrote.

(This article originally appeared on the website OC Media on February 17.)

INTERNATIONAL

Aliyev Calls for Officially Abolishing OSCE Minsk Group

MUNICH (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on February 17 raised the issue of officially abolish the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which had been established to help negotiate a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Aliyev discussed the matter with the chairman-in-office of OSCE, Malta Foreign Minister Ian Borg, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

Aliyev noted the importance of the official abolition of a number of mechanisms within the OSCE that he described as “relics of the past”, including the OSCE Minsk Group, the High-Level Planning Committee and the institution of the personal representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

France Impounds Suspected Gazprom-linked Villa

PARIS (AFP) — France has impounded a luxurious villa suspected of belonging to Russian energy giant Gazprom as part of a money-laundering investigation, Paris prosecutors said on February 19.

Estimated at around 120 million euros (\$132 million), Villa Maria Irina — previously known as Villa del Mare — is one of the most opulent mansions on the French Riviera.

The French daily *Le Monde* said it was the French authorities’ biggest haul since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led the West to slap multiple rounds of sanctions against Moscow.

According to prosecutors, a Russian-Armenian tycoon, Samvel Karapetyan, who bought the villa in 2010, is believed to have acted in Gazprom’s interests.

“There is evidence that suggests that successive acquisition plans for the villa were carried out in the name of various companies, whose indirect ownership would amount to making Gazprom the effective beneficiary,” the Paris prosecutor’s office said.

The villa and the shares in its ownership company were seized on February 12.

Aivazovsky’s ‘Lunar Night’ Auctioned in Russia

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Ivan Aivazovsky’s painting “Lunar Night” has been auctioned in Russia, fetching 92 million rubles (around \$1 million).

At the start of the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014, it was transferred to the Simferopol Art Museum alongside more than 50 other paintings.

The Russians’ plans to auction Aivazovsky’s painting were announced by Gunduz Mammadov, ex-deputy of the Prosecutor General and former prosecutor of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, on Twitter (X), Ukrayinska Pravda reports.



INTERNATIONAL

How France Became the Target of Azerbaijan's Smear Campaign

By Sébastien Seibt

PARIS (France 24) — Azerbaijan's February 7 presidential election, which handed President Ilham Aliyev an unsurprising and unopposed victory with 92% of the vote and a fifth term in office, provided the backdrop for the latest illustration of deteriorating Franco-Azerbaijani relations.

For the first time in at least a decade, there were no French elected representatives or independent observers on the team of international observers monitoring the vote. As Aliyev tightens his grip on power and the country's electoral system, there were fewer West European nationals on the international monitoring team. But a few German, Austrian, Spanish and Italian nationals did make it on the observer mission.

Escalating Tensions

The absence of a French presence on the observer team is the result of a disaccord between France and Azerbaijan. French parliamentarians who have visited the former Soviet republic in the past as election observers no longer want to hear about it. "When you have a president who systematically gets elected with over 80% of the vote, I wouldn't call that free and fair elections," said Claude Kern, senator from France's eastern Bas-Rhin region, who was part of the French delegation for the 2018 presidential election.

Even the Association of Friends of Azerbaijan at the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament, has experienced an exodus of almost all its members in recent months.

Azerbaijan also appears to have closed the door on the few independent French nationals wishing to observe the presidential election on the ground. This was the case with journalist Jean-Michel Brun, who contributes to the websites, "Musulmans de France" and "Gazette du Caucase," two portals with a very pro-Azerbaijani slant.

His candidacy was rejected by Azerbaijani authorities, without explanation, a few days before the election. "Relations with Azerbaijan are so rotten at the moment that they may have decided not to invite any French people," said Brun. When contacted by FRANCE 24 and Forbidden Stories, Azerbaijani authorities did not respond to the reasons for the absence of French observers.

The election observer issue is part of a wider context of escalating bilateral tensions. The month of December was marked by a particularly sharp deterioration: a Frenchman was arrested in Baku and accused of espionage, Azerbaijan then expelled two French diplomats, Paris promptly responded, declaring two Azerbaijani embassy officials persona non grata. The diplomatic tit-for-tat was accompanied by acerbic statements from both sides.

For French nationals in Azerbaijan, the message was clear. "French authorities made us understand that we had to be careful because we could be expelled overnight," confided a Frenchman living in Azerbaijan who did not wish to be named. Despite the strained ties between Paris and Baku, the Frenchman said he was quite satisfied with living conditions in Azerbaijan. When contacted, the French embassy in Azerbaijan did not respond to FRANCE 24 and Forbidden Stories.

The diplomatic deterioration between Azerbaijan and France is a new low, according to experts. "It's the first time we see this kind of development against a European country, a Western country," said Altay Goyushov, a political scientist at the Baku Research Institute, an independent Azerbaijani research center. "This is a completely new development, when a French citizen is arrested on spying charges, it's never happened before," he noted, adding that Azerbaijani authorities have mostly used "these kind of tactics" against the domestic opposition and the media in the past.

A Song against Macron

Historically, it hasn't always been this way. France, like other European countries, has long been the target of what has come to be called "caviar diplomacy." It's a term employed by experts and journalists for over a decade to describe oil-rich Azerbaijan's particularly lavish and distinctive lobbying strategy. The payback, documented in several news reports, includes soft-power wins for Azerbaijan by securing its influence in Europe's political and media worlds.

In the past, France held a special place for Baku's political elites. France is a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, which also includes the US and Russia. Since the early 2000s, Paris has attempted to play a key role, within the Minsk Group, to try to find a diplomatic solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

France was therefore considered an important European power in Baku, one worth wooing. For Azerbaijan, this is particularly important since Baku has long believed the Armenian community in France to be very influential in French power circles, a position echoed by several pro-Azerbaijan figures

interviewed by FRANCE 24 and the Forbidden Stories consortium.

The September 2020 Karabakh war, which resulted in Azerbaijan reclaiming a third of the enclave, marked the beginning of the bilateral break. Two years later, in an interview with France 2 TV station, President Emmanuel Macron declared that France "will never abandon the Armenians."

The French president's avowal was viewed as a diplomatic slap by Baku. "It was very frustrating for Ilham Aliyev, who wants to be able to impose his demands on a weak Armenia, which is not the case if Yerevan thinks it can count on French support," noted Goyushov.

This French support began to take shape after French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna's October 2023 visit to Armenia when she announced that "France has given its agreement to the conclusion of future contracts with Armenia which will enable the delivery of military equipment to Armenia so that it can ensure its defense." The announcement sparked disapproval from Aliyev, who accused France of "preparing the ground [for] new wars."

Azerbaijan then began a diplomatic shift that increasingly resembled a 180-degree turn.

The tone was first set by a song performed on public television and soberly titled, *Emmanuel*. Broadcast a week after Macron's France 2 interview, the lyrics featured criticisms levelled at the French president — accusing him of "betraying his promises," for instance — while children punctuated each verse, singing "Emmanuel" in chorus.

It was a very public display of Azerbaijan's new disaffection for France. Official accusations — such as the one frequently adopted by Elchin Amirbayov, the Azerbaijani president's special representative for the normalization of relations with Armenia, accusing France of "undermining the peace efforts" with Armenia — represent just the tip of the iceberg of Baku's new diplomatic turn.

Outrage over 'French Colonialism'

In November 2023, a video highly critical of the organization of the 2024 Paris Olympics emerged, sparking a media stir in France. According to VIGINUM, the French government agency for the defense against foreign digital interference, it was an influence campaign linked to "an actor close to Azerbaijan."

In its technical report, seen by FRANCE 24 and Forbidden Stories, VIGINUM concluded that the operation, amplified by fake sites and accounts on social media, is "likely to harm the fundamental interests of the nation."

On another, parallel track, Azerbaijan is promoting the claims of a new structure called the "Baku Initiative Group." Its members, independence fighters from French overseas territories and regions such as French Guiana, Martinique, New Caledonia and Guadeloupe, have been denouncing France's "colonization" and "neocolonialism," and have been calling for "decolonization."

"At the last Non-Aligned Movement conference [chaired by Azerbaijan] in July 2023 in Baku, we wanted to take stock of the situation in the territories still under French domination, and decided to form the Baku Initiative Group," explained Jean-Jacob Bicep, president of the People's Union for the Liberation of Guadeloupe, a far-left political party in the French overseas region. "The aim is to make the world aware of France's colonial policy," added another representative who asked to remain anonymous.

These pro-independence activists have already been able to make their case against what they call "French colonialism" before the UN on two occasions: first at a conference in September at the UN's New York headquarters, then at its Geneva office in December. Both events were organized by the Baku Initiative Group.

What does this have to do with Azerbaijan? It's not just a coincidence that Azerbaijan held the rotating presidency of the Non-Aligned Group at just the right time. The executive director of these "anti-French colonialism" gatherings is Azerbaijani Abbas Abbassov, who has long worked for Azerbaijan's State Oil Fund.

In addition, a July 2023 roundtable in Baku titled, "Towards the Complete Elimination of Colonialism" was organized by the AIR Center, one of Azerbaijan's leading think tanks, whose chairman, Farid Shafiyev, is Azerbaijan's former ambassador to the Czech Republic.

The Baku roundtable ended with an agreement on the establishment of "the Baku Initiative Group against French colonialism," according to an AIR Center statement.

Denouncing the 'Macron Dictatorship'

The group of French nationals who have attended the Baku Initiative Group meetings includes well-known figures in the pro-Azerbaijani camp, such as journalist Yannick Urrien. "It was Hikmet Hajiyev who asked me to come to a conference of the group in Baku in October 2023," explained Urrien.

Hikmet Hajiyev is the foreign policy advisor to Azerbaijan's president and a close associate of Aliyev. "He is the mastermind behind the smear campaigns against other countries, including France," explained Emmanuel Dupuy, president of the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe (IPSE) and a former advisor to Azerbaijan for around six years.

Aliyev used a speech at a decolonisation conference in Baku in November to deliver a scathing broadside against France. In his address, he referred to France more than 20 times, accusing Paris of "inflicting conflict" in the Caucasus and committing "most of the bloody crimes in the colonial history of humanity."

Some of the French participants in Baku's decolonisation conferences deny being instrumentalised or prefer to ignore the issue. "It's none of my business. We seize every opportunity to achieve our goal, and all France has to do is settle its own problems with Azerbaijan," said Bicep, the leader of the far-left People's Union for the Liberation of Guadeloupe.

Another participant, who asked to remain anonymous, admits that the creation of the Baku Initiative Group came at the best possible time for Azerbaijan, which "doesn't really have any chemistry with France at the moment." It's probably a way of asking the French government "to put its own house in order before criticising what others are doing [in Nagorno-Karabakh]," he added.

Azerbaijan has also proved to be creative in increasing the resonance of these pro-independence demands on social media. On Twitter, they are relayed by anonymous Azerbaijanis and influential personalities, such as AIR Center director Farid Shafiyev.

Since October, the Azerbaijani parliament has even hosted a support group for the people of Corsica, the French Mediterranean island which has had a tumultuous relationship with mainland France since it became French in the 18th century. A communiqué published in early February by the people of Corsica support group set up by Azerbaijan's parliament denounced "the Macron Dictatorship."

In December, Azerbaijan was accused of sending journalists "known for their proximity to Azerbaijani intelligence services" to cover French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu's trip to New Caledonia, a French archipelago in the Pacific. Their mission was to write articles "with an anti-France angle," said radio station Europe 1, which broke the story.

A Leaf from Russian Playbook

The creation of the Baku Initiative Group and the media hype surrounding the issue of anti-colonialism are "a monumental mistake," according to Dupuy. The former advisor to Azerbaijan asserted that this strategy has "no chance" of moving France one iota on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, while scuttling relations between the two countries. It's an opinion he says he shares with his contacts in Azerbaijan.

