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French Defense Chief Visits Armenia Amid Deepening Ties

By Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun/AFP) — France will provide more weapons and other military assistance to Armenia to help it defend its territory, French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu said during a first-ever visit to Yerevan on Friday, February 23.

"Threats hanging over Armenia force us to move forward faster," he told Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. "It is very important for us to react and take necessary steps quickly."

Speaking after talks with his Armenian counterpart, Suren Papikyan, held earlier in the day, Lecornu confirmed that Armenia took delivery the previous night of the first batch of French night-vision devices commissioned by it last year. The Armenian military will also soon receive air-defense radar systems and more armored personnel carriers from French manufacturers, he said.

The French defense group Thales signed with the Armenian Defense Ministry a contract for the supply of three GM200 radars during Papikyan's visit to Paris last October. Papikyan and Lecornu signed at the time a "letter of intent" on Armenia's future acquisition of short-range surface-to-air missiles manufactured by another French company.

Lecornu indicated that the supply of the Mistral air-defense systems is a matter of time. What is more, he see FRANCE, page 2

France Honors French-Armenian Hero Missak Manouchian

By Jean Eckian

PARIS — Through the voice of French President Emmanuel Macron, France honors Missak Manouchian, a great figure of the French Resistance, hero of a singular story of a stateless Armenian poet who fought against the German occupiers on French soil. It would take several columns to write the story of this committed man who, with his comrades, carried out over 90 attacks and acts of sabotage, killing 150 Germans and wounding 600 more. The Nazis called it the Army of Crime.

On February 21, the 80th anniversary of Manouchian's execution by the Nazis in 1944,



Missak Manouchian

France admitted the glorious resistance fighter to the Panthéon mausoleum, home to the greatest figures in the land of human rights.

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Rally in Stepanakert. December 25, 2022 (Marut Vanyan Photo)

A New Reality for Displaced Artsakh Armenians

By Marut Vanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — The shock is gone, and so is the attention, it seems. What bothers Artsakh (Karabakh) Armenians after the ethnic cleansing, in their new lives in Armenia?

"All the same, Stepanakert is a wonderful city... I am there every night in my dreams. I saw the cars flying through the streets like airplanes. Just as we see on the Internet what the future cities will be like," says Armen Mirzoyan, who was forcibly displaced from Artsakh in September 2023 and now lives in Abovyan, Armenia. "I was breathing there, the nature was different there, the air was different, everything was different. Everyone is guilty for this disaster. If you can't keep something, they take it from you. I wonder if the Azerbaijanis will be able



Artsakh is ours. Abovyan, Armenia. January 9, 2024 (Marut Vanyan Photo)

to live in Stepanakert," he asks, before answering himself, "I don't think so."

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\$2.00

Ukraine's Zelenskyy Reportedly Will Visit Armenia



Scene from the Pantheon ceremonies

By Artak Khulian and Shoghik Glastian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is planning to visit Armenia next week amid the South Caucasus country's mounting tensions with Russia, a diplomatic source told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on February 26.

The visit will likely take place on March 4, the source said, adding that Zelenskyy will also travel to Azerbaijan.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry pointedly declined to confirm or deny the information, saying only that it informs the public about the visits of foreign leaders "in due course."

Ukraine's charge d'affaires in Yerevan, Valeri Lo-

bach, was also coy about the possibility of such a trip. "The spring will bring positive events to Armenia," he told reporters on Friday.

News of Zelenskyy's possible trip followed Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's recent visits to Germany and France during which he stepped up his criticism of Russia. In particular, Pashinyan for the first time denounced the Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying that it violated a December 1991 declaration in which newly independent Soviet republics recognized each other's Soviet-era borders.

Lawmakers representing Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party on February 26 gave more indications that the Ukrainian president, who has not visited any see ZELENSKYY, page 3

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NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenia, ICRC Discuss Needs and Rights of **Displaced Karabakh People**

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN. Net) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan had a meeting with Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of Red Cross, on Monday, February 26.

Issues on addressing the needs and rights of forcibly displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of the military attack and ethnic cleansing carried out by Azerbaijan last September, as well as the scope of cooperation with the ICRC on humanitarian issues were discussed.

Mirzoyan particularly emphasized the importance of the repatriation of persons held in Azerbaijan, as well as working on clarification of the fate of missing and forcibly disappeared persons, reiterating the publicly expressed willingness of the Armenian side to cooperate on this issue.

During the meeting, the current security situation in the South Caucasus were also touched upon.

Davtyan Wins Gymnastics World Cup Gold

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN. Net) — World championships medalist Artur Davtyan of Armenia won the title on Sunday, February 25, at the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG)s World Cup event in Cottbus, Germany.

Davtyan, the 2022 World champion on vault, picked up another title on Sunday, slipping past the Islamic Republic of Iran's Mahdi Olfati.

The Armenian vaulted a stuck Dragulescu (handspring, double front, half out) and a clean front handspring Randi, the website of the Olympic Games reveals.

China's Chen Yilu was the bronze medal winner with a final average of 14.850.

The 2024 FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Cup series continues in Baku, Azerbaijan, from March 7 to 10.

Parliament Speaker Wants Russian Guards Gone from Airport

YEREVAN (Politico.eu) - A senior Armenian official wants Russian border guards to leave the Zvartnots Airport near Yerevan as it has been "proven several times they do not protect" the national border. "What did they do when they [the Azerbaijanis] came to Nagorno-Karabakh? Did they escort the Armenian people out? Did they protect them?" said Armenia's parliament speaker Alen Simonyan on February 27, about Baku's lightning offensive to capture the breakaway region last September.

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expressed France's readiness to also sell more long-range systems to Armenia. He further announced that a French military adviser specializing in air defense will be deployed in Armenia to help it neutralize "possible strikes by potential aggressors."

"Nobody can reproach the Armenian army for boosting its defense capacity," Lecornu said at a joint news conference with Papikyan, clearly alluding to Azerbaijan's strong criticism of French-Armenian military cooperation.

Papikyan emphasized, for his part, that Yerevan is acquiring these and other weapons for purely defensive purposes in light of the "visible threat" to Armenia's territorial integrity.

"Armenian-French defense cooperation and joint efforts are exclusively aimed at establishing long-term peace and stability in the South Caucasus region, as well as at developing the defense capabilities of Armenian's armed forces," the defense ministry in Yerevan said.

Analysts say both Moscow and Baku are carefully watching Armenia's growing cooperation with France.

Neither minister shed light on a number of documents that were signed by them after their talks.

The AFP news agency reported that the Armenian side also signed on Friday a supply contract with the French company PGM manufacturing sniper rifles. It said no details of the deal were made public.

In October 2023, France announced the sale of defense equipment — three radar menia, provoking anger from Azerbaijan.

This week French President Emmanuel Macron expressed concern about a "risk of escalation" between Armenia and Azerbaijan as he received Pashinyan in Paris.

Suspension of CSTO Membership

24, Pashinyan said Armenia was suspending its participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Moscow-led defense pact that comprises several former Soviet republics.

Pashinyan said that the CSTO "had not fulfilled" its obligations in relation to Armenia.

"We have effectively frozen our partici-

AFP. "Pashinyan is playing a risky geopo-In an interview with broadcaster France litical game by shifting responsibility on Macron."

> Analyst Tigran Yegavian said Azerbaijan would continue to "nibble away" at Armenia's territory.

> "The question is whether French military support can act as a deterrent."

> The defense cooperation comes amid Armenia's mounting tensions with Russia,



French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu (left) speaks at a joint news conference with his Armenian counterpart Suren Papikyan, Yerevan, February 23, 2024.

pation in this organization," he said. "We will see what happens tomorrow."

He also accused Moscow of leading a "coordinated propaganda campaign" against him and his government.

The Kremlin said Friday that it had not received confirmation that Armenia was putting on hold its membership in the pact.

"I have a feeling that Nikol Pashinyan is going all-in, demonstrating that he has found a serious military shoulder to lean on in Armenia's confrontation with Azerbaijan," political analyst Arkady Dubnov told its longtime ally. Neighboring Iran has also signaled uneasiness over the pro-Western tilt in Armenian foreign policy.

"Our Iranian partners respect our cooperation with other partners, and I think our Russian and other partners should do the same because Armenia has no taboos when it comes to cooperation for the benefit of Armenia," Papikyan said in this regard.

Armenia is "turning to partners that are truly providers of security," Lecornu said when asked to comment on the tensions between Yerevan and Moscow.

MFA Calls Sumgait Massacres Precursor to Karabakh Ethnic Cleansing

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) - The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement in commemoration of the 36th anniversary of the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan continues its policy of eradicating any Armenian traces under its control, desecrating, vandalizing and destroying Armenian religious and historical-cultural monuments, the Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

of human rights. Hundreds of Armenians were killed, including women, children and the elderly, and thousands of Armenians were forcibly displaced.

"The Sumgait tragedy was followed by massacres of Armenians in Kirovabad, Baku and other Armenian-populated settlements of Azerbaijan. These chain events, like the earlier complete depopulation of Nakhichevan, showed that the mentioned crimes were not separate episodes of violence based on nationalism, but regular manifestations of state-planned and implegeted not only the Armenian population. they were also accompanied by deliberate actions to eliminate the Armenian heritage and the Armenian trace in general.

"Already in the 21st century, under the conditions of complete impunity, Azerbaijan continued the same policy of terrorizing the native Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, starving them to death and finally depopulating Nagorno-Karabakh through the use of force, ethnic cleansing, which was completed notwithstanding the three binding decisions of the UN International Court of Justice," it stated. "Even today, Azerbaijan continues its policy of eradicating any Armenian traces under its control, desecrating, vandalizing and destroying Armenian religious and historical-cultural monuments. Even today, the ongoing xenophobic and hostile policy against the Republic of Armenia is accompanied by high-level hate speech, threats and aggressive rhetoric, which is an obstacle to overcoming enmity between peoples and establishing peace and stability in the region," the Ministry continued. "The international community should give an adequate assessment of the mass crimes that have taken place and launch all available mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of such crimes and contribute to Armenia's sincere efforts to achieve a dignified and lasting peace in the South Caucasus," it concluded.

No official decision has been announced yet.

It comes as relations between Yerevan and Moscow deteriorate, with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan last week announcing the country was suspending its membership of the Russia-led military alliance of former Soviet countries, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

On February 27, 1988, at the initiative of the leadership of Soviet Azerbaijan and un-



der the conditions of absolute negligence, the massacres of the Armenian population of Sumgait began, accompanied by cases of violence, brutality, forced disappearances, dispossession, and massive violations

mented policy of Armenophobia. As a result of that policy, around 500,000 ethnic Armenians were forcibly deported from Soviet Azerbaijan," the Foreign Ministry said.

The Ministry noted that these events tar-

Zvartnots Launches New IT Center for Youngsters

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

VAGHARSHAPAT, Armenia - On February 3, over 65 people gathered in Zvartnots, Vagharshapat for the festive inauguration of a new IT center for youngsters. Presiding over the ceremonies were Lilia Totalyan, who is president of the Social Support Computer Center NGO in Echmiadzin; Angelina Arshakyan, Executive Director, "ZATIK" Yerevan Child Assistance Center State Non-Profit Organization (Ministry of Labor and Social Issues of the Republic of Armenia); Karine Smbatyan, Executive director, Sardarapat Secondary School, Armavir Marz, Sardarapat village; and, Lilit Petrosyan, Executive director, Vagharshapat Basic School Nr. 1.

Karen Gharslyan, co-founder of the initiative together with Tatev Terteryan, had arrived from Wiesbaden, Germany, where he lives and works as an IT architectural manager. Several Executive Directors of schools were on hand, from Vagharshapat, Alvard Hayrapetyan, High School Nr. 2,

tan of the Mother See, opened the ceremony. Gharslyan delivered greetings from co-sponsor of the project, the Mirak-Weissbach Stiftung, and Lilia Totolyan, speaking on behalf of the Social Support Computer Center, also warmly thanked the sponsors for the financial support.

The training center bears the name "BrAIn Lab" and offers instruction in computer skills for youngsters, in part free of charge. Totalyan, who designed the program, is the instructor of a course on "Internet Challenges - Cyber Security and Cyber Hygiene" within the framework of the "Civic Education" program of the World Council of Churches Armenia Round Table foundation. The new initiative is designed to responds to growing demand for various specialists with computer skills and familiarity with new technologies. BrAIn Lab introduces people of different age groups to state of the art digital and non-digital tools, methods, and skills. Computer technology has become a must for the education process everywhere. The children will get acquainted with the structure of the comput-



Karine Smbatyan, Director of Sardarapat Middle School, and Karen Gharslyan

Hranush Grigoryan, Basic School Nr. 8, and Alissa Babayan, Vagharshapat Basic School Nr. 12; Liana Barbasova, Legal department of Vagharshapat municipality, and Nrani Mekhakyan, Vagharshapat Centre Coordinator at Youth Initiative Centre (YIC) Armenia, Vice Director Mariam Harutyunyan, from the central office of the Armenian Church Youth Organization, as well as Lusine Aghajanyan HR manager of World Council of Churches Armenia Round Table Foundation.

Gharslyan and Terteryan officially cut the red ribbon and accompanied guests into the education center, where Rev. Hovhannes and, engineering art and programming, ba- could sense the mood of hope pervading

er, learn to compile and design documents, make calculations, and prepare presentations as well as web sites.