But it's not surprising that Baku is resorting to this kind of tactic, explained Goyushov of the Baku Research Institute. With its internet disinformation operations and anti-West rhetoric harking back to the colonial era, Azerbaijan is taking a leaf out of the Kremlin playbook.

"You have to take into account one thing: Azerbaijan was a part of the Soviet Union," said Goyushov. Aliyev's father, Heydar Aliyev, who president for a decade before his son took over the office, was a former KGB official — like Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Of course they are still almost the same," added the political scientist. "They are copying each other in many ways. Their rhetoric against the West uses the same methods against their opponents, employs the same tactics on social media."

But Goyushov doesn't expect the offensive to succeed. Firstly, because Azerbaijan does not have the same resources as Russia to deploy large-scale operations, such as Russia's Doppelgänger disinformation campaign, which has been spreading false information in several European countries since 2022.

Secondly, Azerbaijan "is much more economically dependent on Western countries than Russia," noted Goyushov. Aliyev, he believes, does not have the luxury of getting permanently upset with a power like France.

"It's quite similar to what happened in 2013 with Germany," explained Goyushov. Back then, Germany criticised the infringements of religious freedom in Azerbaijan, a country with a Muslim majority.

But then the anti-German attacks abruptly stopped. The reason, according to Goyushov, is that these smear campaigns serve mainly internal political purposes. "In an authoritarian regime, you sometimes need to find a common enemy that allows the country to unite around the leader," he explained. Perhaps COP 29, the 2024 climate conference to be held in Azerbaijan in November, will be an opportunity for the authorities to redress the diplomatic balance with the West, and France in particular.

(Eloïse Layan from Forbidden Stories contributed to this report.)

Community News

Dr. Bedross Der Matossian to Deliver Lecture On ‘Armenian Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future’

FRESNO — Dr. Bedross Der Matossian will present a lecture titled “Armenian Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future” on Friday, March 1, at 7 p.m., in the Smittcamp Alumni House on the Fresno State campus. The presentation is part of the Spring 2024 Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program. Support for the presentation is provided by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Greater Fresno Chapter.

Armenian Jerusalem today is facing major challenges that could be detrimental to its future. This talk will analyze the historical background of the formation of the modern Armenian community in Jerusalem and will examine the impact of political and socio-economic transformations of the volatile region on the Armenian Patriarchate, as well as



Dr. Bedross Der Matossian

the community. It will concentrate on the major challenges facing the community and will provide a road map for securing the historical presence of the Armenians in Jerusalem as well as protecting the more than one-millennia old cultural heritage.

Der Matossian is a professor of modern Middle East history at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem he is the author, editor, and co-editor of seven books. His latest edited volume, *Denial of Genocides in the Twenty-First Century*, was published by University of Nebraska Press (2023).

The lecture is free and open to the public. The Smittcamp Alumni House is located at 2625 E. Matoian Way, on the Fresno State campus.

For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, visit, <https://fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies>.



Historic Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem



Steve Sarkisian (Yahoo Sports photo)

University of Texas Football Coach Sarkisian Doubles Salary to \$10.3M

By Chip Brown

AUSTIN, Texas (247Sports) — Texas football coach Steve Sarkisian, who led the Longhorns to a Big 12 title and the school’s first College Football Playoff berth in 2023, will see his salary jump from \$5.8 million to \$10.3 million as part of a guaranteed, four-year contract extension through the 2030 season, according to the agenda of an upcoming University of Texas System Board of Regents meeting.

Sarkisian’s salary will place him in the top three among college football coaching salaries behind Clemson’s Dabo Swinney (\$10.88 million) and Georgia’s Kirby Smart (\$10.7 million) and ahead of Ohio State’s Ryan Day (\$10.27 million).

Sarkisian will receive salary increases of \$100,000 annually, reaching a total of \$10.9 million in the final year of the contract in 2030.

Sarkisian’s performance incentives will increase from a maximum of \$825,000 to \$1.85 million annually, including \$300,000 for a conference championship. Sarkisian can also earn \$250,000 for reaching the College Football Playoff (CFP), \$500,000 for reaching a CFP quarterfinal, \$750,000 for reaching a CFP semifinal, \$1 million for reaching the CFP championship game and \$1.25 million for winning the national championship.

Sarkisian is also set to receive a \$300,000 one-time payment on or before April 1, according to the agenda for a Feb. 21-22 meeting of the Texas Board of Regents, who are expected to approve Sarkisian’s new contract and salary increase.

Texas announced on Jan. 13 that Sarkisian and the school had agreed to a four-year contract extension through the 2030 season.

Details of that agreement, as well as contract extensions and raises for defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski, offensive coordinator/offensive line coach Kyle Flood, and special teams coordinator/tight ends coach Jeff Banks were released as part of the agenda for the Feb. 21-22 UT regents meeting, when all of the extensions are expected to be approved.

Kwiatkowski, who was paid \$1.7 million in each of his first three years at Texas, is getting a guaranteed, three-year extension. The deal will pay him \$1.8 million in 2024, \$1.9 million in 2025 and \$2 million in 2026.

Flood, who was already contracted to earn \$1.325 million in 2024 and \$1.4 million in 2025, is getting a guaranteed, one-year extension that will pay him \$1.475 million in 2026.

Banks, already contracted to earn \$1.15 million in 2024, is getting a guaranteed, two-year extension that will pay him \$1.2 million in 2025 and \$1.25 million in 2026.

Sarkisian went 5-7 in 2021 and 8-5 in 2022 before going 12-2 in 2023. The run in Sarkisian’s third season included a Big 12 title game victory over Oklahoma State and a CFP semifinal berth in the Sugar Bowl against No. 2 Washington, a game the Longhorns lost 37-31.

Sarkisian said earlier this month he’s “borderline obsessed” with winning a national championship after reaching the CFP in 2023.

“I didn’t come here, just to be a head coach,” Sarkisian said on national signing day (Feb. 7). “Again, I didn’t come here to say that I’m the head coach at the University of Texas. I came here to win a championship. And then if I can get one, I want to get two. I’m borderline obsessed with it at this point.

“I know what it tasted like last year,” he added. “I know how close we were, and

see SARKISIAN, page 12

Knights and Daughters Of Vartan Announce Essay Contest in Conjunction with Times Square Genocide Commemoration

NEW YORK — The Knights and Daughters of Vartan are holding their annual essay contest in conjunction with the 109th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and its subsequent commemoration in Times Square, which will be held on Sunday, April 21. High school students (grades 9-12) are invited to participate in a writing contest to enhance awareness of the Armenian Genocide.

All submissions should be received by Monday, April 8, 2024, and the winners will be announced publicly in Times Square at the commemoration event.

“The Knights and Daughters of Vartan, continuing with their annual tradition, will sponsor a writing contest for high school students, where they will reflect on the Armenian Genocide and the importance of historic and cultural preservation,” said Times Square Co-Chairs Haig Gulian and Christopher Artun.

All submissions must be emailed to april24nyc@gmail.com by 11:59 pm on Monday, April 8, 2024.

The prizes are \$300 for first, \$200 for second and \$100 for third.

The prompt is: As descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors, why do you feel the responsibility to share your family’s historical accounts and stories, and how will you carry your family’s story into the future? If you are not a descendant, why do you believe it’s important to recount the history of the Armenian Genocide to the public? Overall, how does transmitting stories from one generation to the next help preserve and retain historical facts?

The essay must respond to the essay prompt. Responses must be between 750-1000 words typed in Times New Roman 12-point font and double-spaced.

Please include the applicant’s first and last name at the top of each page along with contact information.

Accepted file formats include .doc, .docx, .pdf

Please note your essay will be judged on its originality, clarity, historical accuracy, and understanding of the essay contest theme.

The Times Square commemoration will take place on April 21, from 1:30 to 4 p.m. The annual Armenian Genocide Commemoration in Times Square is sponsored by the Knights of Vartan and Daughters of Vartan, a national fraternal organization, and co-sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian National Committee of America, Tekeyan Cultural Association, Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, Armenian Bar Association, and the Armenian Missionary Association of America; participating organizations include the Diocese of the Armenian Church, Prelacy of the Armenian Church, Armenian Presbyterian Church, see CONTEST, page 12



COMMUNITY NEWS

Making Sense of Armenia's Quagmire

QUAGMIRE, from page 1

but domestically Georgia tied its democratic discourse to their European path."

She further explained the foreign policy direction of Armenia.

"Armenia, in my reading, is trying to revisit its role with Russia and that process, I would say, very much started — was instigated — by Russia but it should have happened much, much sooner," she explained. "I have been looking at the processes of regionalism in the post-Soviet space in the 1990s, early 2000s and scholars point out that there is huge institutional cost to the state" because of this regionalism protection.

She added, "The Armenian state's dependence on Russia is in such an asymmetrical way. Russia provided a modicum of stability that allowed Armenia to focus on its domestic reforms."

Still, she added, one could wonder whether Azerbaijan, in the three decades after its defeat in the Karabakh war of 1988-1994 behaved better because of its own domestic challenges, including taking the time to build up its army, oil pipelines, etc. or because of the large shadow Russia cast.

Much has changed, she said, in the past couple of years for Russia domestically, leading it to pursue a different path than the West.

"Russia is increasingly revisionist. It wasn't revisionist before its invasion of Ukraine. In that respect, there was a lot more overlap in their relationship" with Armenia, she said.

With an emboldened Russia trying to overtake Ukraine, it is challenging the norms in terms of governance and thus is destabilizing.

"Now that Russia is challenging the rules-based world order it is a challenge to Armenia. As a small state, their durability, their existence depends on international rules, order, transparency, liberal

principals, human rights. That is where the contradiction between Armenia and Russia lies, pushing Armenia to diversify its relations with western structures and international structures."

In terms of the Russian-Armenian relationship, she said, relations were not always so cozy. "I always have been saying that this was not a relationship. Russia was always trying to get Azerbaijan to join the Eurasian Economic Union. Great powers like that, they don't take one state at a time; they are new imperial powers. They claim whole regions. He did not have a preference for Armenia or Azerbaijan. Putin wants the whole region. The reason you see greater coordination between Aliyev and Putin falls very much in line with Russia's very explicit revisionist role in international politics, trying to change the rules that underpin world order."

She compared the status of Aliyev in Azerbaijan to that of Aleksandr Lukashenko in Belarus as "illegitimate powers."

"Russia comes to their defense and bolsters them," she said.

"I'm not saying the West and the US are angels, they're not. That is the unfortunate thing. I wish the US was more consistent in supporting the very order that it created but the system they created has benefited the small states to have stable international environment within which to develop," she explained.

Joining ICC

Another major change in Armenia was the ratification of the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute and its official membership in that body. In March 2023, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia, she said, "wants Armenia to say verbally, we're not going to arrest Putin if he arrives [in Armenia]. It's not like it gives Putin a guarantee, but it gives Putin the language to weaken ... the international,

liberal, rules-based order of which ICC is an important pillar," she said.

"If you talk to any legal scholar they will tell you. ... Armenia will get a slap on the wrist" if he visits and is not arrested. It would be understandable for any major country why Putin would not be arrested by Armenian authorities. And as a result, she stressed, the fallout would be minimal. "Putin will take that, parade it around and say ICC doesn't mean anything," she said.

Joining the ICC might also deter Azerbaijan from aggression, she added.

"Armenia's joining of ICC increased the cost for [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev doing Putin's bidding in Armenia," she said. "There is scholarship as to how ICC membership affects. Membership of autocratic states," she added.

Silence During Blockade and No Punishment

Many in Armenia and Artsakh were frustrated with world bodies, including the EU and the UN, which rather than condemn the 10-month blockade imposed by Azerbaijan on Artsakh starting in December 2022, instead would often ask "both sides" to agree to behave better.

Ohanyan said they still act as a deterrent for bad behavior, usually.

She explained, "That's in the mind of every Armenian," she said. "Overall the way international organizations work, their powers are very slow and normative. They do have a powerful constraining effect on international politics, sometimes described as norms teachers. They establish norms, [however] their weakness is enforcement."

"The compliance with international law is voluntary. [Yet] if international law did not exist, the map [of the world] would look completely different. You would not have over 200 states. You would be stuck in a medieval ages, think of countries being divided by empires and imperial pol-

itics. International law has elevated the voice of small states," she explained.

Thus, she said, "the core of Armenia's diplomacy should be to work to strengthen these international organizations."

At the same time, she said, "the enforcement is lacking."

Part of the problem, she stressed, was that international law is focused on the concept of "territorial integrity" and as far as many of those bodies were concerned, Nagorno Karabakh was part of Azerbaijan, with Armenians the minorities.

"Any minority group you take, they don't have the same protections that the states do," she said. "Aliyev said 'I am protecting my borders.' Essentially he copied Putin in the Chechnya conflict and perfected it," she said. Thus, she said, the use of force is ok with Russia and human rights don't matter.

She stressed that despite a common perception, those world bodies result in a safer world. Since World War II, "state to state wars have nearly disappeared," she said, with some major exceptions. The stakes, she said, are much higher.

She did praise the European Union monitoring missions to Armenia after the war, as well as the US, to protect the border. "It's hugely important. It needs to be elevated. It's just not enough."

OSCE vs 3+3 Format

Upon the end of the first Karabakh war, Armenia and Azerbaijan participated in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk Group, tasked with reaching a permanent peace agreement. The three co-chairs of the Minsk Group were representatives from the US, France and Russia.

Aliyev, she said, was always against it. "Aliyev has been very systematic in corroding the OSCE Minsk group. He closed the OSCE branch in Azerbaijan a while

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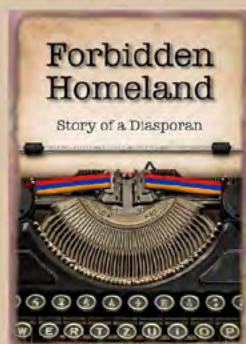
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Tekeyan Cultural Association
Metro Los Angeles Chapter

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KATIA TAVITIAN KARAGUEZIAN
Keynote speaker and author



SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024, 5 PM
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COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

back. It's much more obvious now. The cat is out of the bag now. He's derailed the Western tract of diplomacy because this is the tract in which he is least comfortable, is most fearful, because he is a leader that committed an ethnic cleaning, massive corruption, [and holds] political prisoners."

She said that for Aliyev, one example that causes him fear is that of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, who was convicted at a trial by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for committing genocide in Kosovo.

"They negotiated with him before they dragged him" to the Special Tribunal, she said.

"This can be used in the peace process. Aliyev has been consistently sabotaging the Western tract, the OSCE, as well as the more recent Western support, because Western support is based on norms against conquests, non-use of force, while Russia does not have those requirements," she noted.

Ohanyan still called the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group weak, because it consisted of sporadic meetings. "It was always celebrated as a format where Russia and the West talked, but it was not strong," she said.

Whether the 3+3 format, consisting of Russia, Iran and Turkey on one side and Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan on the other, is good for Armenia or not, depends on one's point of view, Ohanyan explained.

"On the one hand, if you look at other regions, it is important for Armenia to champion and participate in regional integration formats," she said. "Armenia's foreign policy does need to have a regional statecraft dimension."

"Right now the South Caucasus is a fractured region, highly geopoliticized, with very weak regional markets, very poor regional connectivity between societies, as a result it makes it difficult to continue building state institutions," she explained.

A positive aspect of 3 + 3 is to "dilute Russia's voice" because you have Iran and "it's good to create regional format."

She added, "At the same time, many, many analysts and I share this concern, that this is a way to push the US out of the South Caucasus and this is very dangerous for Armenia," she said.

A lot of works remains to be done to understand the role of South Caucasus for Europe and US.

Turkey is not exercising the role it should ideally in the region, Ohanyan said. Instead, she said, Turkey "ranks very low" in "responsible stewardship" in the region as the major actor.

"Russia's slow imperial decline is a historic opportunity for Turkey to play that role, which obviously is scary for Armenia. But Turkey is not taking that role. It continues to do Aliyev's bidding, while continuing with its militarized foreign policy. On paper it looks like Turkish foreign policy is so strong and impressive. ... but in reality, Turkey would be stronger when embedded in liberal world order," she said.

Azerbaijani Price

Ohanyan said that for many countries in the region, a false choice is presented as either democracy or security. Armenia, she said, has shaken that off, while Azerbaijan has not. As a result, she said, the citizens of Azerbaijan will pay the price in the long run.

"The conflict was used as a way to justify the delay for liberalization. The Armenian people have pushed against that false dilemma. The Azerbaijanis are stuck there. They are going to pay the price for it by allowing Aliyev to do that," she said.

"Armenia's challenge is how do you negotiate with a leader of a country of a personalized authoritarian system. We have known for a while that Aliyev is not negotiating," she said.

Instead, she said, Armenia can show that it has something to offer for "all kinds of stakeholders in the region."

For example, she expanded that Armenia could reach out to Georgia, or even to the Azerbaijani civil society, letting the people there know the benefits of "open regionalism."

She did call out European diplomacy with regard to Azerbaijan as "lazy."

"I realize it's a big word but I think there is a myth that Azerbaijan offered so much to Europe in terms of energy security," she said. "With the Russian invasion, Europe organized so quickly to reduce its dependence on Russian oil. Aliyev declining oil reserves are not even making a dent on European dependence on Russian oil."

Ukraine War and Its Ripple Effects

The Ukraine War waged by Russia changed so much in the world. Asked if it was miscalculation, Ohanyan had much to say.

"On the one hand," she said, "everyone thought if Russia invaded, it would take over Ukraine within 2-3 weeks. No one thought that Russia would do it because again it was a war of conquest and we saw how ... America's invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq turned out. ... [They were] different but still invasions but they were costly."

She added that Russia and the Soviet Union experienced the high cost of invading Afghanistan.

By invading Ukraine, Russia was "crossing the Rubicon" as a war of conquest "as opposed to salami slicing Ukraine which it has been doing."

She said, "That kind of Russia was compatible with Armenia but a Russia that changes borders, we already see the ripple effects on Armenia" and thus the increased distance politically.

Now, she said, Aliyev is using the same language as Putin to claim "Western Azerbaijan."

"It was a huge strategic blunder for Russia," she said. In fact, she said, she had given a couple of interviews before the full-scale invasion, saying that she did not think an invasion would happen because it was not in the interest of the Russian state. "It turned out the Kremlin was not doing its homework. Not only Russia lost its centrality but Russia miscalculated how much the West would unite and speak with

one voice," perhaps because earlier incursions on Crimea and Georgian territories did not meet resistance.

She said regardless of how the war there ends, the cost to Russia has been staggering. Not only has Russia weakened its position in Eurasia, but it has hampered its role worldwide.

"Russia was the middleman between China and Europe, two engines of the world economy. Russia was uniquely positioned and had a huge expansive market in Europe selling it oil. Not only Russia lost that makes but now it has to sell it oil below market prices and has lost its edge as a bridge. All of that connectivity is moving down. The costs are enormous," she explained.

Borders

Russia itself has 178 border points which are not delineated. "Border delineation, or the lack of it, is very common around the world. It is a technical issue. You bring your maps, agree on the maps you use. It should not be done under coercion. It is usually the work of cartographers, civil engineers, to make sure the borders don't cross through settlements. OSCE has the largest experience with it," she said.

She noted that there are parts of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan that are not precise because of the additional territories from Azerbaijan that Armenia was holding as insurance policy from Azerbaijan.

Ohanyan noted that she understands that Armenia and Azerbaijan need to start work legitimately on the border. "But what Azerbaijan is doing is using that as an excuse to maintain a constant security threat over Armenia and that is exactly what Russia likes which is the reason the CSTO did not respond to Azerbaijan."

Ohanyan stressed, "It needs to happen but Russia is not going to be the one that will do it," she said. Instead, she said, the OSCE or UN need to do it.

What Could Have Been

Could things have been done to change the disastrous outcome? When asked, Ohanyan said it is hard to know.

She added that some suggest that Armenia should have settled the issue when it held the upper hand in the 1990s, "should have implemented various agreements, should have been more cooperative, given Aliyev more of the surrounding territories," but added, "I am not convinced."

She did suggest, however, that the current peace process "be elevated, go on the offensive, pulling in and identifying actors" in the region.

"The type of state that Azerbaijan was becoming, it's a petro-state. It's an authoritarian state. It's a declining state that derives legitimacy from external territorial claims, from unresolved armed conflicts," she added.

In Armenia, she said, government after government miscalculated and relied on Russia, hoping Russia would come to their defense. "It was a huge miscalculation but that war took place during Covid, when Turkey had an 'activist foreign policy' carried out and continues to carry out similar attacks in the middle east, largely

chasing the Kurds. This happened as part of that string. Under Trump, even Europe was very nervous. Trump basically gave Turkey the green light to do what it wanted to in the Middle East and it spilled over into the Caucasus."

She further explained, "Another driver for Aliyev to engage in this war was declining oil prices. Studies do show that countries that are losing their oil reserves are more likely to start wars."

One mistake by Armenia and Artsakh's negotiators was that the latter was not directly at the negotiation table.

She stressed, "The Nagorno Karabakh voice needs to be much, much louder. Letting Armenia or Russia to do its diplomacy is not sufficient. If you look at cases where claims of national self-determination have been successful, in all of those cases, the actor itself carries out the diplomacy."

Armenia speaking for Karabakh "delegitimized Nagorno Karabakh's claims, saying that Armenia is an expansionist state, even though Armenia didn't recognize Karabakh as a state."

What will happen with Karabakh ultimately is another issue that is hard to foretell, she said.

Even if all the Armenians were to move back to Karabakh, they would still be facing unchanged Azerbaijani policies, which are ones they cannot possibly live with. "Violence is on the table," she said, adding it applies not only for any Armenians returning to Karabakh, but for the Azerbaijani population itself. "Armenians would not move at this point, under this particular state, so Armenia's joining of ICC is important."

She added, "I would not say it is a pipe dream" but added "Armenia's diplomacy needs to be offensive. Now it is very defensive."

Will Azerbaijan Attack?

It is possible, she said, the same way a Chinese attack on Taiwan or a Russian attack on Moldova is possible, but it's not definite.

"The rhetoric in Armenia, this fear factor on steroids is insane," she said. "Overall I do not see Azerbaijani invading Armenia. It is still an international border and the fact that Aliyev is image sensitive, particularly considering that he lost so much political capital after the ethnic cleansing, he was able to use the West against Russia very successfully. Aliyev and Lukashenko are similar in terms of the choices they are making but what is interesting is that Aliyev worked hard to make Azerbaijan the COP 29 [UN Climate Change Conference] host. That means that he is conscious of the image of Azerbaijan. He could try salami slicing Armenia but there would be a stronger response. I do not see that it is in his interest to do anything ... because his economy is very fragile. Even the threat of sanctions will have a hugely destabilizing effect." ...

Ohanyan is the author of *The Neighborhood Effect: The Imperial Roots of Regional Fracture in Eurasia, Networked Regionalism as Conflict Management* and *Russia Abroad: Driving Regional Fracture in Post-Communist Eurasia and Beyond*.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Young Volunteers Learn Importance of Community Service at Diocese Event

NEW YORK — St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral rang with the excited voices of children, and was filled with their youthful spirit of compassion, during a special event on Saturday, February 3.