The course is intended for 10-15 year-old children displaced from Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) who have settled in Echmiadzin city, as well as for children from Aragats section of Echmiadzin city and Zvartnots district. The lessons are designed in three sections: computer literacy, with basic knowledge of computer types, structures, devices, operating systems (including Microsoft Office); photo and video editors, introducing graphic and video programs; Kesablyan, Assistant of the Grand Sacris- sic as well as, in a second stage, relatively the community; from the youngsters to their



Tatev Terteryan and Karen Gharslyan cut the ribbon

more advanced WEB programming.

To meet the needs of low-income families, especially those of refugees from Artsakh, the organizers launched a fundraising drive in Germany, led by Gharslyan. In addition, he has made his Zvardnots office space available free of charge for classroom use, and organized donations of laptop computers.

To select scholarship recipients, the education center launched a competition, together with the Vagharshapat "Zoravar Andranik" Basic School Nr. 12, and the "Nzhdeh" Basic School Nr. 8. Given the financial restraints, only 45 children would be able to win scholarships for free IT instruction. The contest was open to children between the ages of 10 and 14, and the response was great: well over 250 contestants signed up.

The competition was organized in two stages: first, the children answered a questionnaire on theoretical issues, and then they sat down for individual interviews conducted by Lilia Totolyan. Of the 45 winners, 15 are from Artsakh and 30 from the region.

A Spirit of Optimism

The grand opening ceremony continued with a musical interlude provided by the project group, "Do Re Meet NGO," which also conducts music therapy programs. Talented musicians travel to medical centers, offering music to help create a pleasant environment for patients and their family members.

Angelina Arshakyan followed with remarks on the importance of such an IT center for the Vagharshapat region. In his speech, Karen Gharslyan characterized the impact of the new initiative, saying one

parents and teachers, all are eagerly waiting for classes to start, scheduled for March 2. The project has generated not only hope, he added, but also strengthened the community's spirit of cooperation and unity.

While the musicians picked up their instruments again for folk music, and refreshments were served, parents of the winners had a chance to meet with Lilia Totolyan and Karen Gharslyan, to get to know the sponsors, and to have their questions answered. At the same time, the BrAIn Lab signed memoranda of cooperation with Yerevan Zatik Children's Support Center and Sardarapat Middle School.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy **Reportedly Planning** Visit to Armenia

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non-Baltic ex-Soviet state since the outbreak of the war with Russia, is due in Yerevan.

"After all, the president of Ukraine is the elected leader of his country, and just like other heads of state, he can visit Armenia unless there are some special hurdles," one of them, Babken Tunian, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

"We don't care about how Russia will or will not react [to Zelenskyy's visit]," said another pro-government lawmaker, Gagik Melkonian.

There has been no such reaction from Moscow yet. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on February 19 that Russia and Armenia now have "diametrically opposite



Future IT specialists

views" on the war in Ukraine.

Relations between the two long-time allies have further deteriorated in recent months, with the Russian Foreign Ministry accusing Pashinyan of "destroying" them.

Dmitry Suslov, a senior analyst with Russia's Kremlin-linked Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, told the Sputnik news agency on Monday that Zelenskyy's visit to Armenia could mark "the point of no return" in the erosion of bilateral ties. Suslov claimed that it would be part of the West's efforts to reorient Armenia towards the United States and the European Union.

Armenian opposition leaders have expressed serious concern about the far-reaching change in Armenia's traditional foreign policy, saying that it is reckless in the absence of security guarantees or military aid offered by Western powers.

Pashinyan embarked on the apparent rapprochement with Ukraine last year despite Kyiv's strong support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

A New Reality for Displaced Artsakh Armenians

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In the days prior to this disaster, the majority of the Armenians of Artsakh came to Armenia (directly to Yerevan) for two reasons, either for medical treatment or for education. In Artsakh, everyone lived in their own town or village and spoke the subdialect of their region. Whenever they met in the Artsakh's capital, Stepanakert, it became clear from each other's accents who was from which region of Artsakh — Martakert, Martuni or Hadrut. However, the situation is so shocking that six months later, the Artsakh Armenians still don't understand why they ended up in Armenia, although it is also their homeland.

Mirzoyan continued to muse, "The Armenians of Artsakh don't want to accept Armenian citizenship. They think that they will return to their home soon; after all, the cemeteries of our loved ones are there, aren't they? Do you think that Azerbaijan will be able to fill Stepanakert with its citizens? Maybe Aghdam, but not Stepanakert, which always was Armenian. I wonder if they will extract the gold from Artsakh [the Kashen gold mine]? I don't know in what capacity, but Armenians should live in Artsakh. How do they live in Javakhk (Javakheti)? I don't know what to do for this life to make it better."

Today, the entire population of Artsakh, spread across Armenia, faces various socio-psychological problems. From the beginning, there was a lot of talk about how to organize the life of Artsakh Armenians in Armenia. There was a suggestion that it would be good to place them in Syunik, because the dialects of Artsakh and Syunik are similar. But the reality is different. The fact is that these new refugees live where they can at the moment. Others who have the opportunity, unable to endure the difficult social situation or simply to seek the good life, are emigrating. It is not easy to go to another country. It is worse in Russia now, they say, while going to Europe or the U.S. seems as impossible as returning to Artsakh.

According to the National Security Service of Armenia, more than 6,000 Artsakh citizens have already <u>left</u> Armenia.



Displaced children from Getavan village, found refuge at the Gribayedov school in Stepanakert. September 22, 2023 (Marut Vanyan Photo)

nian (Artsakh) authorities lead there, if the guarantor of security is our army. Only under the Artsakh flag. That's it. Life has shown that it is not possible to live even next door (with Azerbaijanis), much less living together," says Anush Martirosyan, who has lived in Stepanakert all her life.



On September 2023, as a result of military clashes, the Artsakh villagers were forced to come to the capital Stepanakert. The city authorities placed them in school buildings. This grandma spent the night at the Abovyan school in a bed made from school

She continues, "How and when to return can be discussed at length but they (we) need a home to live in right now and they want or not that house is in the Republic of Armenia. They have to pay for it (rent). which is very expensive for them. After all, the Artsakh people have always owned property, that's why it's uncomfortable to live in a rented house. It is a kind of psychological pressure for them."

On a recent day, displaced Artsakh residents gathered in the corridor of the Labor and Social Affairs office in Abovyan with anxious faces. Everyone was standing and waiting to get the clarifications they needed. Three children sitting on the chairs in the lobby, with phones in their hands watching a cartoon.

"The landlord demands the rent. I should pay the utility costs. My children don't get pensions, they don't give any clear explanation here. They say wait... How much? They send me from

"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 only 30 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]," said Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during his meeting with the Armenian community in Germany where he was on a visit for the Munich Security Conference on February 19.

God knows when and where we will have a home, say those forcibly displaced from Artsakh. To build a home is as difficult as to lost it, they say.

Concludes Anush, "I'm honestly not much optimistic. We have seen how houses were built for Hadrut and Shushi residents who were displaced in 2020. Until now they are as homeless as we are. I just need my home in Artsakh. I don't need another one even if it's a magnificent castle. I am even ready to live in a tent but in Artsakh."

(Marut Vanyan is a freelance journalist from Artsakh/ Karabakh. He has worked as a journalist since 2015.)

benches. Two days later, the entire population of Artsakh was forced to leave their homes. September 22, 2023 (Marut Vanyan Photo)

The return of Artsakh Armenians to their homes at least seems unrealistic at the moment; certainly no one wants to be in Karabakh in the way proposed by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev. No one wants to live under the Azerbaijani flag, otherwise, why did more than a hundred thousand people leave their homes where they lived for centuries?

According to Artsakh Ombudsman Gegham Stepanyan, serious international guarantees are needed to return to Artsakh and the guarantees of Russian peacekeepers are not enough.

"My opinion is that international guarantees are needed. In other words, only that guarantee of the Russian peacekeeping troops deployed in Artsakh after 2020, as history has shown, is not enough to ensure security in Artsakh. A much more desirable and much higher guarantee can be provided if peacekeeping or international forces are formed on the international platform," Stepanyan said during a press conference held in Yerevan on February 14. "Going back to Artsakh is possible only if the Armeone place to another, they demand documents,

I'm already tired of these humiliating queues. They don't even give these fifty thousand drams, but they say that they will allocate ten million drams to the Artsakh refugees to build a house. Are they making fun of us," says the mother of one of the children.

Perhaps the most urgent problem for the Artsakhtsis is housing. The financial support provided by the Armenian government is not enough if they have to pay rent, because the rent for an apartment in Yerevan, as they would say, is as expensive as in London.



Holy Mother of God Cathedral. Stepanakert 17 September 2023 (Marut Vanyan Photo)

Indian Migrants Reshape Armenia's Labor Market

By Arshaluis Mgdesyan

Armenia's capital Yerevan has seen surging numbers of labor migrants from India over the past year and a half.

This as the city's demography and economy have already been reshaped by the influx of Russians fleeing the consequences of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

It's a novel and ironic situation for a traditionally ethnically homogenous country whose economy relies to a large extent on its own citizens going abroad as labor migrants.

Armenia began to attract labor migrants from India in 2018, when its economy began demonstrating dynamic growth and local businesses began to have trouble finding workers. The economy needed cheap labor.

The number of Indians in Armenia, whose population is just under three million, has grown steadily since then. In 2018 there were a few thousand Indian citizens residing in the country but now that figure is between 20,000 and 30,000, then-Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan reported last November.

The figures of the State Statistics Committee (Armstat) differ slightly. Armstat says that in 2023 a total of 54,582 Indian citizens entered the country, of whom 34,687 are considered "tourists." That's considerable growth over the numbers for 2022, when 21,591 Indians entered Armenia, 18,194 of them "tourists."

But the tourist designation has little meaning and it's hard to distinguish between tourists and labor migrants, largely because many of the latter group never register to seek residency or the formal right to work. In fact, the number of Indian citizens granted residency between 2018 and 2023 has not changed sharply, ranging between one and two thousand annually.

Economists say all this makes it clear that most Indians in Armenia are engaged in the shadow economy.

The former economy minister effectively acknowledged this reality in his remarks last November, noting that tourist flows from India are actually not that high.

Indians, like other labor migrants, migrate with one goal in mind - to find work and send money back home to their families. Armenia's rapid economic growth in the past few years has made it an attractive destination.

Over the past few years, Armenia's GDP per capita has nearly doubled in dol-

lar terms. According to the International Monetary Fund, that indicator rose from just over \$4,200 in 2018 to over \$8,200 in 2023. It's now the highest GDP per capita among the South Caucasus countries. India's GDP per capita, meanwhile, is around \$2,800.

Armenian economist Armen Ktoyan believes that the influx of Indian migrants to Armenia has two main causes: higher wages than back home and the strengthening of the national currency, the dram, in relation outskirts of Yerevan. So far, he's content with his work. He makes enough to live in Armenia and send \$150-200 home each month.

"I've got everything strictly budgeted. I spend about \$120 a month on food in Yerevan, I pay a little less than that in rent, I pay about \$200 per month to rent the motorcycle I use for the deliveries. And the rest I send home to my family," Suraj said, adding that this sum is enough to cover living expenses for his five-member family in



to the dollar over the past year and a half.

"It's precisely these factors that have triggered the influx of labor migrants from India, and this is important in terms of stimulating economic growth. Businesses in spheres such as construction, agriculture and services hire them and save money by doing so. And this in turn lowers the cost price of their products," Ktoyan told Eurasianet.

Many labor migrants from India are willing to do low-skilled jobs in Armenia due in part to their lack of knowledge of the state language.

"The delivery sphere suits best. You don't need to know Armenian to work as a courier. You have the delivery address, you make the delivery, and that's it," 27-yearold Suraj, from India, told Eurasianet.

Suraj has been working as a courier in Armenia for several months. Like hundreds of other Indian citizens, he came to Armenia to make money. He lives together with friends in a rented apartment on the India for a month.

Some Indians have stayed longer, gained some grasp of the language and are able to find more profitable work, such as driving a taxi.

Thirty-four-year-old Ajit has lived in Armenia for two years. He says he came to work in construction. He worked in this field for a few months, building high-rise apartment buildings, then he and some friends did farm work, then he decided to drive a taxi.

"I was learning Armenian in parallel. I learned the rules of the road and ultimately I was able to work as a taxi driver," said Ajit, who came to Armenia in the footsteps of his cousin, who had come and was able to send money home.

Indians Change the Labor Market

The sudden appearance of large numbers of Indian workers has changed the Armenian labor market, eliciting mixed reactions from locals. Some worry that Indians are taking their jobs because they're willing to work for less. Others, particularly members of the business community, are distinctly positive.

"I wouldn't say that the Indians are taking jobs away from locals. As a rule, they work in fields where there is not enough labor. I hire Indians not because I want to pay them less. Sometimes I pay them more than locals since they're good workers. They don't ask many questions, they work, they don't laze about," a local businessman producing canned goods and non-alcoholic drinks told Eurasianet.

The businessman, who requested anonymity, added that the Indian migrants are creating "healthy competition" on the market. "It's becoming clear to local workers that businesses have an alternative, and this spurs them to be more productive," he said.

The influx of migrants to Armenia is taking place against a backdrop of strengthening relations between Yerevan and New Delhi.

According to Indian media reports which have not been refuted by Armenian officials - in the past year and a half Armenia has signed contracts with India on the purchase of hundreds of millions of dollars of weapons, becoming, according to Armenian officials, the biggest buyer of Indian military hardware in the world.

These growing strategic ties have given India the image of a friendly country in the eyes of Armenian society. For the most part, this positive feeling is extended to the Indian migrants themselves, though there have been occasional manifestations of xenophobic aggression.