“Children’s Day at St. Vartan Cathedral” was conceived as a way to bring young Armenian faithful together in a meaningful cause, to honor the 125th Anniversary of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

The result saw 115 children from throughout the New York Metro region — ranging from the 3rd to 8th grades — converge on the Diocesan cathedral to pray, make new friendships, and lend their eager hands to a special community service project. Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan presided over the occasion, and expressed his delight in seeing the cathedral sanctuary filled with young faces. Addressing them during the opening prayer service, he praised the children for their outreach to others in the community and urged them to stay close to the church and embrace their Armenian Christian identity.



Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with the young volunteers at St. Vartan Cathedral (Jebejian Images)

weekly soup kitchen out of the St. Vartan Cathedral Complex — the children worked together to fill 200 bags with meals for the poor and houseless in the area. Each bag contained a ham and cheese sandwich, a

The Importance of Giving Back

While they were enjoying lunch and working on the project, the children listened to a motivational talk by Chris Sarafian, the chief operating officer of New Jersey’s Hovnanian School. He engaged the children in a friendly, informal style, encouraging their spirit of charity and compassion.

“I was extremely impressed with the students’ enthusiasm and empathy toward helping feed the less fortunate,” Sarafian explained. In my talk, I moved among the tables reading the students’ inspirational notes, often quoting the messages they had written on the meal bags. The words were motivating and inspired hope for the recipients.”

“In talking with the children, I touched on the importance of volunteering, and displaying acts of kindness toward others — not only people we know, but those we don’t know, as well,” he added. “I also tried to instill the importance of giving back to the church by serving on the altar or in the choir. I truly believe that Bishop Mesrop’s sermon ener-

celebration and its connection to the year’s “125 Acts of Kindness” initiative. As a result, plans are underway to make Children’s Day an ongoing annual event at St. Vartan Cathedral.

“The enthusiasm on February 3 from both parents and children was palpable,” said Children’s Day committee leader Talia



Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan meets a couple of the young volunteers. (Jebejian Images)

“The sight of our cathedral, the very heart of our Diocese, pulsating with the energy, laughter, and joy of so many young attendees is nothing short of inspirational,” said Bishop Mesrop. “Your enthusiastic dedication to serving others is a living testament to the teachings of Christ on love and service.”

mustard packet, a water bottle, a banana, apple sauce, Purell handwipes, a bag of cookies, a hot beverage cup with a lid and the elements to make tea, a Nestle’s Crunch bar, and a toothbrush with toothpaste.

To cap off their effort, the children also put a sticker on each bag that read: “Made and Packed with Kindness.” Using markers, they also decorated the bags with their personal messages of support and hope. For their efforts, each child was awarded a community service certificate.

The Sant’Egidio Community, which reaches out to around 150 needy individuals in this area of Manhattan, was overjoyed with the result, expressing in a thank-you message how touched and im-

pressed they were by the care that the children put into the assembly of every bag. They thanked the Diocese for its trusted partnership over the years, and noted how important it is to teach young souls to value volunteerism, outreach to the local community, and Christian service.

Outreach and Kindness

After the service, the children went to the Diocesan Center’s Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium, where they had lunch and undertook their charitable service project.

Working in association with the Sant’Egidio charitable community — which runs a



Young volunteers put inspirational messages on paper bags. (Jebejian Images)



Inspirational messages decorate paper bag filled with essentials. (Jebejian Images)



A young volunteer addresses the assembled at the Diocese. (Jebejian Images)

gized and inspired the children to become enthusiastic about giving back and engaging in acts of kindness.”

The Children’s Day organizing committee included Yn. Hasmik Ajamian, Maral Beylerian, Talia Jebejian Bouldoukian, Melanie Bourghol, Souzi Kasaryan, Nazig Kirokian, Noushig Ohanian, Lori Saganda and Yn. Alla Terzyan.

Maria and Bryan Stepanian, the enthusiastic and creative chairs of the Diocese’s 125th Anniversary Committee, took a special active interest in the Children’s Day committee — an event that played a key role in their conception of the year-long

Jebejian Bouldoukian. “That was a testament to our organizing committee—which was cohesive, dedicated and hard-working. From our very first meeting, everyone was excited about the Children’s Day idea, and especially about the meal bags project. And they kept that enthusiasm going all the way until we were cleaning up in the kitchen and talking about doing this again next year.”

She went on: “We had representation on the committee from the Hovnanian School, Kirikian Saturday School, Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School, and St. Leon Sunday School: a wonderful show of unity among our community.”

The event was also generously supported by the local community, including monetary contributions and donations of food and supplies by Toufayan Bakeries; Dr. Natalie Capan and Dr. Nayat Hacikian; ShopRite (of Fair Lawn, NJ), Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods (of Edgewater, NJ) markets; and several kind anonymous donors.

Afterwards, Bishop Mesrop summed up the hopeful spirit of the occasion with these words: “This extraordinary day stands out as a beacon of hope and goodness, reminding us all of the incredible things that can be achieved when we unite in faith and love. It was a true embodiment of the spirit we aspire to cultivate within our Diocesan community, especially as we commemorate the 125th anniversary of our Diocese.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

Major County Sheriffs of America Recognizes Sheriff Peter Koutoujian as Sheriff of the Year

WASHINGTON — Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian has been named the 2023 Sheriff of the Year by the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA).

The award was presented to Sheriff Koutoujian during MCSA's Winter Conference in Washington, D.C. on Friday, February 9.

MCSA's Sheriff of the Year award is named after late Orange County (CA) Sheriff — and former MCSA President — Sandra Hutchens who passed away in 2021.

In bestowing the award, new MCSA President and Santa Barbara County (CA) Sheriff Bill Brown recognized Koutoujian for his focus on employee wellness, and the innovative correctional programming he has implemented for incarcerated military veterans, emerging adults, those with substance use disorders, and much more.

Brown also lauded Koutoujian for his service as MCSA President from February 2020 to February 2022. During his tenure, Koutoujian worked with two presidential administrations, helped grow MCSA membership by 15 percent while simultaneously increasing the diversity of the membership,

and led the organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As a professional, there is no greater honor than to be recognized by your peers — inspiring leaders who I truly admire," said Koutoujian. "As a MCSA member, I have had the incredible opportunity to work alongside some of the most highly regarded corrections and law enforcement leaders on the most pressing issues facing our country. These men and women are dedicated to serving their communities and I am truly proud to count them as friends and colleagues."

Prior recipients of the Sandra Hutchens Sheriff of the Year Award include Polk County (FL) Sheriff Grady Judd and Pinellas County (FL) Sheriff Bob Gualtieri.

In addition to his work with Major County Sheriffs of America, Koutoujian is also a past president of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association and a founding member of Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration. He was also recently elected vice chair of The Council of State Governments Justice Center Advisory Board.



Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian (2nd from right) was presented the 2023 Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA) Sheriff of the Year award in Washington, D.C. on Friday, February 9, 2024. Pictured with Sheriff Koutoujian are Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas (from left), Motorola Solutions Vice President Frank Galvin, MCSA President Bill Brown and MCSA Immediate Past President Dennis Lemma.

University of Texas Football Coach Sarkisian Doubles Salary to \$10.3M

SARKISIAN, from page 12

I couldn't wait to get back. Hopefully, that's what our team really starts to exude is this obsession with being the best because we have a locker room full of young men that are driven, that are focused that want to be the best."

According to *USA Today*, Sarkisian's \$5.6 million salary in 2023 placed him 30th among college football coaching salaries.

Under the terms of his initial, six-year, \$34.2 million contract signed when Sarkisian was hired in January 2021, Sarkisian was paid \$5.2 million in 202, \$5.4 million in 2022 and \$5.6 million in 2023. He was due to get a raise to \$5.8 million in 2024.

The new, four-year extension replaces the \$5.8 million with a base salary of \$10.3 million, a raise of \$4.5 million.

Other perks in Sarkisian's new deal include:

- Two "dealer cars"
- 20 hours of private aircraft flight time

for personal use

- UT Golf Club membership
- 12 tickets to all home games (with the opportunity to purchase up to 20 tickets to all home games)
- One suite for use at all home games (with premium parking passes)
- Up to eight tickets to away football games (with the opportunity to purchase up to 20 tickets to all away games)
- Up to six tickets to all home games for all other Texas sports.

"Coach Sark is an incredible coach, a first-class person, and a tremendous leader of men," Kevin Eltife, chairman of the UT System Board of Regents, said when Sarkisian's contract extension was announced on Jan. 13. "We knew he was the man for the job when we hired him three years ago. And the way he stuck to the plan he laid out for us, stayed the course in putting everything in place and got our football program back among the best in the nation, has been phenomenal.

"What a year it was in 2023, winning the final Big 12 Championship and taking us to the CFP for the first time, and we know the best is yet to come. Coach Sark has brought the pride and passion back in our program. We're so fortunate to have him, and we're looking forward to many more exciting years ahead."

The Longhorns were one of only five Power Five programs that ranked among the top 15 in scoring offense (35.8 points per game) and scoring defense (18.9 points per game allow) in 2023, finishing 15th na-

tionally in both.

"As we head into the SEC next year, we're doing that with a great deal of momentum, a program we're extremely proud of and with a great head coach and leader," Texas athletic director Chris Del Conte said on Jan. 13. "We knew that Coach Sarkisian was the man for the job when we hired him, and he's proven that each step of the way. We couldn't be more excited about where we are and where we're headed, and we're thrilled that Coach Sark will be our coach for a long time."

Knights and Daughters of Vartan Announce Essay Contest

CONTEST, from page 7

Armenian Evangelical Union, Armenian Catholic Eparchy, Armenian Network of America, Armenian International Women's Association, Homenetmen Scouts of NY & NJ, Armenian Youth Federation, and several national Armenian youth organizations.

Founded in 1985 by the late Sam Azadian, a former Brooklyn, New York resident who lost four siblings during the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian Genocide Commemoration at Times Square has honored the more than 1.5 million Armenian lives lost during the horrific events of the 1915

Genocide of the Armenians perpetrated by the Young Turk Government of the Ottoman Empire. This internationally recognized annual event draws thousands of Armenians and non-Armenian participants to commemorate the solemn occasion. The event features speeches and tributes delivered by prominent political figures and civic leaders, officials of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, representatives of major Armenian-American organizations, and distinguished scholars and educators as well as high-ranking Armenian and non-Armenian clergy.

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Arts & Culture

International Literary Alliance Has New Advisory Members

LOS ANGELES — The International Armenian Literary Alliance (IALA) has three new advisory board members: Shushan Avagyan, Susan Barba and Anahit Ghazaryan.

Shushan Avagyan (b. 1976) is the author of two experimental novels *Girq-anvernagir* (A Book, Untitled, 2006) and *Zarubyani kanayq* (2014), and co-author, with the Queering Yerevan Collective, of *Queered: What's to Be Done with X-Centric Art* (2011). She has translated several classics of the early Soviet avant-garde into English, including *A Hunt for Optimism*, *The Hamburg Score*, *On the Theory of Prose* by Viktor Shklovsky (Dalkey Archive Press) and *Art and Production* by Boris Arvatov (Pluto Press). She revived Shushanik Kurghinian's work by translating and publishing the bilingual edition *I Want to Live: Poems of Shushanik Kurghinian* (AIWA Press). Her articles, translations, and interviews have appeared in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, *Asymptote*, *InTranslation*, *The International Literary Quarterly*, *Music and Literature*, *Los Angeles Review of Books* and elsewhere.

Avagyan grew up in Soviet Armenia and lived in Zambia and Ethiopia with her parents who taught there as part of the Soviet Teach Abroad Program. After graduating from Khachik Dashtents School in Yerevan, she went to study at the Melkonian Educational Institute in Nicosia, Cyprus. She received her undergraduate degree in studio art with a focus on printmaking and book arts from Cedar Crest College, and her master's and doctoral degrees in English studies from Illinois State University. She lives in Yerevan and teaches at the American University of Armenia, where she coordinates the Certificate in Translation program.

Susan Barba is the author of *Fair Sun*, winner of the Anahid Literary Award and the Minas & Kohar Tölölyan Prize, and geode, a finalist for the New England Book Awards and the Massachusetts Book Awards. She is a co-editor, with Victoria Rowe, of *I Want to Live: Poems of Shushanik Kurghinian*, and the editor of *American Wildflowers: A Literary Field Guide*, which won the 2023 American Horticultural Society Book Award. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, and elsewhere, and her poems have been translated into Armenian, German, Swedish and Romanian. She earned her doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University, and she has received fellowships from MacDowell and Yaddo. She

see ADVISORS, page 17



Peter Davidian

An Australian-Armenian Master of Indian Music

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/OCEAN SHORES, Australia — Peter Davidian (born in 1958) is an Australian/Armenian composer and sitar player with a musical career extending for half a century. He has studied music from age of eight, and has become proficient for sitar, guitar, harmonium, drumkit, darbuka and tabla. In the 1980s, he studied the sitar and Indian music theory with Ustad Ghulam Qadir Khan of the Jaipur Gharana school in India. He has taken part in numerous musical projects and events, including recitals, film soundtracks, studio recordings and education. Davidian also a composer with more than 10 albums featuring sitar, Indian, Armenian and western musical genres. His most recent albums are “Instrumentalism,” “Art-sakh,” “The Armenia Suite” and “Urartu.”

Dear Peter, there are two basic music traditions in India, northern and southern. The specialists say that very rare musicians master both traditions. What tradition do you follow?

My studies of Indian classical music and of sitar, are related to the North Indian system, known as Hindustani music. This style is a combination of Persian Classical Music and the ancient southern Indian system known as Carnatic music. This has suited my own history, as my Armenian family had a long history in New Julfa, Iran (Persia) and then in India, South East Asia, before arriving in Australia after World War II.

As about the point that few musicians master both traditions of Indian music — yes, only a rare musician could accomplish this, as they would have to master the different use of musical phrasing, rhythmic techniques, decoration of notes and understanding of the two systems of Raga. It is also a matter of geography, as Hindustani Raga music is found in the north of India, while Carnatic music is in the south and is a purer form of the ancient Vedic India. A more common situation is Hindustani and Carnatic musicians drawing on certain characteristics to embellish their performance in either style. Pure Carnatic music is usually only found in southern India in areas like Tamil Nadu.

Sitar music is very meditative. I always think that sitar players are very harmonious people – am I right?

Trying to keep a balanced and calm outlook is an attribute we aspire to. In India it is regarded as Nada Yoga, the union to God through sound/music. I have experienced this phenomenon many times in Armenia too. The music of the motherland, the beauty of the mountains and the incredible spiritual state of mind when sitting in ancient places, like Tatev, Geghard, Sanahin, etc. Of course, as a father and musician, who has seven children, staying calm and not becoming upset by daily stresses of life and finances, has certainly been challenging!! As an Armenian, I can become sad when reflecting on the hardships, disasters and wars that have beset our people. But our general optimism, survival instinct and our resolute nature to get on with living are things to be very proud of.

Is your devotion to sitar connected to your family ties with India?

Yes, there is certainly continuity in that. My grandparents, Carapiet and Rose (Var-tuhi), both attended Armenian schools in Calcutta, having both been born in Persia. Also, my great-grandfather, Marcar and great-grand-uncle, Mesrope, were Armenian priests that came from New Julfa to Calcutta and Singapore, for the church services there. Mesrope was a priest in India and Singapore. Apparently when he returned to New Julfa he spent the rest of his life as a traveling *ashugh*. For me, the sitar has become my main instrument of choice, after 40-plus years of rigorous practice techniques and performances in Australia, Europe, Asia and Armenia. It satisfies my

see DAVIDIAN, page 15

Sacred Music Project Scholarship Is Available

The Armenian Sacred Music Project is announcing that it is offering the Kinarik Altinyuzuk Scholarship to students pursuing a music degree with a Fall 2024 financial disbursement.

The deadline to apply is February 29.

The non-profit organization was established to promote the appreciation, teaching, and preservation of Armenian Sacred Music through workshops, masterclasses, trainings, physical and digital archives to sacred music enthusiasts, students, educational institutions, clergy, and to all those who wish to learn more about our project and sacred music.

This scholarship will provide music students the opportunity to further develop in their collegiate studies and be connected with a network of sacred music enthusiasts, educators, and professionals under the patronage of our nonprofit. This scholarship will ensure that our precious Armenian sacred music will be preserved and promote through collegiate studies.

Scholarship Academic Requirements are the following:

- Students must be enrolled in a four-year undergraduate or graduate program at an accredited college/university;
- Students must be majoring in a musical studies program with a current grade point average of 3.0 or higher (on a 4.0 scale).

Sums will vary from \$500 to \$5,000.

Students need to complete an application, provide unofficial transcripts, and one-page essay explaining how Armenian sacred music has affected their personal or collegiate musical studies.

Students can apply for the scholarship at: <https://forms.office.com/r/X55ys1JQTF> or by visiting www.sacred-music.org.

Gomidas 14 Volume Digital Archive Project

The Armenian Sacred Music Project is currently working to create a digital archive of all current 14 volumes of Gomidas' works traditionally known as the green and blue books. These works feature vocal, orchestral, instrumental, and piano scores of his works. They will be release online for viewing in a locked PDF to ensure the original copyright and privacy regulations are not infringed. We are collaborating with the CalState Los Angeles Classical Guitar Ensemble with this endeavor and hope to have it released to the general public in later summer.



Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian

PHOTOS COURTESY SOWMYA'S SPICY CORNER



Sowmya's Spicy Corner - Baingan Bharta/Roasted Eggplant Curry

Baingan Bharta/Roasted Eggplant Curry is a delicious and smoky North Indian variation of the Mediterranean baba ganoush. This simple dish has unique smoky flavors that come from grilling the eggplant on direct fire or charcoal. The grilled eggplant is then chopped or mashed, spiced up and cooked to a delicate finish. This baingan bharta/roasted eggplant pairs well with Indian flat breads like roti/paratha and steamed white rice. Paratha is made from a simple dough of flour, salt, oil, and water. The dough is divided and each piece is rolled out and smeared with a generous amount of ghee, butter, or shortening, and sprinkled with flour to help provide definition between the layers.*

Paratha is a type of flaky, layered flatbread common throughout South Asia. They can be simple — layered with your choice of fat (such as ghee, butter, or shortening) and rolled into a variety of shapes (such as square, round, or triangular) — or they can even be stuffed or filled, such as in aloo paratha or Mughlai paratha.

“Paratha, while definitely bread, is not baked the way that naan is. Rather, it’s fried in a tawa, a stone frying pan, using butter or cooking oil. While naan is generally rolled out once and slapped up against the side of the tandoor, paratha often gets rolled out multiple times, creating a very flaky bread,” says the Little India Restaurant in Denver, Colorado.**

“The word ‘baingan’ refers to eggplant/brinjal and ‘bharta’ means mashed. So baingan bharta refers to eggplant mash. The taste of this dish depends on how well you roast the eggplant. This curry tastes good even without the smoky flavors but if you can infuse some smoky flavors into the eggplant, then it tastes heavenly and delectable,” says Mrs. Sowmya Raghavan at <<https://sowmyasspicycorner.com/>> Sowmya’s Spicy Corner, where she features many authentic vegetarian recipes.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 medium eggplant
- 1 medium onion
- 1 medium tomato
- 1 1-inch piece ginger
- 5 to 6 cloves garlic
- 1 green chili
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 teaspoon coriander powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin powder
- 1 teaspoon Kashmiri chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garam masala
- Salt to taste
- Coriander leaves to garnish
- 2 to 2 1/2 tablespoons oil, more to taste

PREPARATION:

Greasing the eggplant - Wash and pat dry the eggplant with a kitchen towel. Grease the eggplant with oil. Greasing the eggplant helps in getting a smoky flavor when cooked on fire. Make small slits on the eggplant using a fork or knife. Making small slits this way will allow the heat to penetrate inside so that the inside of the eggplant gets cooked evenly.

Roasting the eggplant - Place the greased eggplant directly on fire and roast it on medium flame. Keep flipping the eggplant frequently using tongs from side to side so that all the sides are uniformly roasted. As and when the eggplant gets roasted, you will start seeing brown/black spots on the skin. Continue to roast the eggplant until the outer skin wrinkles completely and the inner fleshy part is soft and tender. Roast the eggplant until it almost collapses. Insert a sharp knife to check if the fleshy part is cooked well. Once it is done, turn the heat to high and roast it for about 30 to 60 seconds.

Roasting on high heat at the end will give a smoky flavor to the dish. Switch off the flame and place the roasted eggplant on a plate and allow it to cool. The whole process of roasting the eggplant might take about 10 to 15 minutes.

Peeling/chopping the eggplant and preparing the veggies: Peel the outer skin of the eggplant carefully and discard the skin. Chop or mash the fleshy part of the eggplant into small pieces and keep it aside.

Finely chop the onion and tomato. Grind the green chili, ginger and garlic to a coarse or fine paste.

Spice up the roasted eggplant. Heat a pan and add 1 to 2 tablespoons of oil. When the oil is warm enough, add the chopped onion. Sauté until the onion is transparent. Add the ginger-garlic-green chili paste and cook for about a minute until the raw flavors go off. Add the chopped tomato and mix well. Cover the pan and cook on low-medium heat until the tomatoes are soft and mushy.

Add the turmeric powder, coriander powder, cumin powder and kashmiri chili powder. Mix well and cook for a minute in low flame. Add a little water and mix well. Now add the chopped eggplant and mix well. Add salt. Check for spice level, and add more chili powder if needed. Add garam masala powder and cook for 2 minutes. Add a little water to get the desired consistency.

Cook for another 2 to 3 minutes. Garnish with coriander leaves. (Note: Garam masala is a warm, fragrant spice blend with lots of layers of flavor. Not every blend will taste the same, but you’ll likely get hints of cinnamon, cloves or peppercorns. Try a pinch on roasted vegetables-you’ll really taste it.)

Serve this dish with Indian flat breads like roti/paratha and steamed white rice.

*See: <https://www.thekitchn.com/parathas-recipe-23280232>

**See:

<https://www.littleindiaofdenver.com/blog/paratha-vs-naan/#:~:text=Paratha%2C%20while%20definitely%20bread%2C%20is,creating%20a%20very%20flaky%20bread.>

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Serves 2 to 4.

NOTES:

Variation - If you prefer to add green peas, add them after the tomatoes are cooked.

Green chilies give a nice flavor and taste to this dish. If you prefer green chilies over red chili powder, you can add more green chilies and reduce the quantity of chili powder. You can also use jalapeno or serrano pepper, if desired.

Choose the round/globular Italian type because it is best for grilling/roasting and yields the most eggplant pulp after you remove the burnt skins. While roasting the eggplant, keep the heat setting to medium initially. This will allow the eggplant to cook uniformly. If the heat is on high initially, then the skin of the eggplant will wrinkle before the inside fleshy part gets cooked.

Variation - While making slits in the eggplant, you can insert 2 or 3 garlic cloves inside the eggplant. This will allow the garlic to get roasted on direct flame which in turn enhances the flavor of the dish.