"Indians as labor migrants is a new phenomenon for Armenia. Twenty or thirty thousand people is a large number for our country, so it's been hard for some people in Armenia to comprehend what's going on. People are adapting to each other and in this process there might be some misunderstanding, incomprehension. But I don't see any discrimination against Indians in Armenia, let alone discrimination on a large scale," social anthropologist Aghasi Tadevosyan told Eurasianet.

Many Indians in Armenia have no plans to stay over the long term. For some, it's a jumping-off point, a place where they can get an economic footing, get residency, get a Schengen visa and move on to Europe.

(Arshaluis Mgdesyan is a journalist based in Yerevan. This article originally appeared on Eurasianet.org on February 21.)

Armenian State Symphony Orchestra Donates to UNICEF for Refugees

YEREVAN — The Foundation for the Support of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra announced on February 27 a donation of \$12,000 to UNICEF Armenia in support of its humanitarian work for refugee children. Led by UNICEF Armenia Ambassador Sergey Smbatyan, the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra raised funds for UNICEF through seven concerts from November to December 2023, UNICEF Armenia said in a press release.

Through this contribution, refugee children with disabilities will benefit from multipurpose pharmacy vouchers. Each voucher, valued at 25,000 drams (\$60), will allow families to choose and purchase the essential pharmaceutical items that their children require. This approach not only ensures flexibility but also respects the unique needs of each child, allowing families to make decisions based on their specific healthcare and rehabilitation priorities.

Smbatyan expressed the urgency of addressing the immediate needs of refugee children, stating, "While we consistently advocate for shaping a brighter future for children, the current reality demands our immediate attention to their present. Our support is particularly vital for the most vulnerable refugee children, who, having overcome numerous challenges, now require the care and warmth of each and every one of us."

UNICEF has been providing support to refugees arriving in Armenia since day one, including much needed mental health and psychosocial support, medical supplies and equipment, social protection and child protection services, and much more. Ahead of winter season, funded by the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund and European Investment Bank, UNICEF, in cooperation with the RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Armenian Progressive Youth NGO, started to provide 25,000 dram clothing vouchers to all refugee children aged 0-9 (inclusive), as well as to all refugee children with disabilities. In addition to clothing vouchers, all refugee children with disabilities will now also benefit from pharmacy vouchers, addressing not only their essential clothing needs but also facilitating access to necessary medications and healthcare supplies.

"UNICEF extends its heartfelt appreciation to the Foundation for the Sup-

port of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and National Ambassador Smbatyan as well as to everyone who attended the Orchestra's concerts, to its musicians and guest artists, as well as to private sector parties who have contributed to this campaign. This collaboration empowers us to expand our existing humanitarian support, reaching out to a greater number of refugee children, with a particular focus on those who are the most vulnerable. UNICEF has been there before, during and after humanitarian emergencies during the 30 years of our work in Armenia, joining hands with our partners to support all children in Armenia, and we will continue to do so," emphasized Christine Weigand, UNICEF Representative in Armenia.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Kremlin: Moscow in 'Quite Frequent Contacts' with Armenia over CSTO

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN. Net) — Moscow continues contacts with Yerevan to clarify statements by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan about "freezing" its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told a briefing Monday, February 26.

The Russian Federation does not have an "understanding" of Armenia's position, the Kremlin representative noted, Tass <u>reports</u>.

"We have quite frequent contacts with our Armenian partners. Of course, we will clarify [the issue]," he added.

Pashinyan said in an interview earlier that the country had "frozen" its participation in the CSTO.

Erdogan Asks Aliyev To Avoid Tensions with Armenia

ANKARA (RFE/RL) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Ankara on February 19.

Erdogan during the meeting told Aliyev that he wanted Baku to avoid future border flare-ups with Armenia and to pursue a lasting peace.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev arrived in Ankara after holding rare talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hosted by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Azerbaijani Detained in Moscow at Armenia's Request, Quickly Released

BAKU (JAM News) — Kamil Zeynalli, a prominent blogger and fitness trainer from Azerbaijan, was detained in Russia on February 21, based on a warrant for murder issued by Armenia. However, on the same day, he was released.

Zeynalli said that the following day was slated for a court hearing.

"According to international conventions, if the detainee is sought by a hostile country, he cannot be extradited there. Since there has been no peace treaty signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia cannot, under any circum-

Mitsotakis to Pashinyan: Greece will Stand by Armenia in its Peace Efforts

ATHENS (Public Radio of Armenia) — Greece will stand by Armenia in every diplomatic effort for a lasting peace treaty with Azerbaijan, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a statement for the press alongside Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 27.

He said the visit is an important step in consolidating the already excellent relations between the two countries, Greece and Armenia.

"These relationships go back centuries, but can become even more productive in



Greek Premier Kyriakos Mitsotakis

the face of the common challenges we face. Especially now that Armenia, with the assistance of the European Union, is acquiring stable and transparent structures, which will allow attracting investments," Mitsotakis noted.

"We also do business in the defense sector, having concluded a special agreement since last December. We are also discussing with the Prime Minister how we can strengthen our trade relations," he added.

"We also discussed the developments in

our wider region, finding that here too our positions are common: both countries stand firmly against any threat of force or use of force," Mitsotakis said.

"We are always on the side of International Law, we remain fully committed to respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of each state, we believe in dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes. After all, after the 2023 war, Armenia understands better than anyone the value of peace," Mitsotakis noted. He emphasized that Greece will always stand by Armenia in every diplomatic effort for a permanent peace treaty with Azerbaijan.

"And I insist that only a viable agreement between Yerevan and Baku can pave the way for a better tomorrow in the South Caucasus. That is why Greece supports the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative, which the Prime Minister announced last December, so that the wider region can be transformed from a theater of conflict into a commercial hub that will connect the Black Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea. Because in the end only the common prosperity makes the guns fall silent and only the progress of the people repels the plans of authoritarian leaders," Kyriakos Mitsotakis stated.

He noted that Greece will help protect the Armenian cultural heritage in areas such as Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Finally, all the conditions are in place to reach a bilateral agreement regarding the immigration and employment of Armenians in Greece. The friendly country has a vibrant workforce with distinct skills in all fields of work. While, on the other hand, the many things that connect our peoples will make their integration into the Greek reality easier," the Greek PM added.

On the same visit, Pashinyan also met with Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou.

She noted, "Your visit reflects the excellent level of our relations, as well as our common will to develop and deepen our cooperation in all spheres. Our two countries are bound by age-old feelings of friendship and brotherly relations and mutual understanding. We cooperate constructively within the framework of international structures and in this spirit we fully share your interest in protecting the safety of world cultural heritage within the framework of UNESCO."

"Aware of your efforts in the implementation of reforms, we support and deepen the institutional dialogue between Greece and Armenia. Greece is closely following the events taking place in the Caucasus, from the very first moment we expressed our solidarity with the Armenian people by sending humanitarian aid to thousands of Armenians forcibly displaced from Nagorno Karabakh. Greece unequivocally condemns the use of force and supports the negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which aims to establish solidarity, peace that will be lasting and will contribute to the creation of good neighborhood and relations," she added.

Pashinyan thanked her for the warm reception and noted: "The relations between our countries – political, economic, cultural, you rightly mentioned – have a long history, there is a deep emotional connection between our peoples. In this sense, of course, that emotional bond was also expressed with the help of Greece to our compatriots forcibly displaced from Nagorno Karabakh, for which I am grateful."

He noted that Greece is one of Armenia's most important partners in the European Union and expressed gratitude for the participates in the EU civilian mission in Armenia.



stances, hand him over to Armenia," stated the blogger's lawyer.

Zeynalli was placed under international search on charges of "murder" and is suspected of beheading an elderly individual in Karabakh during the 44-day war, as reported by Armenian sources, citing the press service of the Armenian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In October 2020, during the war, Zeynalli was arrested in Azerbaijan for 10 days for "posting information prohibited for dissemination on the Internet" and "violating the requirements of the martial law regime."

In December 2020, after the, Zeynalli was arrested again. This time he was arrested for 30 days for attempting to illegally enter the Kelbajar district, which had been recently taken back by Azerbaijan. The statue of Alexander Myasnikyan in Stepanakert

Azerbaijan Destroys Alexander Myasnikyan Statue in Stepanakert

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijan has destroyed the statue of prominent Soviet Armenian politician, academic and literary critic Alexander Myasnikyan located on Martuni Street in Stepanakert, the capital of Azeri-occupied Artsakh, the Artsakh Monument Watch warned on February 27.

The Myasnikyan statue was inaugurated on September 27, 2014, marked as the day of Stepanakert. It was carved by famous sculptor Yuri Hovhannisyan.

"Incidentally, this is not the first case of destruction of monuments to Artsakh and Soviet politicians in the city of Stepanakert. As part of the state policy, the Admiral Ivan Isakov bust, the memorial stone of Artsakh hero Ashot Ghulyan, the bust of Lieutenant-General Anatoly Zinevich, a former chief of the Artsakh army's General Staff, the Stepan Shahumyan statue in Stepanakert and the Eagle Monument in the Upper Park of Stepanakert have already been destroyed," the Monument Watch statement added.

INTERNATIONAL

France Honors French-Armenian Hero Missak Manouchian

MANOUCHIAN, from page 1

Manouchian was born on September 1, 1906 in Adiyaman in the Ottoman Empire. Self-taught, he worked as a laborer, then became a carpenter. He fled to France in 1925.

He was a member of the Spanish Republican Aid Committee and a delegate for the French Communist Party until 1939, when he applied for French nationality. He was twice refused. Thus, it was as a foreigner that he was welcomed at the Panthéon.

Through him, we also pay tribute to his 21 other comrades, "Francs-tireurs [free shooters] and partisans," who were shot alongside him. They were "Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Italians, Spaniards, Romanians or French."

Panthéon

Outside the sacred precinct, hundreds of people waited in the light rain to see Melinée and Missak's coffins, draped in French colors, make their way to their final resting place. Inside, the emotion was palpable, as could be seen on Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's face.

In his tribute speech, lasting 30 minutes, the French president said, in essence: "You enter here as a soldier with your brothers in arms." In his speech, he recalled the singular career of this hero of the shadows, repeatedly quoting words from the works of Charles Aznavour and the singer Léo Ferré (*L'affiche rouge*).

The Red Poster (Affiche rouge)

Missak was arrested on November 16, 1943 by collaborators of the French Intelligence Service and executed on February 21 the following year, after being tortured by the Gestapo. On February 22, 1944, the German propaganda services in France distributed 15,000 copies of a red poster





Scenes from the Pantheon ceremonies



featuring 10 Resistance fighters, including their leader Missak Manouchian. The poster read: "Liberators? Liberation! By the army of crime." Mélinée had escaped arrest. She died, a French citizen, on December 6, 1989 at the age of 76.

Armenian Community

Because of his former role in the French section of the Comité de secours à l'Arménie, before the war, Manouchian retained an important influence within the Armenian community in France. It should also be remembered that he was sheltered and taken in by the family of Charles Aznavour, whom he taught to play chess.

On February 21, 1944, the day before his execution, Missak wrote his last letter from prison to his wife Mélinée before being shot at Mont Valérien Fort: freedom fighters will honor our memory with dignity. At the moment of my death, I proclaim that I have no hatred against the German people or anyone else, and that everyone will get what they deserve in punishment and reward.

The German people and all other peoples will live in peace and brotherhood after the war, which will not last much longer. Happiness to all...

I deeply regret not having made you happy. I would have liked to have had a child with you, as you always wanted. I therefore beg you to marry after the war, without fail, and have a child for my hap-



shortly with the courage and serenity of a man with a clear conscience, because personally, I have done no harm to anyone, and if I have, I have done it without hatred. Today, it's sunny. It is by looking at the sun and the beautiful nature that I have loved so much that I will say farewell to life and to all of you, my dear wife and my dear friends. I forgive all those who have hurt me or wanted to hurt me, except the one who betrayed us to buy back his skin and those who sold us out. I give you a



the Red Poster



Missak and Mélinée Manouchian

"My dear Mélinée, my beloved little orphan, In a few hours, I'll be gone from this world. We're going to be shot this afternoon at 3 p.m. I don't believe it, but I know I'll never see you again.

What can I write to you? I'm so confused and so clear at the same time.

I joined the Liberation Army as a volunteer soldier, and I died just short of victory and the goal. Happiness to those who will survive us and taste the sweetness of tomorrow's freedom and peace. I am sure that the French people and all

The political delegation, including the French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, as well as Armenia's Premier

piness, and to fulfill my last wish, marry someone who can make you happy. I bequeath all my possessions to you, your sister and my nephews. After the war, you will be able to claim your war pension as my wife, as I die a regular soldier in the French Liberation Army.

With the help of friends who will honor me, you will have my poems and writings published and read. You will bring my memories, if possible, to my parents in Armenia. I will die with my 23 comrades big hug, as well as your sister and all the friends who know me from far or near, I hold you all close to my heart. Adieu.

Your friend, your comrade, your husband. Manouchian Michel.

P.S. I have fifteen thousand francs in the suitcase on Rue de Plaisance. If you can take them, repay my debts and give the rest to Armène. M. M."

(Missak Manouchian and Mélinée are buried at the Panthéon in vault number XIII.)

Community News

109th Commemoration Of the Armenian **Genocide to Take Place** In Times Square on April 21

NEW YORK - The 109th commemoration of the Armenian Genocide will take place in Times Square on Sunday, April 21, in an event sponsored by the Knights and Daughters of Vartan and co-sponsored by a number of leading Armenian-American organizations.

The program, which will take place from 1:30 to 4 p.m., will consist of remarks from elected officials who are supporters of Armenian-American issues and have continuously advocated for Armenian Genocide affirmation in the US, as well as scholars, and cultural musical performances.