Mrs. Sowmya Raghavan at <<https://sowmyasspicycorner.com/>> Sowmya’s Spicy Corner

Sowmya’s Spicy Corner - A vegetarian food blog with delicious and heart-warming recipes, and step by step instructions.

For this recipe and more, see:

<https://sowmyasspicycorner.com/2022/02/25/baingan-bharta-roasted-eggplant-curry/>

<https://www.pinterest.ca/raghavan07610081/>

<https://www.pinterest.ca/raghavan07610081/my-recipes/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/raghavan0761/vegetarian-recipes/>

For Roasted Eggplant Chutney, see:

<https://sowmyasspicycorner.com/2021/03/22/roasted-eggplant-chutney-kathirikkai-thogaiyal/>

Also: <https://janeammeson.com/2022/06/10/eggplant-curry-recipe/>

Also: <https://pipingpotcurry.com/baingan-bharta/>



Grilling an eggplant

ARTS & CULTURE

Peter Davidian: An Australian-Armenian Master of Indian Music

DAVIDIAN, from page 13
need for musical discipline and spiritual satisfaction. I hope that a little of this can be experienced by my listening audience.

You are a descendent of Julfa Armenians who spread through various countries of Asia. Our readers will be interested to know Davidian family saga.

My ancestors were from Julfa, Nakhijevan, and were part of the mass forced migration of Armenians from this region by Shah Abbas of Persia in the first decade of the 1600's. They crossed the Arax River and journeyed to Isfahan, Persia, where they were given land across the river there, to build a new life in New Julfa. Many Armenians from New Julfa travelled further to India and Asia for work, business and perhaps a better life. There has been a long association of Armenians and Indians, that continues to this day. As outlined above my great-grandfather and his brother were Armenian priests that came and went from India and Singapore. My grandfather, Carapiet, was born in New Julfa, travelled to India for school, at the Armenian Philanthropic College in Calcutta. After some years in India, he then moved for work to Makassar, the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, where he worked in an export company, eventually as a manager and then became the British Vice Consul there. He had returned to New Julfa to marry my grandmother, Rose Gevorgyan, in 1920. They returned to Makassar where my mother Elsie was born in 1922. Unfortunately, tragedy struck two months later, when Rose was killed in a car accident. My grandfather eventually remarried Rose Edgarian of the Edgar shipping family. They had two sons, my uncles, Ronald and Arnold. In 1942, more tragedy arrived, with the Japanese military invading the Dutch East Indies during World War II. My family's comfortably established life came to an end. They were all imprisoned in jungle prison-of-war camps, for the next 3 1/2 years. Miraculously they survived the ex-

treme hardships, disease and poor diet until the end of the war, with the Australian army freeing them from the prisons.

My father, Reginald Allen, originally from an Irish and English ship building family, was one of these soldiers. My family eventually repatriated to Australia, after losing their house and possessions, to start a new life. My mother married Reginald, in Sydney in 1952, and they had two sons, my brother Ross and myself. More tragedy for our family arrived in 1964, when my father died, from long term health issues related to five years of active duty in WWII. At the time we were living with my Armenian grandparents, and so now we continued living with them for many years.

I grew up in an Armenian household in Sydney, Australia, with regular Armenian food, mixed with some Indian, Persian and Indonesian dishes. My family spoke many languages, including, of course, Armenian, English, Malay and Dutch. We had music from all these cultures in our history and attended the Armenian Church in Surry Hills and then Chatswood, Sydney for special occasions.

How and when did your connection with Armenian music began?

I would have first heard Armenian Church music as a baby and young child at the Armenian Church in Surry Hills, and later at the new Chatswood Church. Growing up in the 1960s in Australia did not provide much exposure to Armenian music, only some Soviet-era vinyl LPs that we had in our home, of folkloric music and music of Komitas and Sayat-Nova. I still have these recordings, and cherish them dearly. Later as a musician I became aware of the duduk, through film recordings and music of Djivan Gasparyan, and the music of Gurdjieff, and of course, Charles Aznavour. As I am also a jazz drummer, I knew of New York drummer Paul Motian, and also the music of the band Night Ark. In today's modern world we can enjoy the music at our fingertips!

I have been able to record my own instrumental music over the years, blending Armenian, Indian and some western music traditions. From my first album "Sandalwood Dreaming," through to my recent work, in 2020 I recorded music entitled "Artsakh" after my travels to Armenia and shortly after the terrible war. All profits were donated



to children of soldiers who gave their lives protecting the motherland. Since then I have recorded music for the Armenia Suite, which will be released under the title "Uratu" in 2024, again reflecting musically, my further journeys in Armenia.

We met last November in Yerevan after your brilliant concert. You discovered your motherland relatively lately. Do you feel a certain attachment to the country?

Yes, it was wonderful to meet at the Russian-Armenian University Concert in Yerevan with my Davidian Ensemble. It is always a great honor to perform in the Motherland and to such appreciative audiences. On that occasion we had just returned from Areni and Yeghegis in the south of Armenia, playing our music for Artsakh refugee families. If we can bring just a little musical joy to our people, who have really been through

difficult times, then the smiles on their faces is something I will never forget.

I first came to Yerevan in January 2019, with my family, to honor my mother's passing. She was never able to travel here, as we lived in the diaspora, on the other side of the world. As soon as we arrived by air, the whole plane applauded that we had touched down on our sacred Motherland, with a view of Mt. Ararat to complete the picture. I really felt that I had arrived home, after so many generations have passed! An incredible feeling. My wife Sonia, said I didn't sleep for days, as I was so excited. Since that first trip, I have returned four more times, and travelled across the country, north, south, east and west and have loved every moment, met so many beautiful people, joined in music with world class musicians and enjoyed the food of this great country.

I have to give special thanks to Aslanian family for their abundant hospitality and travels, Indian Armenian Friendship Group for their concerts and generosity, Rananjay, Ruzanna, Veronika, Karen, Roza and all the others. Avag Magaryan world class blul player, that joins me in the ensemble, percussionists, Orestis, Levon, John and Simon, touring duduk master Arsen Petrosyan, for our collaborations and dance teachers Kristina and Astghik, who I perform with. Also, the Waldorf Steiner School, on Saryan Street, who always welcome me to give recitals and workshops with the students.

The latest exciting news for me, is my meeting with oud musician, Tigrane Kazazian, and the recording of a new album, on my last days in Yerevan in December 2023. The weaving of our sitar and oud is a mesmerizing experience, and I believe quite unique. We are currently in post-production and will be releasing in 2024, with many concert performances planned.

I am very keen to return again to Armenia as soon as it is possible. My genetics have too strong a pull for me, to always return to the motherland!

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of Boston

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21
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Books

Paradise Lost: Anush Babajanyan's *A Troubled Home*

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Even though increasingly doubtful and scared, the internationally acclaimed photojournalist Anush Babajanyan from Yerevan, Armenia, kept returning to that “special place” whenever she could, “partly because Armenians, like me, lived there,” but also because “the story of this place and its people had not been told enough, and I wanted to tell it.”

What started off as a documentation of the natural beauty and the ordinary life of the families living in the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) ended up being a documentation of loss. “Nature in that unknown yet familiar place felt more gorgeous even when we didn’t know we were going to lose it,” says the artist with much emotion. The ninety-nine photographs comprising Babajanyan’s recently published *A Troubled Home* (EBS, 2022) tell the stories of the families who, following the

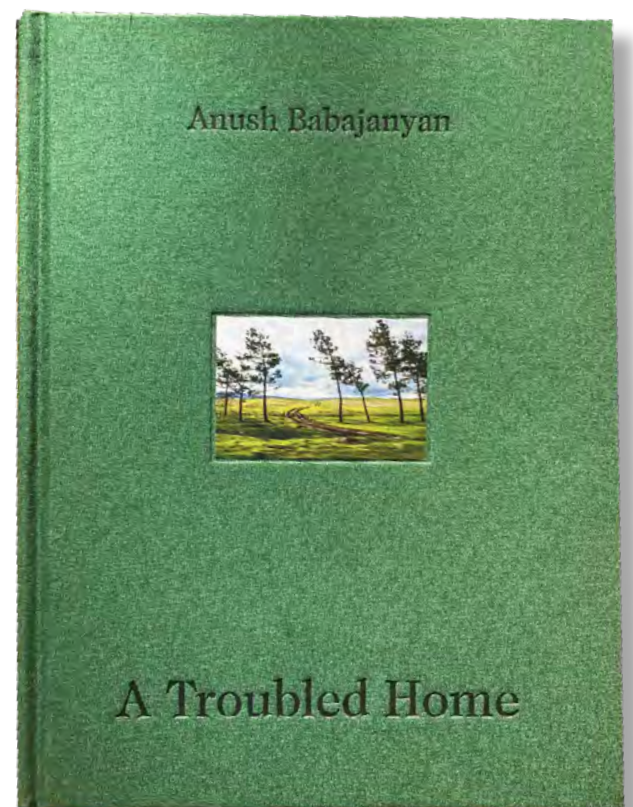
table strewn with numerous dishes abound. Why so many children? How does one feed a family of 12?

Whether it is of the young woman at the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi lighting 31 candles and putting them together in a tight bunch, one for each year of the age of her friend who was missing in action, of the seven children lined up against the wall of their old apartment waiting for their new home, or of the endless flow of cars during the week-long exodus from Artsakh, the photos reveal the woman who cares deeply for her fellow human beings and for her native land.

“Hadrut is so beautiful,” she says with a sigh.

A whole personal philosophy comes to life. Referring to the shot of Harutyun Chobanyan, 13, “soft and gentle,” hugging his three-month-old brother Levon, she says, “We have to preserve the gentleness boys have that the atmosphere of militarization ruins.”

Besides representing the everyday lives, the thousands of photographs Babajanyan took document the conse-



being given away.

The poem by twenty-one-year-old Anna Hakobyan from Hadrut, printed on the first page of the book, sums it all up:

The taste, the smell of my sweet home,
Of my soil that has seen pain, every bit
Of my Artsakh, my world, all of it, I miss.
I miss my soil,
I miss my space,
I miss my place, my home,
My rocky slope, my orchard.
Dear people,
If in this world there is one sweet place,
It springs from my heart. It's my Artsakh.

Nonetheless, in Babajanyan’s own words, all is “not soaked in tragedy.” The good spirit of refugees trying to do their best to resettle is also evoked.

Babajanyan believed her photos “would make a difference but they didn’t.” “Nothing is happening,” she deplores. At best, it is the ambiguity in the lives of the displaced residents that the photographs capture. There is no theorizing here about grief and the healing process. Just a suffocating feeling of helplessness against the injustice of it all.

Babajanyan’s slide show presentation at the newly inaugurated Center for Armenian Arts in Glendale did much to enhance the book’s appeal to those present. Comments on the beautiful images projected overhead — “Each of my trips to this land has brought me closer to the known,” “I cherish the beautiful, meditative six-hour drive to Artsakh,” “Motherhood has given me access to a deeper level of emotion” — highlighted the emotions depicted in the photos and brought the artist’s work even closer to everyone’s heart. What ultimately emerged was the woman of feeling behind the photographs.



The six children of Varduhi Chobanyan, 31, living in poor conditions, July 15, 2017.

dissolution of the republic in 2023, were forced out of the land they had called home for millennia to become refugees trying to resettle to a new life.

Babajanyan made her first trip to Artsakh on April 2, 2016. Notwithstanding the ongoing fighting between Artsakh and neighboring Azerbaijan, she kept going back and forth, actively photographing even in regions ceded to Azerbaijan following 2020’s 44-Day War. It was in 2020 that she decided to bring together the work she had done for five years.