The Commemoration will remember the 1.5 million Armenian lives lost during the first genocide of the 20th century, between 1915 and 1923, and will call for recognition from the Turkish government, which denies this crucial piece of history to this day.

"For almost four decades, our community has had an impactful platform to meaningfully commemorate the Armenian Genocide," said Committee Co-Chairs Haig Gulian and Christopher Artun. "Once again we gather this year in Times Square to raise our voices and show the world that we will not forget the 1.5 million Armenians who were massacred, while continuing our fight for global recognition."

Donations to help defray costs of the Armenian Genocide Commemoration in Times Square can be made (https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ to donation-form/caada68d-baab-42b9-99d0-45b0f52ab0f1).



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 (AGBU), Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, Tekeyan Cultural Association, Armenian National Council of America, Armenian Bar Association and the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA); participating organizations include the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Armenian Presbyterian Church, Armenian Evangelical Union, Armenian Catholic Eparchy, Armenian Network of Greater New York, Armenian International Women's Association, Homenetmen Scouts of New York and New Jersey, Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) and national Armenian youth organizations.



Dr. Vahakn N. Dadrian

Dadrian Archive Project Announced

MISSION HILLS, Calif. - The Ararat-Eskijian Museum Research Center (AE-MRC) and the Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) within the Promise Armenian Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), recently announced the launch of the Vahakn N. Dadrian Archive Project.

Prof. Vahakn N. Dadrian (1926-2019) was a preeminent scholar of the Armenian Genocide and instrumental in establishing the larger field of genocide studies. He lectured and published widely in the field, leading to greater international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. His unique collection of archival materials and books is of extraordinary value to those researching the origins of the Armenian Genocide, the Genocide itself and its aftermath.

Throughout his long career, Professor Dadrian accumulated a wealth of material on the Armenian Genocide throughout the different archives in the world, American, British, German, French Armenian and Ottoman, among them. His archive has also numerous unpublished manuscripts and newspapers from various languages. Before his death, he transferred these materials to the AEMRC. The Vahakn Dadrian Armenian Genocide Book Collection is now housed in the Edward L. Doheny Jr. Memorial Library located at the University of Southern California.

After a gradual process of herculean efforts and numerous trips across the nation transporting Professor Dadrian's archives, the AEMRC initiated a project in 2009 to digitize his personal notes and archives of historical documents and make them available for future generations of researchers interested in furthering their knowledge of Armenian Genocide Studies and general genocide studies.

A total of 28,000 pages out of

a total of 110,000 pages were digitized and indexed by 2018. It took two years of effort to appropriately preserve the entire archive collection into special folders and boxes. This full archive has been available to scholars and researchers by in-person appointment only at the AEMRC. Due to a large grant received in 2023, the organization will be resuming the digitization and indexing of the Part of the Dadrian archives remaining 80,000 pages.



California Armenian **Legislative Caucus Foundation Announces Scholarships in Remembrance of** Genocide

SACRAMENTO - The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation is hosting two scholarship contests in remembrance of the Armenian Genocide. California high school students (grades 9-12) are invited to participate in an essay and/ or a visual arts contest to increase awareness of the Armenian Genocide on its 109th anniversary. All scholarship applications must be submitted by Friday, March 29, 2024.

Winners will be announced to mainstream and Armenian media on Wednesday, April 24. The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation will contact all winners directly. Original artwork may be requested from visual arts finalists for display in the California State Capitol.

Criteria for each contest are detailed below. Students may enter both contests, but each application must be submitted separately by completing the Scholarship Form (https:// bit.ly/2024CALCF). All applications must be submitted to the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation by or before 11:59 PM on Friday, March 29, 2024. No exceptions.

Essay Scholarship

Essay Scholarship Awards: First Place: \$1,000; Second Place: \$750 and Third Place: \$500

Prompt: In 2022 and 2023, the Azerbaijani government launched a blockade of the Republic of Artsakh which displaced over 100,000 indigenous Armenians. How would you address the resulting humanitarian and refugee crisis?

Requirements: Essay must directly respond to the essay prompt. Responses must be 750-1000 words and no more than four (4) pages in length. Responses must be typed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper, one-inch margins, in Arial 11-point font, and double-spaced. Applicant's first and last name must be included at the top of each page with a page number.

Visual Arts Scholarship



AGRP is also in the process of facilitating the accessibility of the digitized collection, particularly to make it searchable through keywords for researchers. Dr. Anna Aleksanyan, a post-graduate student from Clark University, has been involved in these efforts. Dr. Aleksanyan is also currently on fellowship with the AGRP.

The Vahakn N. Dadrian Archive Project is led under the direction of Professor Taner Akçam, the inaugural Director of the AGRP. This project is anticipated to be completed by December 2025. Upon completion, the entire collection will be available online.

The AGRP will host a webinar this spring to offer additional insight into the project.

The Ararat-Eskijian Museum was founded in June 1985 by Genocide survivor, Mr. Luther Eskijian, and includes a unique collection of Armenian artifacts as well as books and materials about the Armenian Genocide. The museum is also a cultural and educational center where scholars, artists, writers, and community leaders can present current and historical subjects related to the Armenian people, as well as Genocide education.

The Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) was established within the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA in early 2022. Led by Taner Akçam, Ph.D., the AGRP engages in research and scholarly activities pertaining to the study of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire during the early 20th century.

Visual Art Scholarship Awards: First Place: \$1,000; Second Place: \$750 and Third Place: \$500

Prompt: In 2022 and 2023, the Azerbaijani government launched a blockade of the Republic of Artsakh which displaced over 100,000 indigenous Armenians. Create artwork to be published on the cover of a news magazine which illustrates the individual and global community impacts of this evolving humanitarian and refugee crisis.

Requirements: include a 300-500 word personal statement explaining the artwork; must be typed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper, one-inch margins, in Arial 11-point font, double-spaced, and include the applicant's first and last name at the top of the page. Artwork must be original work created by the applicant; only two-dimensional, visual art submissions will be see SCHOLARSHIP, page 11

COMMUNITY NEWS

ACYOA Seniors Serve on Mission Trip in Atlanta

By Jennifer Morris

NEW YORK — The Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) Seniors from across the Eastern Diocese just returned from the 4th annual ACYOA Seniors Mission Trip. The ACYOA Central Council partnered with Habitat for Humanity of North Central Georgia and the Armenian Church of Atlanta Mission Parish in Roswell, Ga., over the weekend of February 15-18.

The Mission Trip was underwritten by a grant from the Dadourian Foundation, along with funds from the ACYOA Central Council, which covered the participants' lodging, ground transportation, meals, and donation fees to take part in a Habitat for Humanity house build.

Nineteen young adults, ranging from college students to working professionals, participated in the trip and were immersed in service, education, witness, worship, and fellowship. They traveled from 9 states (Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin), representing 11 parish communities of the Eastern Diocese. They were joined by group leader Fr. Yeprem Kelegian, along with Jennifer Morris of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, along with St. Nersess Seminary graduates Deacon Alex Calikyan and Deacon Johnny Chadoyan.

The group arrived in Roswell, GA on Thursday evening. Early Friday morning, Fr. Kelegian led the participants in prayer and reflection before the group took off for Gainesville, GA, the site of the Habitat for Humanity house build. After meeting the Habitat staff and acclimating themselves with the tasks ahead, the group got right to work–eager to lend a hand for two full work days as they diligently prepared materials and cleared the land for the build.

First-time participant Cynthia Panthier said: "My first time on this mission trip

was special for me not only because I was able to give back to the community, but I was also able to go out of my comfort zone and reignite a passion inside of me. I'm thankful for what the mission trip gives to people, and what it gave to me. Bonding with families, giving a family a home, and making new friendships: this weekend made a huge impact on me and gave me memories that will last a lifetime."

Among the Atlanta Faithful

After a full day on the build site, the participants broke up into four groups and visited four homes of parishioners from the Atlanta Mission Parish. The participants entered their homes as strangers and left feeling like family, sharing life stories and spending time getting to know each other. Participants gathered back at their hotel together and participated in another late night of engaging group discussions that provided space for the participants to be vulnerable and grow deeper in their faith and prayer life.

Saturday's work on the Habitat worksite was especially meaningful, as participants worked alongside the future homeowner. A returning participant from the Atlanta Mission Parish, Emma Freeborn, reflected on her experiences by sharing: "I feel thankful to have had the opportunity to serve on the ACYOA mission trip for a second year. One thing that really impressed me this year and last year was the enthusiasm of all the ACYOA members to serve. At the Habitat for Humanity site, we formed smaller teams by task and area of the house and were able to work efficiently and effectively. Since everyone was eager to help, we were able to complete a substantial part of the siding of the house. It showed how much of a difference we can make when people come together with a common motivation and goal."

At the end of the work day, and af-

ter an emotional closing reflection, the group witnessed a baptism ceremony for two young adults from the Atlanta parish. Concluding the service, the young adults

ple who eagerly wanted to put their Christian values to work. They worked hard for Habitat for two days in inclement weather. They had deep reflections about their faith.



Members of the ACYOA Seniors help construct a house in Roswell, Ga. (Photo by Jennifer Morris)

provided and served dinner to parishioners and spent time in fellowship playing cards, chess, and tavloo.

The trip concluded on Sunday as the group participated in the Divine Liturgy, celebrated by Fr. Kelegian. After liturgy, Jennifer Morris and Lerna Lacinian of the Diocesan Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries spoke about the ministries of the ACYOA and Diocesan Summer Camp programs, St. Vartan Camp and Hye Camp.

Fr. Yeprem shared: "It was a joy and privilege to be with a group of young peo-

They were pastoral on home visits. They did it all with joy and fervor."

After a closing fellowship meal and parting conversations with members of the parish community, the group said their tearful goodbyes–eagerly awaiting a chance to meet at future national and regional ACYOA programs.

Follow @ACYOA on Facebook and Instagram to stay up-to-date on upcoming events, or subscribe to their email newsletter by visiting www.acyoa.org. Feel free to contact Jennifer Morris at jenniferm@ armeniandiocese.org.



IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA:

Between Local Dynasties and Eurasian Empires

PROFESSOR ZARA POGOSSIAN UNIVERSITY OF FLORENCE

Date: March 21, 2024 Time: 5 p.m. Location: Heritage Hall*

The Catholic University of America

620 Michigan Ave., N.E. Washington, DC 20064

* Heritage Hall is located on the main floor of Father O'Connell Hall.

For information and registration, email isec@cua.edu. *To request accommodations for individuals with disabilities, please call 202-319-5683.*

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Assembly Holds Special Advocacy Event in Palm Beach

WASHINGTON - The Armenian Assembly of America hosted a special weekend event for regional advocates, members, and supporters in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Saturday, February 3, which included a community advocacy update and evening gala featuring performer Kev Orkian.

The community briefing provided updates from Assembly Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian, who had recently returned from holding a round of meetings in Jerusalem, and Co-Chair Van Krikorian, who had recently returned from Armenia. Members and regional advocates also heard from Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny, who updated guests about current program objectives.

Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan spoke of the upcoming Advocacy Summit on April 16 and 17, as well as recent developments on Capitol Hill and efforts by the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, while Assembly Western Region Director David Ojaki-

an gave an update on West Coast advocacy. The community briefing also included discussion about the Assembly's program expansion, including the purchase and renovation of a new National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The new space will undergo renovation beginning this Spring with completion slated for the Fall. The Assembly looks forward to inviting the community to the nation's capital to celebrate the grand opening.

During the evening's gala at the Hilton West Palm Beach, where Executive Director Bryan Ardouny served as the Master of Ceremonies, Board Member Lu Ann Ohanian extended the Assembly's gratitude to the weekend's sponsors and donors, the West Palm Beach Committee Members, as well as Armenian Assembly intern alumni and families who were in attendance.

Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, delivered the invocation. He also remembered Assembly founders Dr. Richard Hovannisian and Dr.



The assembled at the Saturday banquet



Performer Kev Orkian

Dennis Papazian, Assembly Trustee Members Ardis Bogosian, Nevart Talanian, and Peter Onanian (also former Board Member), and the Assembly's Regional Director in Armenia Arpi Vartanian, who passed in 2023

Barsamian discussed activities and initiatives of the Assembly, and welcomed London-based Executive Producer of the "Armenia Uncovered" documentary and Board Member of the Tufenkian Foundation, Raffi Tanielian, who spoke about his involvement with the Assembly and its noteworthy accomplishments over the years, and introduced Orkian.

Orkian, a classically trained pianist, composer, and host of "Armenia Uncovered," performed for guests, and in between his sets, wove in insightful discussion about Artsakh refugees and played a tribute piece he composed during the 2020 war.

The program concluded with remarks from Assembly President Carolyn Mugar and Krikorian.



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

"The Assembly's events in West Palm Beach served as a wonderful opportunity to brief the community on our advocacy efforts, and gather with the important goal of expanding our reach for the betterment of the Armenian people," said Ardouny. "The Assembly sincerely thanks the West Palm Beach Committee Co-Chairs and Members, as well as all our generous sponsors for making this special weekend possible and to all of our attendees for joining us."





The gathering on Friday night





Epic Study-Tour Across Historical Armenia FROM KARS TO **KHARPERT, 2024** 14-23 July, 2024

Travelling through Bayazid, Van, Bitlis, Silvan, Diyarbakir and Kharpert, visitng Armenian churches, monasteries and historic sites, including Ani, Aghtamar, Varak, Lim, Gdouts, St. Partoghimeos, Garmirvank and St. Tovmas, and more. Organized by Alkans Tour Agency with the Gomidas Institute (London) and the Armenain Film Foundation (Thousand Oaks, CA).