The photographs assembled in the elegant volume owe their tremendous appeal to the intimate relationship Babajanyan had with the families. “I had unimpeded access into their homes. I was not an intruder. I am still in touch with them,” she notes candidly. Her pictures are of real people with real names. Only a photographer sharing her subjects’ most familiar space could capture the everyday joys and sorrows the shots convey to the viewer. When asked about the amazing power her work has to touch people, “Once the personal connection is established, photography follows,” she adds.

It was especially the lives of the many large families in Artsakh that Babajanyan wanted to document, as the photo of Liana Babayan happily introducing her newborn son, Movses, the Babayans’ tenth child, to her children at the Stepanakert maternity hospital attests. A mother herself, it was Babajanyan’s genuine concern for the families that won their confidence. There are pictures of children playing joyfully inside their homes, and outside in their backyards while the mother hangs the laundry to dry. Photographs of the entire family seated at the dinner

quences of incessant shelling. The breakfast table inside a home in Martuni, hit on the first day of the 44-Day War with Azerbaijan in 2020, tells the story of destruction with all of its implications of violence, of disruption and of loss. The destruction caused by wars is even more directly evoked by the photograph of lieutenant Vahe Avanesyan, 27, and conscript Harut Gasparyan, 19, waiting and smoking in a trench on the frontline during the shelling of Martakert in the 2016 Four-Day War. There are mages of wounded soldiers, of funerals, and of burning homes. Many owners set their homes on fire before they fled. Babajanyan bemoans the fact that “It is yet another tragedy” that the photographs document. “I never wanted the photos to be a document of what was,” she says, but “we need to talk about it and the photos help.”

“There is so much to learn and to understand,” she adds.

Indeed, a whole history of pain and of displacement comes through in these hauntingly beautiful images. It is perhaps true that “We have art in order not to die of the truth,” to borrow the words of celebrated philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. The sense of beauty lost is made palpable in the images of the greens and the yellows in October in Shushi. The oranges of the house burning in the night, on November 14, 2020, make it clear it is all



Lieutenant Vahe Avanesyan and conscript Harut Gasparyan wait in a trench on the frontline in Martakert, April 4, 2016.

At the end of her presentation, Babajanyan acknowledged the “incredible help” from the designers, the editors, and the printing house in bringing the book together. “The book is for everyone living in Artsakh,” she writes in her Afterword.

To purchase a copy of the book, visit <https://anushbabajanyan.org/books/atroubledhome>

ARTS & CULTURE

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 3 — Mitchink-Lenten Luncheon. Sunday, at 12 PM, Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont. Featuring lentil keofte and tahini bread. Organized by the Ladies’ Guild. Donation: \$25, for the tickets please contact: 617-645-1950 or 617-857-1107.

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](https://www.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, com-

plemented 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](https://www.ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar)

APRIL 19 — SAVE THE DATE: The 109th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at the State House in Boston will take place on Friday, April 19, beginning at 10:30 a.m., organized by the greater Boston community’s Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee.

APRIL 21 — SAVE THE DATE: The 109th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at Boston’s Armenian Heritage Park will take place on Sunday, April 21, starting at 4:00 p.m., organized by the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Greater Boston.

APRIL 28 — Nora Armani performs in “Mercedes and Zarouhi” play translated into English, cosponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter, Armenian Women’s Welfare Association, and Armenian International Women’s Association, with the Armenian Cultural Foundation, at 441 Mystic St., Arlington. Tickets \$15 through ACF office (781-646-3090) or email armeniancultural.fdn@gmail.com.

NOVEMBER 16 — St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School will celebrate with a 40th Anniversary Gala. Saturday, 6.30 p.m., Hyatt Regency Cambridge. Details to follow

RHODE ISLAND

APRIL 5 — Commemorating the 155th Anniversary of the Birth of Gomidas Vartabed. Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee, the Armenian Music Festival of RI, Amaras Art Alliance and the Urartu Armenian Association of RI present “Music of Poetry,” with singer-songwriter Vahan Artsruni Duo with Nelly Manukyan, on flute. Program to feature St. Mashtots Sharagans Melodies, Songs based on Gomidas Poetry and others. Friday, 7 p.m. Egavian Cultural Center. 70 Jefferson St., Providence. Donation \$20 (\$10 for students). Refreshments

APRIL 26 — Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee Armenian Martyrs’ Memorial Committee of RI Present Nora Armani in Mono – Theater “Mercedes and Zaruhi,” by playwright Anush Aslibekyan, with English adaption by Armani. “Mercedes and Zaruhi” is the story of two sisters from the Diaspora during the post-WW II period of mass migrations (Nerkaght) to Soviet Armenia. Friday, 7.30 p.m., Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Donation \$20 (\$10 for students). Refreshments

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.

International Literary Alliance

Has New Advisory Members

ADVISORS, from page 13

works as a senior editor for *New York Review Books*. Learn more by visiting: www.susanbarba.net

Anahit Ghazaryan is a writer, visual artist, and researcher from Yerevan, Armenia. In the last several years, She has worked with text, audio, and visual materials including photography, and most recently with documentary theater play and film. Anahit was the co-producer of the Akanjogh Podcast (2019-2021), the first podcast on feminism in Armenia. Additionally, Anahit has co-authored two books. The first book, *Border-play / The Armenian and the Armenian*, is a discussion about the relationship between two language backgrounds: Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian. Her second book, *Dark Matter: Notes on War*, came out in November 2022 and chronicles a painful, honest conversation between two friends, providing an unfiltered perspective on the personal impacts of war.

Ghazaryan has been researching the life and work of Maryam Shahinyan (1911-1996), the first woman professional studio photographer in the Republic of Turkey, for more than six years. In 2021, she curated an exhibition of Shahinyan’s original photos that she found and collected during her time in Istanbul at the 4Plus Documentary Photography Center in Yerevan. In 2022, she completed the production of “Foto Galatasaray,” a full-length documentary on Shahinyan’s life and work. The film is currently in post-production. In 2023, Anahit, as a playwright, created a Documentary Performance titled “Planned Outage,” delving into the nostalgic childhood memories of those born after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Currently, she is working on a new documentary performance exploring dating culture in Armenia.

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COMMENTARY

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



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Instead of a National Salvation Strategy Will They Create Another Ill-Renowned Treaty of Alexandropol?

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, C.M.

The domestic political life of Armenia, with its daily new developments, recently has taken on a new and worrisome dimension.

Under the influence of the successive major crises that have occurred in the past year, over a month ago, I expressed my thoughts in a long and comprehensive essay entitled “Armenia-Artsakh-Diaspora: Facing Great Challenges in the Next Era,” which received a wide response in the Armenian and English press. The thoughts expressed there remain relevant today.

Its urgent message is that in order to prevent greater and irreparable new losses, it is necessary to urgently create a National Salvation Strategy Body, with the best elements of our nation. In the international political immoral circus of these days, this body should lead the strategic activity of Armenia with the consolidation of nationwide efforts. It was emphasized that this initiative should be taken by the government, and everyone, the opposition, the homeland’s intellectuals and all the important structures of the diaspora, should show their sincere and complete cooperation.

However, today, it is observed with deep pain and disappointment that, apart from the wide response in the press, and apart from Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia’s positive and constructive, yet limited initiative, not a single action has been taken on this matter, which is a central problem of Armenian national existence. The Armenian government itself remains motionless. Is the majority of the Armenian world in a deep stupor or has it reached a dangerous level of impotence?

In fact, today’s authorities, and especially Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, continue to act in an unchanging, despotic manner. It is obvious that the latter still believes that “he may be responsible, but he is not guilty” for all the serious losses of Armenia and the Armenian people, which he has led by means of his unfortunately inconsistent, contradictory and confusing policies.

I write the present article to sound a new alarm. It should be clear that, as always, my point of view is neither pro-Pashinyan nor anti-Pashinyan.

Starting from the principle of prioritizing the supreme interests of our people, I arrive at my conclusions based on the objective and obvious data that is revealed to any rational observer every day.

Indeed, during the last few weeks, with special speeches in the National Assembly, and also with special interviews outside of it, the prime minister unexpectedly, with great diligence, suddenly pushes forward a series of new proposals that have not been elaborated until today. They are questionable, short-sighted and dangerous.

Under the current circumstances of existential worry for the Armenian state and people, we all hope that the leadership of Armenia will work day and night mainly to concentrate its forces for defense against our neighbors around us, as well as to shock the indifferent and immoral international states, flood them with persuasive information, and secure their cooperation, all of which is difficult work required in this situation.

However, instead of all this, today’s government, led by Prime Minister Pashinyan himself, suddenly started a few weeks ago to present a series of humiliating proposals that are half-concealed, but for careful analysts, obviously defeatist and designed to please the enemy.

The first in this series of proposals happened when the prime minister suddenly created a completely inappropriate if not ridiculous storm with speeches lasting hours concerning replacing “Armenians’ history” [Hayots badmutiun] with “Armenia’s history” [Hayasani badmutiun], and creating a question of secondary importance in the context of the serious problems of the day.

While people were busy with absurd issues of this type, the prime minister and his small group of associates in the National Assembly, suddenly and again unexpectedly, started to raise a number of issues leading to much more serious consequences. The Declaration of Independence of Armenia, the Constitution, the Coat of Arms, and the Anthem were put under question with dizzying speed. Unbelievably, they even dared to question the importance of Mount Ararat, one of the greatest and indisputable sanctities of the Armenian people, giving the pitiful justification that after all

Ararat currently is not found within the boundaries of Armenia.

Serious voices in Armenia and the diaspora pointed out to the prime minister and his direct associates that this attack unleashed against all these symbols important to the statehood and identity of the Armenians represent useless and inconsequential demoralizing steps taken simply to please and give in to the condescending demands of Turks and Azerbaijanis. In response, they tried unsuccessfully to completely deny this evident circumstance.

However, the self-spoken confession came from the prime minister himself when, with the intention of convincing the people, he gave the story of bulls for explanatory purposes, which simply caused laughter. Adopting a thoughtful attitude, the prime minister “explained” to his listeners as follows. Currently, he said, Armenia is trying to advance safely on a road on both sides of which bulls are lined up ready to attack. Then he added that Armenia should be circumspect and careful and remove all the “red clothes” on it in order to calmly continue on its path. This is how transparent his strategy is.

Perhaps the prime minister has missed the fact that in the traditional contests held in Spain, when people face the bulls, they will hold in their hands deadly swords prepared for taking them down. When the bull attacks a bullfighter with excessive force, the latter, knowing that he is facing the choice of life and death, mercilessly plunges his sword into the bull’s heart. It is necessary for Prime Minister Pashinyan to consider this last image pertaining to his story of bulls.

How much awareness of national dignity, responsibility and security is required to reflect that Armenia should first of all have in its hands the most effective and modern weapons of self-defense corresponding to the sword of the bullfighter? Is it necessary to reiterate the well-known popular saying that the most effective way to ensure peace is to be prepared to the maximum extent for a possible war?

The current defeatist policy of Prime Minister Pashinyan and his associates, by appeasing our insatiable archenemies, the Turks and Azeris, trying to satisfy their successive and

endless demands made in the familiar style of the Mafia, will voluntarily lead us to the situation of one hundred years ago. At that time, the defeated Republic of Armenia was forced to sign the infamous Treaty of Alexandropol. This appears to be happening now without attempts even to try to avoid this situation, taking advantage of all the alternatives provided to Armenians one hundred years later.

So, today we are forced to declare that the prime minister’s proposals to save Armenia from its current impasse are wrong.

Creating a so-called new “legitimate constitution,” replacing “Armenians’ history” with “Armenia’s history,” and especially denying that Mount Ararat, the centuries-old symbol of pride of the Armenian people, is Armenian, will not lead to salvation, nor will any other concessions.

Instead of all those humiliating and fruitless steps, today’s urgent demand is to unite the all-powerful forces of our people from Armenia to the diaspora and put them to work with smart and flexible means, so that they organize the hard work of warding off the current danger of the complete loss of the homeland. We hope that we are not already too late.

The solution to this urgent existential problem requires, on the one hand, that Armenia provide itself with a modern and powerful system of self-defense as a matter of priority. On the other hand, with the same importance, it should endow itself with a body that creates a high-level strategy for national salvation, and even more so, a body with the full capacity to deal with political issues, led by individuals who have the best experience, cunning, knowledge and especially, the ability to predict future moves with the ingenuity of a chess master.

It is clear that today’s authorities, after the defeat of the 44-day war, and after that with their almost daily failures — the last and most shocking of which was the complete loss of centuries-old Armenian Artsakh in 24 hours — can no longer claim to believe that they are capable of shouldering this great responsibility on their shoulders alone. Morally, they are obligated to humbly request the support and cooperation of all the capable elements of our people.

Otherwise, they are not allowed to lead Armenia involuntarily to the point of signing a new and shameful Treaty of Alexandropol.

TODAY WE ARE FORCED TO
DECLARE THAT THE PRIME
MINISTER’S PROPOSALS TO SAVE
ARMENIA FROM ITS CURRENT
IMPASSE ARE WRONG.



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Despite His Denials, Aliyev Is Upset by International Criticism Of Azerbaijan

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan repeatedly states that he ignores all international criticisms regarding his violations of the human rights of his own citizens, war crimes by his soldiers, and ethnic cleansing of Artsakh Armenians. Aliyev tries to cover up these violations and crimes through “Caviar diplomacy,” by providing billions of dollars in bribes to various European officials.

Anytime Azerbaijan has a problem with a foreign country, Europeans institutions or international courts, he puts on a brave face and acts like nothing has happened. He repeatedly says, “I don’t care who says what, I will do what I want.”

I would like to cite a recent example of Aliyev being so bothered by such issues that, rather than ignoring them, has gone to unusual lengths to resolve them.

This example has to do with France. In recent months, Aliyev has been quite outspoken with his harsh criticism of French President Emmanuel Macron for supporting Armenia. Aliyev has refused to meet with President Macron and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to discuss the Artsakh conflict. Aliyev also complained about France selling a number of armored personnel carriers to Armenia. While spending billions of dollars to arm Azerbaijan with the latest Israeli and Turkish drones and missiles, Aliyev dares to complain about Armenia procuring a limited number of arms to defend itself.

Late last year, the Azerbaijan-France confrontation got more heated when Azerbaijan expelled two French embassy officials from Baku and in return France expelled two Azeri embassy officials from Paris.

The Intelligence Online website reported that, according to its confidential sources, Azerbaijan’s intelligence services asked Mossad, Israel’s Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations, to intervene with France to resolve their outstanding conflicts.

According to confidential Mossad sources, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Intelligence Service (XKX), led by General Orkhan Sultanov, asked his counterpart in Israel to intervene with the General Directorate of External Security (DGSE) of France to deescalate the tension between Baku and Paris. Azerbai-

jan indicated that it would not want to worsen the existing dispute.

However, the Azeri effort failed, as Mossad did not transmit the Azeri request to France, according to Intelligence Online sources. This was a delicate issue for Israel as it wanted on one hand to preserve its good relations with Azerbaijan, while on the other hand Israel’s intelligence agency did not want to attempt such mediation at a time when it was preoccupied with the conflict in Gaza and other Middle Eastern hot spots.

Intelligence Online reported that Mossad enjoys a high degree of influence over Baku, since Israel uses the Azeri territory for its operations in Iran. When Mossad stole Iran’s nuclear documents from Tehran in 2018, Israel’s agents used Azerbaijan’s border to flee from Iran. In return, Mossad greatly facilitated Azerbaijan’s acquisition of sophisticated weapons from Israel, which aided Baku, the second largest buyer of Israeli arms, to score victories in 2020 and 2023 in Artsakh. Just before the attack on Artsakh in September 2023, Azerbaijan’s security services informed the experts of Mossad and Unit 8200 (Aman) of Israel’s Military Intelligence Directorate of their plans and sought their advice.

According to Intelligence Online, Mossad has in recent years brought its cooperation with the French External Security Directorate to a higher operational level, notably on Iran. The French Agency has also been mobilized over the situation in Gaza.

The new director of French Intelligence Agency, Nicolas Lerner, met with David Barnea, the director of Mossad when the latter came to Paris in the last week of January. Attending the closed-door meeting on the Israeli-Palestinian issue were Abbas Kamel, head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate (Mukhabarat el-amma); Ronen Bar, head of Shin Bet, Israel’s Internal Security Agency; William Barnes, head of the CIA; and Qatari officials.

Intelligence Online importantly reported that the CIA let Baku know that it was not pleased with Azerbaijan’s conflict with French Intelligence, while France is trying to hinder Moscow in the Caucasus and needs Azerbaijan’s platform.

Having exposed Aliyev’s deception about ignoring international pressure on Azerbaijan, my advice to the international community is to continue pressuring Aliyev to stop his unacceptable behavior. Otherwise, he will go on with his multitude of ever-increasing violations and crimes, causing great harm to Azeris and Armenians alike.

Next week, I will expose another one of Aliyev’s efforts to counter international pressures on Azerbaijan, despite his denials of not paying any attention to them.

Will There Be Any ‘Syunik Corridor’?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On February 7, Ilham Aliyev won the presidential elections held in Azerbaijan. The victory was given to him quite easily, without any upheaval and he will continue his presidency in the following years. Now, nothing prevents Aliyev from continuing his aggressive actions against Armenia. In particular, he will try to bring to life the so-called “Syunik Corridor” (or “Zangezur Corridor”) project.

This is a project that the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem had in mind since the collapse of the USSR and, no matter what the official statements are now, it is hard to believe that the two countries have changed their geopolitical priorities. Turkey needs this corridor for its aspirations to unite and lead the Turkic world, and Azerbaijan needs to provide a direct connection with Nakhichevan. At the same time, the implementation of this project is also necessary for Russia, because the settlement of Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations will mean that it will no longer make sense for Russia to have a military presence in Artsakh (there are no Armenians there but there are Russian troops still there) or on the territory of Armenia against Turkey (the Russian military base in Gyumri). Therefore, Russia needs this project if it is to ensure the security of the corridor, routes and communications, as well as its physical military presence on the ground. Actually, an agreement about the implementation of this project was reached with the statement of November 9, 2020 and it can be assumed that the Armenian authorities have given their consent to the project verbally,

despite the fact that this statement is just a piece of paper.

When we talk about outside players, we also need to talk about those who will oppose this project. It is important to understand Iran’s position and it is unequivocally negative. Iran will not want to lose its regional transit position, and at the same time it will not want to lose or reshape its external border with Armenia which provides it an exit to Georgia, the Black Sea, etc. Yet another player is the United States, which opposes this project because Washington’s number one priority is to contain Russia, and with the implementation of this project, Washington will not be able to push Russia out of the South Caucasus region.

It is also important to understand which player is ready for what kind of actions to implement or to oppose the project. It is natural that the problem should be solved militarily so that the Armenian authorities can justify what happened in their own country and the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem will also give Russia a solid opportunity to move its troops from Nagorno-Karabakh to Syunik and deploy them right there in Syunik as the only security guarantor of Armenians.

In this scenario, everything may seem too logical. But there is also another important factor, which is adroitly chosen timing. Timing is crucial. It could happen when there is a tense pre-election or post-election processes in the US and no one in Washington is particularly interested in what is happening in the South Caucasus — just as it happened during the 2020 elections.

Of course, this is not the only scenario for developments, but at the moment it seems the most possible one, to which Armenia cannot be an obstacle. But here, Iran and the United States, which surprisingly have common interests on this issue, can hinder Azerbaijan’s plans.

(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.)

Armenia’s Diaspora Commissioner Makes First Visit to Australia

By Vahe Artinian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

SYDNEY, Australia — Representatives of the government of the Republic of Armenia dealing with the Armenian diaspora are visiting Australia this February. This is the first such visit since the time of Diaspora Minister Hranush Hakobyan, and of course the first visit by High Commissioner of the Diaspora Zareh Sinanyan.

Armenia has changed so much in the last five years or so and too many tragedies have been recorded in our nation’s tragic history. During this latter period, the previous governmental structure for diasporan relations has been changed, with budget reduction and alterations to the previous ethos. Understandably the needs and priorities of Armenia have also changed, with much greater defense needs and 125,000 Artsakh refugees, so local budget needs correspondingly shifted. The diaspora keeps sending aid via traditional organizations, and sometimes privately; but it’s never enough considering the needs.

From our meetings, it became clear that the main focus of the new representative is in the youth programs and exchange of talent. These areas can bring strength to both entities (diaspora and Armenia). The education portfolio, including preparation of teachers and student exchanges, seem to have been either changed or discontinued by this department. This alarms us in the diaspora, with hundreds of schools, especially after the weakening of communities in Syria and Lebanon and closures like that of the Melkonian Educational Institute in Cyprus, as to how and where the future teachers in the diaspora will be trained, and the much-needed modernization of Armenian integrated language programs will be conducted.

The youth exchange and other professional exchanges are useful; but to me it represents a definite cut in the budget and reduction in the portfolio. As for the visit, it was explained that it’s two pronged: first, to strengthen relations and programs, and second, to nominate a local community member as representative of the Office of the Diaspora High Commissioner in Australia, as has already been established in certain countries. Sinanyan also spoke about two new initiatives in Armenia,

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Armenia’s Diaspora Commissioner Makes First Visit to Australia

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“mapping” the diaspora, and a repatriation integration center.

I like the fact that the Armenian government perhaps started to think that diasporan Armenians could be trusted as its direct representatives in governmental issues. Am I stretching my imagination? Let’s wait and see! On the other hand, communities need to mature and find this as a common ground to have representation. Just as Armenia is raising the flag of democracy, so should the diaspora; i.e. we need proper elected representatives for which the community votes, with time limits, etc. Otherwise, the same old same old.

By no means did I represent our community, but I attended one meeting during the visit and listened to the impressions of others from different meetings, as Sinanyan met separately with each group, except at a forum with New South Wales youth. We wait for the official report about this visit from Armenia. The situation worldwide is fraught and our enemies are at the door with eager appetites. Let’s organize our communities to forge forward for Armenia and its diaspora alike.



Zareh Sinanyan, first row, third from left, with the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party Ardag Tarpinian Chapter members and some spouses on Thursday, February 8 in Sydney, Australia

Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State To Hold 36th Annual Banquet on March 17

FRESNO — The Armenian Studies Program of Fresno State will hold its 36th Annual Banquet on Sunday, March 17, at the Fort Washington Country Club in Fresno.

This year’s banquet will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Students Organization and the 45th anniversary of the *Hye Sharzhoom* newspaper.

“This is a special year for the Program and the community,” said Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program, Prof. Barlow Der Mugardechian. “The anniversaries of the Armenian Students Organization and *Hye Sharzhoom* are a recognition of the impact that Armenians have made at Fresno State and in the community.”

More than fifty-five student recipients of Armenian Studies scholarships and grants for 2023-2024 will be recognized at the Banquet, together with students who are graduating with a Minor in Armenian Studies.

The Armenian Studies Banquet brings together Fresno State students, faculty, administrators, and the community, to celebrate the achievements of the Program and its students.

The reception will begin at 5:00PM followed by the Banquet at 6:00PM.

Tickets are \$60 per person, with a special price of \$30 for Fresno State students and Fresno State faculty. The deadline for reservations is Friday, March 8.

For more information about the banquet, contact the Armenian Studies Program by email at barlowd@csufresno.edu, or Facebook @ArmenianStudiesFresnoState.





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