Travel in comfort with English and Armenian speakers.

14. Istanbul to Kars, visit Ani, and the city of Kars (Holy Apostles Cathedral, City museum).

15. Kars to Van via Dogubayazid and its fortress and castle, views of Ararat, devil's bridge.

16. Van - old city, new museum, Varak monastery, Lezk and Gdouts Island Monastery.

- 17. Aghtamar Island, Nareg, St. Tovmas Monastery at Kantsag.
- 18. Hayots Tsor, St. Partoghimeos Monastery and Soradir village.
- 19. Drive to Tatvan Khntsorkin, Por and Bitlis town.
- 20. Drive to Upper Mesopotamia and Dikranagerd via Silvan.

21. Visit Dikranagerd city, including Sp. Giragos and St. Mary's Assyrian church.

- Drive to Elazig and Kharpert via Goljuk. 22. Kharpert city, Huseynig, Movsisavank and Palou.
- 23. Leave for Istanbul from Elazig.

Sergey Edilyan Appointed Honorary Consul of Armenia in Cleveland

WASHINGTON — The Embassy of the Republic of Armenia to the US recently reported that by order of the minister of foreign affairs of Armenia, Sergey Edilyan has been appointed the honorary consul of the Republic of Armenia in the Cleveland, Ohio metropolitan area. The Office of the Honorary Council will promote Armenian-American cultural, trade and economic relations.

Edilyan was born in Yerevan in 1977 to a family of lawyers. After graduating from law school in Yerevan, he practiced law at Yerevan State Prosecutor's Office and then at the Court of General Jurisdiction of the First Instance of Yerevan City.

In 2000, Edilyan moved to the United States, where he received his Executive MBA from Cleveland State University. At present, he is the president of the manufacturing company Alpha Tek Automation, Inc. and American Truck Equipment.

He serves as a St. Gregory of Narek parish member and plays an active role



Sergey Edilyan

in the Armenian community in Cleveland.

Edilyan is married to Irina Grigoryan. They are raising three children; Arman, Anri, and Catherine.

California Armenian Legislative Caucus **Foundation Announces Scholarships**

SCHOLARSHIP, from page 8 accepted. Submission types are limited to drawings, paintings, photographs, digital illustrations, and graphic design. Artwork may not exceed an 11x17 frame and must weigh less than 25 pounds. Artwork and the accompanying personal statement may not include any nudity, excessive and/or graphic

violence, racial slurs, derogatory and/ or offensive language, profanity, and may not make use of or replicate existing artwork. Must include up to five high-definition photographs of the artwork: take pictures in good lighting to ensure reviewers can see the details in the artwork; provide different angles to showcase the depth of the artwork.



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This study tour includes reading materials as well as unique content provided by the Gomidas Institute, such as maps, diagrams and other materials that brings the landscape alive.

Price: \$2,050 per person and includes internal flights from Istanbul, four star hotel accommodation at double occupancy (\$300 single occupancy supplement), breakfast and evening meals, comfortable buses, boat and entrance fees, and English speaking guides throughout. This trip will also include friends and members of the Gomidas Institute and the Armenian Film Foundation.

Booking details and deposits please contact info@easternturkeytour.org. For more information, info@gomidas.org or info@armenianfilm.org





SCHOLAKS AVAILABLE

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

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COMMUNITY NEWS

ARMENIAN JAZZ-MEETS-ROCK PIANIST TIGRAN HAMASYAN FRI MAR 15 | BERKLEE PERFORMANCE CENTER







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Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter

ԱՐԳԻԼՈՒԱԾ ՀԱՅՐԵՆԻՔ. ՍՓԻՒՌՔԱՀԱՅՈՒ ՄԸ ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ Forbidden Homeland: Story of a Diasporan Գլխաւոր բանախօս եւ հեղինակ ՔԱԹԻԱ ԴԱՒԻԹԵԱՆ ԳԱՐԱԿԷՕԶԵԱՆ KATIA TAVITIAN KARAGUEZIAN Keynote speaker and author





Story of a Diaspora

OBITUARY

Fr. Yeghishe Mandjikian

Former Catholicosal Vicar of the Armenian Prelature of Cyprus

By Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra

ANTELIAS, Lebanon — Rev. Fr. Yeghishe Mandjikian passed away on February 21, 2024.

He was born Ara Mandjikian, in Karadouran, Kessab, Syria, on March 21, 1942. At a young age, he and his family moved to Bourj Hammoud, Beirut. After graduating

from the Holy Forty Martyrs Elementary School, he was admitted to the Theological Seminary in Antelias in 1956. On May 22, 1960 Archbishop Khoren Paroyan ordained him a deacon, and on May 23, 1963 Bishop Hrant Khachadourian ordained him a celibate priest, called Hieromonk Yeghishe.

Between 1963-1965, he supervised the Library

of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, and he also taught at the Seminary and the Mardigian School. Between 1965 and 1974, he served as a spiritual shepherd at the Armenian Diocese in Isfahan, Iran, he headed the Armenian studies chair at the University of Isfahan, and he also taught at the New Julfa Armenian schools. On October 10, 1965 he received the rank of Archimandrite by Archbishop Ardag Manougian. In 1974 he settled in California, and in 1976 he received his B.A. from the Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures Department of the University of Columbia.

Between 1976 and 1983, he served in the United States (Western Prelacy) as a spiritual shepherd (1976-1977: Montebello, 1977-1980: Encino, 1980-1983: Fresno), and he also taught at the Mesrobian School in Montebello, the Holy Martyrs Ferrahian School in Encino, and the Department of Armenian Studies at the University of Fresno. On November 16, 1980 he was bestowed the rank of Senior Archimandrite by Catholicos Khoren I Paroyan.

In November 1983, he was appointed

Catholicosal Vicar in Cyprus, where he served until June 1997. During his long tenure, he continued publishing the *Gibrahay Deghegadou* newsletter until 1993; additionally, thanks to his efforts, the Armenian Genocide monument was erected in the courtyard of the Virgin Mary church in Nicosia (1990-1991).

He then served as a spiritual shepherd in Canada (1997-2000: Vancouver)

and the United States (2000-2002: Troy, New York; 2002-2004: North Andover, Massachusetts). Returning to Lebanon, he taught at the Theological Seminary (2004-2007), and also served as Director of the Catholicosate's Archives (2004-2008) and Museum (2006-2009), and Headmaster of the "Bird's Nest" School (2007-2009). Between 2010-2011 he served as Catholicosal Vicar in Tabriz, Iran (Aderbadagan Diocese).

He wrote and/or edited about 20 books. He resided in Antelias, facing serious health problems for about 12 years.

His funeral took place on February 22, 2024, at the Saint Gregory the Illuminator cathedral in Antelias.







Forbidden Homeland



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Arts & Culture

'Armenia, My Home' Premieres On PBS Stations Across the Country

NEW YORK —PBS will show the premiere of "Armenia, My Home," a spectacular visual journey through Armenia, premiering February 27 on PBS (check local listings). From filmmaker Andrew Goldberg, the documentary promises viewers a breathtaking exploration of Armenia's rich cultural tapestry, featuring stunning cinematography, striking archival photographs, incredible interviews, and vibrant music.

The documentary, narrated by Andrea Martin ("Only Murders in the Building"), features prominent



voices from the Armenian diasincluding pora actor Eric Bogosian ("Succession"); author Chris Bohjalian (HBO's "The Flight Attendant"); Pulitzer

Prize-winning

Andrea Martin (photo Jeff Vespa) author Peter Bala

author Peter Balakian (*Black Dog of Fate*); journalist Araksya Karapetyan ("Good Day LA"), author Dawn Anahid Mackeen (*The Hundred-Year Walk*); Conan O'Brien's famed assistant Sona Movsesian; and Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of NY. Additional voices include educator Dottie Bengoian, internationally renowned artist Michael Aram, comedian Vahe Berberian, and scholars Ron Suny and Salpi Ghazarian.

"Armenia, My Home" celebrates the modern-day, independent Armenian Republic and its people, and offers a lens into the nearly 3,000-yearold storied past of the world's first Christian nation. From medieval monasteries nestled in northern forests to the spectacular Hellenistic temple of Garni, the documentary takes viewers on a compelling journey through Armenia's diverse landscapes. Sweeping from the Caucasian mountains with stunning views of the peaks of Mount Ararat, "Armenia, My Home" seamlessly blends the epic with the every day, evoking the deep emotions felt by Armenian Americans for a heritage that has endured for millennia. The film incorporates the spiritual charm of Armenian music throughout, telling a story that resonates with the fusion of East and West. "For so many that we interviewed in this film, Armenia is more than a country, it's a part of who they are a community that has survived and flourished, despite untold enemies who sought to conquer them. This is more than a story of a nation, it is the story of some of the most resilient people alive," stated director Andrew Goldberg. "It's an honor to narrate this documentary exploring Armenia's storied past and vibrant culture," said Emmy Award-winning actress Andrea Martin. "As an Armenian-American, I am deeply connected to our ancient see PBS, page 17



Frunze Dovlatyan Soviet Armenian Classic Film in Spotlight at Socially Relevant Film Festival

NEW YORK — The 11th Edition of SR Socially Relevant[™] Film Festival opens March 13 at the Maysles Documentary Center and continues March 14 at MRHS, March 15-17 at Cinema Village, March 18 at the National Arts Club for the Awards Ceremony. The festival covers a broad range of social issues. The official Selection including the short films line up can be found on the festival's website under the 2024 Program, totaling 53 films this year, nine of which are Armenian-themed. The Armenian films are as follows:

• "Barev Yes Em" (Hello It's Me), by Frunze Dovlatyan. It is one of the historic milestones of Armenian cinema, and was inspired by the lives of two physicists. "Love and death, war and creation, the problem of memory [...] with unexpected freshness. It's a great film," Sergei Parajanov said about it.

The film will be the Spotlight Screening of the 11th annual edition of SR Socially

Hachig Kazarian To Discuss Western Armenian Music

FRESNO — Musician Hachig Kazarian will speak in a virtual presentation on "Western Armenian Music: An Artist's Perspective" at 11 a.m. (California time)/2 p.m. (New York time) on Saturday, March 9.

The event is part of the Armenian Studies Program Spring 2024 Lecture Series.

Silenced for over one hundred years, the Western Armenian music brought to America by the first Armenian immigrants has become an integral part of Armenian culture in the United States. Artist and musician Kazarian, author of *Western Armenian Music: From Asia Minor to the United States* (Armenian Series, The Press at California State University, Fresno, 2023), will examine the many facets of Western Armenian music, and how it has been neglected due to the Armenian Genocide of



1915. He will discuss his motivation for why he wrote the book Western Armenian Music, and based on his many years of research and musical performances, Kazarian will address the accuracy of transcription, authenticity, and the documentation of Western Armenian music.

Kazarian was born in Detroit to immigrant parents of the Armenian Genocide. He is a retired secondary instrumental music educator with 46 years of teaching experience, which includes a suburban Detroit school system and the Clark County schools in Las Vegas, Nevada. He received his professional credentials from the Juilliard School of Music, where he earned a B.S. and M.A. degree in clarinet performance. He also attended Eastern Michigan University, where he received an M.A. degree in Music Literature/Ethnomusicology. Kazarian has performed Western Armenian music for many Armenian churches, societies, and patriotic organizations throughout the United States. He has been a leading role model for many young Armenian-American clarinetists for decades and performs as he was taught by an Armenian immigrant musician. The Zoom registration link is: https://bit.ly/armenianstudieshachigkazarian. For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, visit https://fresnostate. edu/armenianstudies.

RelevantTM Film Festival. It stars Armen Djigarkhanian, Rolan Bykov and Margarita Terekhova in her film debut. The film was seen by 10 million people when first released in 1966.

"Barev Yes Em" screens at Cinema Village on March 17 at 5 p.m., to celebrate 100 years of Armenian Cinema as it steps into its second century.

•"The Forgotten Homeland," by Essam Nagi is a documentary about life at the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. 2022, from Egypt.

•"Partings and Landings," by Kardash Onnig is a documentary about the filmmaker's Armenian survivor family migrating from their ancestral home in Turkey to Syria, Lebanon, and the US.

• "Edge," by Sona Khatchatryan is a short documentary about the edges of Yerevan, where the environment shapes the stories of its inhabitants.

•"250km" by Hasmik Movsisyan is a narrative short where a 14-year-old boy embarks on a treacherous 250-kilometer journey to save his family.

•"Blockade" by Hakob Melkonyan is a documentary about the inhabitants of the Armenian village of Chinari trying to survive the war between Azeris and Armenians, and a blockade.

•"Manuscripts Don't Burn" by Mariam Ohanyan is a documentary about the Armenian heritage of Lviv, and the history of the Armenian church there, closed during Soviet times.

•"The Desire to Live" by Mariam Avetisyan is a documentary web series about post-war life in Artsakh and the aftermath of the 2020 war.

•"Metamorphoses," by Trocquenet Valère & Fert Florence, is a narrative short see FESTIVAL, page 14

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Sweet Biscuits from Mediterranean Meals for Mom

Helen Adourian is the successful blogger and entrepreneur at Mediterranean Meals for Moms. She is also a licensed cosmetologist and fashion consultant.

When she married her husband John, they traveled extensively which gave her extra time to discover and refine her true culinary passion and creativity. Having two sets of twins since then, Helen has made it her goal to create a variety of healthy and organic foods for her family as often as possible. "I am a first-generation American-Armenian, and I like to incorporate and create traditional dishes and recipes from my Turkish-Armenian family's background and heritage."



Helen Adourian Saman, John Saman, and their family

"I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and live and work in California. My parents were both born in Turkey; my father is from Kayseri, and my mother is from Istanbul. Kayseri is renowned for its culinary specialties such as manti, pastirma and sucuk. Manti is the most popular dish in Kayseri for the local people and tourists. My in-laws are from Dikranagerd, and I also post special family recipes that I've learned from my husband's relatives."

"I love to cook and bake especially traditional meals and baked goods from my Armenian culture. My paternal grandparents were a big part of my childhood and I remember them when I cook and bake because I remember the fondest memories with them in the kitchen. Our family likes this sweet biscuit bread (choreg) any time of year, and it's delicious served with butter, honey, jam, and Armenian coffee or tea," adds Helen.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup butter (1 stick)
- 3/4 cup powdered sugar
- 1 large egg (room temperature)
- 1 tablespoon mahleb*
- 4 oz. cream cheese (about 1/4 cup)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 4-5 teaspoons water for rolling out
- Glazing: 1 large egg yolk
- Sesame seeds as garnish

PREPARATION:

Combine the dry ingredients in a bowl and set aside.

In another bowl, mix together the egg, oil, butter, and cream cheese; slowly add the dry ingredients to this mixture, and stir to combine.

Refrigerate the dough for an hour or a little longer.

On a large clean work surface, roll out the dough and shape into desired shapes. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Place biscuits on parchment-lined baking sheets and brush the tops with the egg and sesame seeds, if desired.

Bake for 20 minutes or until lightly golden brown. (Baking time will depend on the size of your biscuits and the shapes you've made).

*Mahlab, sometimes spelled mayleb, is a small, wild cherry pit from the St. Lucy cherry. It's commonly used in Greek cooking and it's also used heavily in Middle Eastern dishes. The cherries' pits are ground into a meal-like substance.

Follow Helen at her Mediterranean Meals for Mom's page on Facebook, go to: https://www.facebook.com/MediterraneanMealsforMoms/

For this recipe, go to:

https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1556708281129450&set= pb.100064760706556.-2207520000

Check out Helen's recipes at: https://helenadourian.wordpress.com/

For Helen's Gluten-Free Easter Bread (Choreg), see: https://helenadourian. wordpress.com/page/2/

For her Easter Bread (Choreg), see:

https://helenadourian.wordpress.com/2014/04/15/easter-bread-choreg/

"I've also made a major lifestyle change for the past few years, and have lost 80 pounds. I share my journey and weight loss tips along with recipes and Armenian keto food on my Instagram Helens_Keto_Journey." Helen owns her own business selling and promoting wine that is keto-friendly, low carb/low sugar, and organic. For details, see: www.helensketovino.com.

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Soviet Armenian Classic in Spotlight at Socially Relevant Film Festival

FESTIVAL, fropm page 13

about a series of mysterious metamorphoses that lead two inspectors to an investigation into the humorous world of artist Saré, (Evguenia Sarkissyan).

"Barev Yes Em" and "The Forgotten Homeland" screen only in-person in the cinema. The other Armenian films screen in person (except the last four) and online. The online streaming starts on March 19.

The main themes of the festival are 100 Years of Armenian Cinema, Black History, BIPOC films, Aging and Disability, Women, LGBTQI+, and more. The Festival's YouTube Channel has the trailers of the selection and the live Meet the Filmmakers

interviews.

The SRFF 2024 competition award categories are The Vanya Exerjian - Empowering Women and Girls Award, Best Narrative Feature, Best Documentary Feature, Best Narrative Short, Best Documentary Short, Best Actor, and Best Actress. The Finalist Screenplay Awards are sponsored by InkTip and NetworkISA.

"Eleven years have gone by quickly. We're proud to have had the opportunity to present over 700 socially relevant films from 40 countries. The work of these talented and dedicated filmmakers has offered us the bonus of learning about the human condition, filmmaking, and ways of engaging an audience as the first steps towards raising awareness of social issues," Festival Founding Artistic Director Nora Armani.

SRFF was founded by Actress/ Filmmaker Armani in 2013 as a response to the proliferation of violence and violent forms of storytelling in media and entertainment. Following a family tragedy that cost the lives of two of her dearest and nearest, namely her cousin Vanya, and uncle Jack Exerjian, Armani founded the festival to commemorate them in a meaningful way. SRFF believes in the power of the film medium in raising awareness of social issues and promoting positive social change. This new edition deals with topics such as Climate Change, Family and Adoption, LGBTQ Rights, Home and Health, Disability, Incarceration and Freedom, New York City, Racism, and BIPOC cultures.

The Mission of the SR Film Festival is to shine the spotlight on filmmakers who tell compelling, socially relevant, human-interest stories, across a broad range of social issues without resorting to violence and violent forms of storytelling.

Early Bird \$5 tickets, the Trio \$12, are available for a limited time before regular prices become effective. Students enter for free with a valid ID.

For more information visit https://www.ratedsrfilms.org/

ARTS & CULTURE

Mardanyan Makes Waves with Carnegie Hall's Musical Armenia

By Cris Patvakanian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON — Many stars have graced the stage of Carnegie Hall, including Armenians such as Charles Aznavour, Tigran Hamasyan, and the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra. Joining their ranks on March 3, will be pianist Tigran Mardanyan, 20, performing in Musical Armenia, the annual concert presented by the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America. The program features composer and pianist Grigori Balasanyan who will be playing some of his own compositions and Khachaturian, while Mardanyan will be performing pieces by Mozart, Carl Vine, and Franck.

Mardanyan is a native of Yerevan, Armenia, and is currently a third year student at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee under the tutelage of Michael Lewin. Boston Conservatory at Berklee is widely considered among the top 10 universities in the United States for music. In Armenia, Mardanyan studied at the Alexander Spendiaryan Specialized Music School with Professor Vagharshak Harutyunyan. Mardanyan's journey from Armenia to Boston was rather unexpected - he had not planned to study in the U.S. but, upon encouragement from his family, applied and was accepted to the Boston Conservatory at Berklee's Classical Piano Performance faculty. It's a rather small department, comprising roughly 40 students, with Mardanyan among the few Armenians at the school.

"But that's slowly changing, and I'm all the more happy for it. We have lots of Armenians from the U.S., and more students from Armenia are becoming interested in attending," Tigran noted.

In his first years at university, Mardanyan has already managed to stand out among the crowd. He was the winner of the Boston Conservatory at Berklee 2021-22 Churchill Piano Competition as well as



Tigran Mardanyan at Worcester's Mechanics Hall

the Boston Conservatory at Berklee 2021-22 Concerto Competition. His victory in the latter gave him the opportunity to perform Rachmaninoff's 1st piano concerto at Worcester's Mechanics Hall with the Boston Conservatory Orchestra. His performance was under the baton of conductor Bruce Hangen, artistic director and conductor of the Vista Philharmonic Orchestra, director of orchestral activities, and professor of conducting at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee. Mardanyan's chance to perform with the Boston Conservatory is an honor that is only bestowed upon the sole student who wins the concerto competition that year, which he won in 2021–2022.

"Being able to perform at Worcester's Mechanics Hall with the entire conservatory's orchestra is not something that you can do easily...you have to work really hard and earn your spot," Mardanyan reflected.

And he has continued to work hard, gathering the attention of both faculty and his peers, which is what led to his invitation to join Balasanyan at Carnegie Hall for their upcoming concert. The two of them are both enrolled at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and had been in touch through their Armenian connection and the music world even prior to their studies in the United States.

"One day in early December, I received a message from Grigori asking, 'How would you feel about performing in Carnegie Hall?' Of course, I told him I was interested!" Tigran explained. The two of them will be performing for Musical Armenia, an annual program established by Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian and the Prelacy Ladies Guild in the mid-1980s to help promote the next generation of Armenian artists and further the performance of music by Armenian composers. Each year, new performers are selected to highlight the new generation and tradition of Armenian culture. After auditioning with several pieces, Mardanyan received the news in mid-January that he had been chosen to join Balasanyan for this year's concert.

"It's a huge honor to be performing at Carnegie Hall, and I'm extremely happy that I can do so with the support of the Armenian community." Tigran is happy to give back to the community, not only through his upcoming performance but also with contributions to the Saint James Armenian Church in Watertown, where he plays the church organ during Sunday services on an intermittent basis. In the future, Tigran knows he wants to ultimately go down the difficult path of professional concert performances, but he hopes he can also help Armenia through his talent.

"Whether that's maybe one day teaching in Armenia after I retire or just representing my country in international competitions, that responsibility is not one I take lightly. It means a lot to me."

For more information about Musical Armenia and to purchase tickets for the concert taking place on Sunday, March 3, 2024, at 2 PM, see the official webpage for the event at https://www.carnegiehall.org/Calendar/2024/03/03/Musical-Armenia-0200PM.





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*Serenade with a Dandelion: Armenian Chamber Music Old and New'

By Huntley Dent

Many listeners, including reviewers, will be daunted by the prospect of four CDs devoted to Armenian chamber music of the 20th and 21st centuries, and the headnote [not reproduced here] is a bewildering thicket of names unknown outside Armenia. Good intentions count, and these performances are clearly a labor of love, the quality at times rising to an exceptional level of technique and musicality. But there needs to be an overriding reason for a general listener to explore this deluxe package, which I aim to provide. I've sporadically encountered a disc devoted to Armenian classical music — the last one was by the stunning violinist Sergey Khachatryan in 2015, a beautiful recital springing from a sad purpose, to commemorate the centennial of the tragic Armenian genocide committed by Turkey under the cloak of World War I.

The set under review serves a different aim, reaching out to the larger music world from a small country whose art-

ists and musicians are fierce loyalists. The expatriate Armenian community in Los Angeles gave rise to a series of concerts featuring contemporary Armenian composers. The founder of the Dilijan Chamber Music Series was violinist Movses Pogossian, who had moved with his family to L.A. in 2004. For the next 15 seasons a rich array of composers and compositions emerged, including over 50 world premieres. Pogossian and his wife, Varty Manouelian, who is also a violinist, are superb musicians, as can be heard in the opening work on CD 1, a fascinating violin duo by Vache Sharafyan. As a way to dip your toe in the water, a stream or download of their scintillating performance will be a strong motivation for exploring further.

The Sharafyan pieces, titled *Serenade with a Dandelion*, is the collection's title track; it was also on the first program of the Dilijan series. As you'd expect, the composers and performers gathered here are closely knit as friends, colleagues, and collaborators. That raises an issue for general listeners. What justifies these works beyond cultural ties to Armenia? There are strong elements of folk music at work, but in general the idioms being represented fall into the eclecticism

that prevails internationally today. There is no worry about provincialism. One mystifying aspect, however, is the title *Modulation Necklace* that serves as the rubric for all four discs. It refers to "a string of different modal constructions" rooted in Armenian folk music. This collection is an extension of an initial release titled "Modulation Necklace" from 2020 on the New Focus label.

I've devoted considerable space to pricking the reader's curiosity, but what counts, after all, is the music, which I will cover one CD at a time.

CD 1: We begin with five assorted chamber works, of

contrasting ways. As the title suggests, *Lachrymae* by Tigran Mansurian (b. 1939) is an expression of mourning whose spare textures are parsed in minimal but deeply felt lines for violin and tenor saxophone. *Chameleon*, by Aregnaz Martirosyan (b. 1993), takes a totally divergent tack, exploiting the virtuosic side of the violin and alto sax in disjointed, frenetic action.

CD 2: This disc is devoted to Armenian art songs and is different from the other three discs. In miniature the program recapitulates the history of Armenian art songs from their beginning as arrangements of folk melodies gathered in the field to their present sophisticated state. As widely known as the field collecting by Bartók and Kodály is, the contribution made by Komitas Vardapet (1869–1935) to Armenian music is greater—Komitas is revered as the father of Armenian classical music (his career as a composer ended tragically when he was arrested during the 1915 genocide and witnessed its horrors, which led to a nervous breakdown and severe post-traumatic stress disorder).

Serenade with a Dandelion





The 18 songs from four composers that appear here are sung with deep commitment and admirable musicality by lyric soprano Shoushik Barsoumian. She and pianist Steven Vanhauwaert applied themselves to master the stylistic evolution that begins with the almost raw, open sound of Komitas's folk arrangements, leading us through the steps represented by his musical heirs. Modal harmonies remain over the decades, as does Middle Eastern *melisma*, but there is more complexity in the songs by Romanos Melikian (1883–1935) and Kourken Alemshah (1907–1947). Woven into the perennial themes of love and longing is up. The old material gets vibrant new life in an imaginary narrative moving with evocative titles that the listener is invited to fill in with his own imagination (a sample: "Festivities," "Rendezvous," "Capture," "Escape").

Probing to the deep origins of Armenian culture in the 8th century, Artur Avanesov applies a postmodern imagination to ancient musical and literary fragments in a very impressive *mélange*. Taking a leaf from Ligeti, he writes "works in progress" that grow continuously as miniatures that can be played in any order. His String Quartet is represented by the four movements completed between 2019 and 2023. Space limitations forbid me from describing the ancient roots, secular and religious, that are woven into this work except to say that the result is genuinely haunting.

The musical languages encountered in the seven pieces on this disc vary, but to a general listener the feeling of warmth and heartfelt expression that envelops everything is unmistakable (excluding Hovhaness's five-minute String Trio, an oddball concoction of the kind he apparently could spin off any time that an indiscriminate idea struck his fancy).

CD 4: After admiring several pieces by Artur Avanesov on the precious discs, I wasn't surprised that he receives an entire CD to himself. *Feux follets* for solo piano is a major instance of borrowing Ligeti's process of accumulating large numbers of small works as they proliferate into collections that span years. In Avanesov's case, he informs us that *Feux follets* now amounts to over 100 pieces, of

which nine are excerpted here. (The title is poetically translated here as "Frenzied flames," but when it appears as one of Liszt's *Transcendental Études*, it depicts fleeting luminescence, whether called marsh gas or will-o-the-wisp.)

In fairness to Avanesov's impressive talent, this CD deserves a long review of its own, which it isn't going to get, unfortunately. Moscow-born and now 44, Avanesov rose as a pianist and composer through educational phases largely spent in Armenia; he has taught since 2005 at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan and is now a professor at the American University of Armenia. The *Feux follets* pieces are immediately appealing because of their strong pull toward melody, atmosphere, and tonal-modal harmony. Some have an arresting simplicity that make you imagine you are hearing an Armenian Satie or Mompou.

Far more intricate and virtuosic is *Tezeta* (translated as "longing," with overtones of regret for what will never return), a 10-minute fantasia based on each note of the pentatonic scale. The work's cultural origin is unique, being taken from popular music forms in Ethiopia, which has unexpected ties with Armenia. (Avanesov is scholarly and explains his compositions in detailed, informative notes.) He is the pianist in both works, and is joined by violin and cello in *Tre Sonate* from 2022. It is very

nearly a Baroque pastiche in three movements (fast-slowfast) that revolve respectively around Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard style, Johann Sebastian Bach (with a brief quote from the *St. John Passion*), and early Classical sonata form. The mood is vivacious and sparkling in the two outer movements, aria-like in the middle. Armenia isn't invoked, for the first time in the collection.

Movses Pogossian is the mover and shaker behind this recording project, which occupied a span from 2021 to 2023, but its musical reach extends from L.A. to Yerevan and beyond. I haven't singled out many performers, for the happy reason that all are first-rate. The recorded sound is impeccable, and the lavishly illustrated booklet offers extensive annotations. Armenia's history of struggle is due to its location between East and West, buffeted between mighty forces — Islam, Christianity, the Ottomans, and Russians — along with untold suffering in war and the unique horror of a genocide that killed somewhere between 600,000 and 1.2 million Armenians.

which two are string quartets, one is part of a vocal cycle, and three are duos. I mentioned the remarkable quality of the first duo, Sharafyan's *Serenade with Dandelion*. The two violins are in giddy constant motion on separate, sometimes intersecting courses, bright with trills and engaging thematic material. The idiom is contemporary but personal and captivating—it is hard to imagine a more inviting entry point for the collection. More challenging but equally arresting is Sharafyan's String Quartet No. 2, built in linear fashion out of strongly contrasting sections. The mood ranges from serenely contemplative to agitated, and to hold the structure together there are nods to sonata form.

The other piece with string quartet is a mysterious three-movement vocal work, *Sillage*, by Artur Akshelyan (b. 1984), whose often fragmentary setting of texts by poet Zareh Melkonian feels not too distantly related to Ligeti. In the second movement much of the text is whispered by mezzo-soprano Danielle Segen; her singing is quite lovely throughout. The quartet writing tends to be tonal and often melodic; the texts refer to a mystical entity, IT, which represents an almost Buddhist concept of the totality of existence.

We get twin duos for violin and saxophone that achieve an adroit blend of two very disparate instruments, but in the atmosphere of mountain life as both hardship and transcendence.

The original folk songs have an undeniable power and exoticism, but I think the general listener will get the most out of the six sophisticated songs by the contemporary composer Tigran Mansurian—he is a major figure among Armenian modernists—whose *Canti Paralleli* from 2012 manage to merge classic Armenian folk elements within a broad European setting. A cherished style at home now speaks to a wider world. Here Barsoumian adapts beautifully in her singing, showing the subtlety and refinement one expects from a French *mélodie*, for example, and revealing the lyrical beauty of her timbre.

CD 3: We return to the main track with a spectrum of chamber music for strings—a duo, three trios, two quartets, and a quintet with clarinet. The dates cover a wide span from the early 1960s (including Alan Hovhaness's String Trio from 1962) to two new works from 2023 by Artur Avanesov. To keep this long review from unreasonably spilling over, I'll limit my focus. Throughout this disc the historic influence of Komitas and the Armenian folk tradition weaves its way. *A Tale for Two Violins* is a musical adventure story based on the folk melodies that the composer, Kristapor Najarian (b. 1990), heard at home growing

No wonder that an unbroken — and unbreakable — bond unites Armenia and the diaspora of its emigrants across the oceans. That the joy and beauty of the music gathered here can still be so abundantly felt is more than heartwarming. It has been a people's salvation.

(The above review is republished with permission from Fanfare Magazine (Copyright © 2024 by Fanfare Inc). For more on the CD's, see <u>https://www.newfocusrecord-ings.com/catalogue/serenade-with-a-dandelion-arme-nian-chamber-music-old-and-new/#tab-bios</u>. For those in the Los Angeles area, there will be a March 4 free celebratory concert at UCLA at 7 p.m. RSVP is required. See https://schoolofmusic.ucla.edu/event/armenian-music-serenade-with-a-dandelion/)

AKIS & CULIUK

CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- 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
- 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 Associaiton Boston Chapter series coordinated by Rita Balyozian. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. \$25 per person. RSVP necessary. Sossy, 617-281-1647 or email syogurtian@comcast.net
- APRIL 6 Concert by Vahan Artsruni (guitar) and Nelly Manukyan (flute). Premiere performance of works inspired by the poetry of Komitas, complemented by arrangements of Sharakans by Mesrop Mashtots, original songs based on the works of renowned poet Razmik Davoyan (1940-2022). Saturday, 4 p.m. Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic St., Arlington. Co-sponsored by The Armenian Music Festival of Rhode Island, Amaras Art Alliance. Donation: \$30 through ACF office (781-646-3090) or by visiting amarasonline.com
- APRIL 11 LET'S PARTY FOR THE PARK! InterContinental Hotel, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Meet & Greet. Enjoy Chef Didier Montarou's Luscious Signature Plates. Tutunjian Family Vineyard Wines & Curated Silent Auction, all

whole supporting the Park's care. Advance Reservations only. For link to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar

- 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.
- APRIL 28 Remembrance of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide. Divine Liturgy, Reception, and Youth Cultural Program with the participation of the Armenian Churches of the Merrimack Valley. Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill. Divine Liturgy will begin at 10:00 a.m. Special Sunday School Program for the Youth.
- 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.

'Armenia, My Home' Premieres on PBS Stations Across the Country

PBS, from page 13

history and thrilled to be partnering on this project."

Filmed using state-of-the-art cameras and drones, a team of cinematographers known for their work on films like "Thor: Love and Thunder" and the upcoming "Mad Max Furiosa" has revolutionized the visual representation of Armenia. This groundbreaking approach provides viewers with, quite simply, the most impressive visual showing of Armenia ever made.

For an added layer of authenticity, "Armenia, My Home" takes viewers on a journey into a dungeon that dates back nearly 2,000 years, providing a rare glimpse into Armenia's ancient and mysterious history. Alongside the spectacular landscapes, "Armenia, My Home" delves into the complex and crucial subjects of the Armenian



Genocide and the recent war in Artsakh, acknowledging their historical significance and impact on the Armenian people and the world. To see a trailer for the documentary,

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

Email one photo per email with escaped home and where they lived afterwards and their name to Armeniangenocidesurvivors1915@gmail.com But as many emails as you wish. Khor Virap Monastery and Mt. Ararat (Courtesy of Freepik)

click here.

Emmy Award-winning producer/director Andrew Goldberg is the founder and owner of So Much Film in New York City. He has executive produced and directed 15 prime-time documentary specials for PBS and public television, multiple lifestyle series for HGTV, and Magnolia Channel, and a variety of long and short-form segments for such outlets as CBS News Sunday Morning, ABC News, NPR's All Things Considered, E! Entertainment Television, and Food Network. He has worked as a journalist for virtually every major TV news organization including ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN and Fox. In 2006, he produced and directed the critically acclaimed film, "The Armenian Genocide" for PBS.

Andrew's most recent film was the critically-acclaimed "Viral: Antisemitism in Four Mutations," which was released theatrically across the country and aired nationally as a prime-time special on PBS in 2020.

COMMENTARY





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Can Countries Survive Without a Protector?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

When following current geopolitical processes, one can come to the conclusion that there are almost no states in the world that do not have a so-called "big brother" or protector that ensures the inviolability of the economic or political system or physical security of that specific state.

Obviously, in the current system of international relations the main political giants or patrons are the US, China and Russia and this can be considered the top league of international politics. It is really hard to imagine, for example, how Israel would have ensured its security without continued US support, what would have happened to Belarus without Russian support as a Union state, or what would have happened to North Korea without Chinese support. This does not mean that there would not have been an Israel or North Korea, but these states would not have been what they are today with their impact on the security of their own regions.

Taking a broader perspective, we can see that even neutral states such as Austria and Switzerland are largely under the umbrella of NATO and the pan-European security system, which in turn is secured by the United States. At the same time, there are certain states, such as India, Iran or Turkey, which act more or less independently. Then again, they all have their place in the general security system created and maintained by the main players of the top league. Even if we look at India, Iran and Turkey as exceptions, they are essentially exceptions that confirm the general rule.

In other words, all states in the world either have their own "big brother" or find themselves in the middle of the balance of power formed by the club of patrons. Interestingly, Iran, India, Turkey and some other lookalikes are not in the club of the "big brothers," but they, in turn, have their own "little brothers" to take care of. Yet again, those "little brothers" are still in the general system of international affairs.

The South Caucasus is no exception. The US can be considered Georgia's big brother. Of course, Azerbaijan's big brother is Turkey, but Azerbaijan is doing everything to maintain balanced relations with Russia as well, basically trying to have two "big brothers" at the same time. As for Armenia, after the 2018 revolution, and especially after the 2020 war, it is unclear whether Armenia has a "big brother" or is in search of one.

The reversion to the US and Europe and the tension with Russia are proof of this, that Armenia cannot find its place in the environment in which it appeared. It seems Yerevan has found itself in a dilemma. It is absolutely not important who was responsible for Armenian-Russian strategic relations reaching this point. It is a fact that Armenia does not have a geopolitical patron who will provide it with security guarantees. Of course, this vacuum cannot continue for long and Armenia will be forced to make a choice between geopolitical centers, or, what is worse, a readymade decision will be imposed on Armenia, which Yerevan cannot avoid. And again, this decision will be very painful to accept. Armenia's only chance is to orient as quickly as possible and take clear steps towards this geopolitical center, whether this is Washington, Moscow or Beijing to escape a total collapse.

(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.)

Pashinyan: Armenia Has 'Frozen' its Participation in CSTO

ByArshaluys Barseghyan

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has said that Armenia's participation in the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was "basically frozen" because of its failure to come to Armenia's defense.

In an interview with France 24 on Thursday, Pashinyan criticized the CSTO for not fulfilling its security obligations towards Armenia in 2021 and 2022, saying that the CSTO's refusal to come to its aid in the face of Azerbaijani attacks "could not have gone without consequences."

"The consequence is that in practice, we have basically frozen our participation in the CSTO," said Pashinyan.

Article 4 of the CSTO charter stipu-

abduction of Dmitriy Setrakov, a Russian fleeing the draft, from Armenia.

Setrakov was reportedly abducted by Russian soldiers impersonating Armenian military police and held in the Russian military base in Gyumri, before being transferred to Rostov-on-Don in Russia.

The Prime Minister stated that the Armenian authorities were investigating Setrakov's reported abduction.

"If everything turns out to be as you say, it will, of course, lead to certain consequences because we cannot tolerate illegal actions on the territory of our country," said Pashinyan, adding that the specific consequences would depend on Armenia's legal assessment of the incident.

On the same day as the interview, Armenian independent media outlet Factor cited quests from Yerevan to terminate its membership in the security bloc, and suggested that Pashinyan could instead have been referring to Armenia's absence from CSTO drills and meetings.

Military Cooperation with France

During the interview, Pashinyan warned that Azerbaijan could be preparing for a new war, echoing statements he made on February 15.

"In the peace agreement, we have a problem expressing the three principles declared and published in the framework of agreements reached on international platforms," Pashinyan told France 24.

"Analyzing these problems and the statements coming from official Baku, we come to the conclusion that yes, an attack on Armenia is very likely." Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry dismissed Pashinyan's latest warning as allegations "aimed at clearly distorting the existing fact and confusing the international community."

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Other than the Editorial, views and opinions expressed in this newspaper do not necessarily reflect the policies of the publisher. lates that members of the security bloc are obliged to mutually defend each other against external threats or attacks.

The interviewer also asked Pashinyan if Armenia intended to close Russia's military base in Armenia, to which he replied that Russia's military presence in Armenia was based on a separate "legal-contractual framework."

"We haven't had the occasion to address that framework," said Pashinyan.

Pashinyan went on to accuse Russia of inciting Armenians to overthrow the government In September and October 2023.

"Russia's highest-ranking representatives directly called on the citizens of Armenia to take to the streets and overthrow the elected, legitimate government of Armenia," said Pashinyan, adding that Russian media had produced 'systematic, consistent, and purposeful" propaganda against the government, the elected authorities, and him personally for six years.

Pashinyan also addressed the alleged

"high-ranking Armenian" sources as saying that Russian border guards stationed in Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport would be removed "in the near future."

Factor's source refused to specify why the Russian border guards would be removed but stated that it was a "political decision." The report came a day after Armenian and EU officials announced that Russian border guards had obstructed the EU mission in Armenia. Armenia's National Security Service told Factor that they were not aware of the reported decision.

On Friday, Russia's Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning Pashinyan's criticism of the CSTO.

"We expect comprehensive explanations through bilateral channels about what really stands behind Pashinyan's statements regarding Armenia freezing its membership in the Collective Security Treaty and in the Organization itself," stated the ministry.

The CSTO on the same day told Ria Novosti that they had not received any re-

The ministry also accused France of having a "negative" impact on the peace process.

France has grown increasingly supportive of Armenia since the 2020 war, even more so after the 2022 September fighting in Armenia.

On February 23, France's Armed Forces Minister Sébastien Lecornu visited Armenia to sign several agreements. (See story on page 1.)

Le Figaro reported that Paris will deliver three GM 200 radars and night vision devices to Armenia, and that France would also provide Armenia with three-phase mountain combat training courses.

(This piece originally appeared on the website OC-media on February 23.)



MY TURN



Aliyev Asks the Arab League And Turkey To Pressure PACE To Readmit Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev repeatedly states: "I doesn't care who says what about my country, I will continue doing whatever I want." However,

this is a cover up. Regardless of his public tough talk, Azerbaijan is working behind the scenes to manage its conflicts with other countries.

Last week, I wrote that Azerbaijan asked the Israeli government to intercede with France to improve their relations which have deteriorated in recent years due to the French support of Armenia in the Artsakh conflict. Since Israel turned down Aliyev's request to mediate with France, Azerbaijan started looking for other channels to resolve its problems with Europe.

After the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) suspended Azerbaijan's membership, Aliyev asked the League of Arab States to intervene with Europeans to restore Azerbaijan's status. On February 13, 2024, at Azerbaijan's request, Adel bin Abdul Rahman Al-Asoomi, the president of the Arab League's Parliament, sent a letter to the president of PACE, Theodoros Rousopoulos, complaining about the resolution PACE had adopted refusing to ratify the credentials of the delegation of Azerbaijan.

The President of the Arab Parliament told PACE: "The Arab Parliament expresses its deep regret over the adoption of this resolution; the Republic of Azerbaijan is a friend and strategic partner of the Arab States and plays a significant and influential role to preserve cultural diversity and to promote dialogue among civilizations. ...The Republic of Azerbaijan is a member of the Council of Europe since 2001 and plays a major role in promoting activities of this Organization and achieving its principles and objectives. At the global level, it makes concerted efforts to lower tensions and conflicts...."

The president of the Arab Parliament then counseled PACE: "Multilateral parliamentary diplomacy must be an instrument to reconcile points of view, and a wall of resistance in front of any divisions, and an added value for the diffusion of the principles of peace and tolerance."

The letter ended by urging PACE to reconsider its earlier resolution that had refused to ratify the credentials of Azerbaijan's parliamentary delegation "which contradict the principles of dialog and cooperation."

Naturally, Azerbaijan's Parliament (Milli Majlis) immediately publicized

the Arab Parliament's letter which was also published by several Azeri newspapers.

It is very odd that the Arab Parliament would intervene with PACE on a matter that has nothing to do with Arab states. Azerbaijan is neither a member nor an observer of the Arab League. How can the president of the Arab Parliament call Azerbaijan "a friend and strategic partner of Arab States," when it is an ally of Israel and buys billions of dollars of Israeli weapons? That is the reason Azerbaijan's request in the past for observer status was rejected by the Arab League. The only possible explanation for the Arab Parliament's willingness to write a letter to PACE is that Azerbaijan was engaged in its usual practice of "Caviar Diplomacy," meaning that it made a very generous donation to the Arab League. Therefore, the Arab Parliament's statement about Azerbaijan seeking dialog and peace has nothing to do with reality.

Since Armenia has had an Observer status with the League of Arab States since 2005, I am curious to know if Armenia's representative in the League was aware that the Arab Parliament was considering sending such a letter to PACE in support of Azerbaijan. If yes, what actions, if any, he or she took to object to sending such a letter?

In addition to the Arab League, Azerbaijan is pursuing its lobbying efforts at PACE through its big brother Erdogan, the President of Turkey. Yasar Yakis, the former Foreign Minister of Turkey and founder of the ruling AK Party, wrote in ARAB NEWS on February 25: "Turkey has strongly opposed the suspension of Azerbaijan [from PACE].... Even if Azerbaijan's membership of the Council of Europe is suspended, it could survive without being a member."

Earlier in February, when Aliyev visited Erdogan in Ankara, the Turkish President pledged to do everything possible "to get Azerbaijan's credentials validated at PACE. We will continue our support and efforts for Azerbaijan until the decision [not ratifying its credentials] is overturned." Erdogan added that Turkey will stress that PACE should be a platform for "parliamentary democracy rather than conflict." However, Aliyev and Erdogan do not have parliamentary democracy and peace in their own countries.

If Aliyev truly did not care what actions other countries take against Azerbaijan, he would not have gone to such great lengths to lobby the Arab League and Pres. Erdogan to restore his country's credentials at PACE. He would have simply ignored PACE's decision.

The truth is that Aliyev deeply cares about his image. Most dictators, having violated all sorts of domestic and international laws, do everything possible to whitewash their crimes and try to look like an angel in the eyes of the world.

Soft Power: China's Spheres of Influence In Armenia

By Gayane Asryan

The past decade has been important for the development of Armenian-Chinese relations. They have been built not on diplomatic formalities and protocol events, but on thoughtful steps and practical actions.

China is the third country after Russia and the US to be represented in various spheres of Armenia. This includes trade, healthcare, education, culture, and even cuisine.

This article explores the relationship between the two countries, the prospects of economic cooperation, and how China is perceived in Armenian society through the stories of individuals.

Soft Power

The Belt and Road Initiative is a transcontinental investment program aimed at developing infrastructure and economic integration of countries located on the historical Silk road. As of March 13, 2022, China has signed cooperation agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative with 148 countries and 31 international organizations.

Both countries emphasize the importance of high-quality road construction, which will boost trade and investment and develop infrastructure.

For China, besides its exceptional commercial value, it has an image component — enhancing its authority.

In addition, Armenia and China are interested in direct flights between the two countries, joint environmental, digital, and innovative technological projects.

What makes China interesting for the residents of Armenia? Stories

Alina Matevosyan spent three years living in China, where she worked as an English teacher. Friends helped her find a job, teaching English to local children in both group and individual settings.

"The offer was quite attractive. I was offered work with small groups, as well as highly paid individual lessons. Besides, China had always been a mystical country for me. I couldn't miss the chance to get to know it," she says. In her opinion, people either fall in love with China and integrate into its society or leave disappointed because their expectations were not met. there and will work under a contract for two years.

China is expanding its influence in Armenia through the teaching of Chinese language. The calculation is simple: proficiency in the language opens up opportunities for people to find online jobs in Chinese companies.

In 2009, the Confucius Institute was officially opened at the Yerevan State University of Languages and Social Sciences. It operates three Confucius classrooms and seven Chinese language learning centers.

In September 2018, the Armenian-Chinese Friendship School opened in Yerevan. It is designed for 600 students and does not have elementary classes; enrollment is open from the 5th grade, allowing students to study until the 12th grade.

The school's director, Spartak Vardanyan, reported that in the year of its opening, 408 students enrolled, and now they have 685 students. Interest in the school is growing. In September 2023, there were 191 applicants for 54 places in three classes.

"The educational program of the school is supported by the Confucius Institute. This year we submitted it to the ministry for expert evaluation. If the program is approved, then in the future, all schools wishing to teach Chinese as a third foreign language will be able to use this ready-made program," the director said.

Armenia and China officially enjoy friendly relations. However, in the modern world, it is customary to consider the friendship between an economically developed and influential country with a developing nation in need of assistance from the perspective of applying "soft power."

China simply wants to have a reliable partner in the region. And in Armenia, this Eastern country is perceived as an underutilized opportunity for cooperation — in business, education, and other spheres.

In 2022, Armenia and China celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Chinese ambassador to Armenia Fan Yun stated that the peoples of the two countries "generation after generation make efforts to strengthen the traditional friendship." Armenian diplomats emphasized that these are "warm relations with a centuries-old history — since the times of the Great Silk Road."

Currently, Armenia is primarily a road to the West for China. The country is interested in ensuring that the road passes through friendly territory to avoid problems and obstacles.

At this point, the basis of economic, cultural, and diplomatic relations, some of which pass through Armenia, is the "Belt and Road Initiative." After her contract ended, Alina returned to Armenia, where she immediately gained students interested in learning Chinese.

"I have three small groups, each with four children, and had to turn away five others. I'm not sure why there's such interest in learning Chinese. I assume most of my students' families see their children's futures connected with this country," says Alina.

In a year, she plans to return to China, this time to study. One of her students, Armine, 12, explained her motivation for learning Chinese: she wants to understand the language of her favorite cartoons, animations, and movies.

"There are also Chinese bloggers whom I would really like to understand. And I have a Chinese friend with whom I communicate in English. I'd like to speak his language with him," says Armine.

Armine's parents were pleased with their daughter's decision to study Chinese, as they plan to move to China as a family in the near future. Armine's father has found a job The school offers its students the opportunity to continue their education in China: "Over the years, 20 students have been given the opportunity to study in China. Currently, we have eight more applicants. Parents only cover transportation expenses," he added.

Chinese Assistance to Armenia

Buses and ambulances of Chinese manufacture are often seen on the streets of Yerevan. They were donated to the Armenian government as assistance from the Chinese people.

In 2018, the healthcare system received 200 ambulances. China also provided support during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, with the assistance of the Chinese government, Yerevan received 100,000 doses of the Sinovac vaccine. Subsequently, the Chinese helped Armenia procure 1.2 million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine.

Thanks to China's assistance, Yerevan's bus fleet has been supplemented by approximately 250 buses. Along with them, spare parts for maintenance and repair were also delivered to Armenia.

Armenia's law enforcement agencies also received see CHINA, page 20



Soft Power: China's Spheres of Influence In Armenia

CHINA, from page 19

assistance in the form of Hyundai and Volkswagen buses for the police.

The Chinese government closely collaborates with the Public television.

Presumably, this could be related to the significant influence this channel has on shaping public opinion in Armenia.

In 2015, China provided three mobile television stations equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. In the same year, thanks to a grant from China, a new mobile station with 10 high-quality cameras and a digital satellite apparatus for content transmission was acquired.

The Chinese government also provided equipment for the central hardware and quality broadcasting. And very recently, it allocated a grant of 10 billion drams [about \$25 million] for the construction of the 8th studio.

"This studio will have the largest pavilion covering an area of 1000 square meters. It will be used for shooting large-scale cultural and entertainment projects," according to the public relations department of the TV channel.

Cooperation with China is considered important here in terms of "creating production infrastructure for the production of television projects and improving the quality of programs."

Chinese Cuisine — one of the most popular in Armenia

Vaan is an expert in Eastern cuisine. He worked in several Chinese restaurants in Yerevan, offering visitors traditional, familiar flavors that he perfected thanks to his knowledge gained in China.

"My brother has been living in China for ten years now. When I first visited him, he took me to a restaurant. Honestly, I didn't like the atmosphere or the smells. When we ran out the food we brought from Armenia, I went to the store, bought some groceries, and started cooking something similar to our dishes. My brother said I was good at mixing Chinese and Armenian cuisine. He invited his Chinese friends. They tried my meals and took me to other local restaurants," Vaan recounts.

Later, he easily found a job in a Chinese restaurant in Yerevan. He was already familiar with Chinese cuisine, knew how to cook traditional dishes, and understood the nuances of their presentation.

"The head chef was Chinese, he liked me, and he taught me a lot. And when he decided to return to his homeland, he suggested me as his replacement. For eight years now, I've been trying to offer customers something new, despite Armenians being conservative about it. They continue to order what they're used to — Pig Ears mushrooms, soy salad, chicken with oranges. They don't go beyond this menu," the chef says with a smile.

At the same time, he believes that after local cuisine, Chinese cuisine is the most popular in Armenia:

"Every year, for at least a week, I travel to China, visit new restaurants, try dishes to later adapt them. It works. I cautiously add spices and exotic dishes to the menu."

In Yerevan, there are over a dozen Chinese restaurants. **Economic Ties**

China is one of Armenia's significant trading partners. In 2023, it ranked second in terms of trade turnover, second only to Russia.

Moreover, over the past five years, the trade turnover between Armenia and China has more than doubled. Data for December 2023 has not yet been published, but it is expected that the annual turnover will exceed two billion dollars. This is almost 40 percent higher than the previous year's figure

According to economist Aykaz Fanyan, a significant portion of the trade turnover is attributed to China, accounting for about 80 percent of imports. These include various Chinese goods, from automobiles and household appliances to fruits.

He believes that Armenian-Chinese trade relations are at a very high level. However, based on objective and subjective circumstances, they have developed in one direction:

"Armenia mainly exports copper and molybdenum concentrate. Consequently, Armenian producers theoretically have a large untapped market in the form of the 1.5 billion-strong China. I believe Armenian brandy and grape wines have the greatest potential for success. Over the past five years, brandy imports to China have almost doubled. Chinese consumers are gradually transitioning to non-traditional alcoholic beverages."

Chinese companies do not have major business projects in Armenia. China invests only in the construction of the "North-South" transport corridor, a plant producing mineral water managed by Chinese companies, and photovoltaic power stations.

The "North-South" highway is the largest transportation project in independent Armenia. This road is intended to connect the north of the country with the south. The highway from the north will connect Armenia with Georgia and through it will provide access to the Black Sea and European countries. From the south, the highway connects the country with Iran. Thanks to this project, Armenia can become a transit country.

Chinese goods in the Armenian market

Armenian stores abound with Chinese products, which are both the cheapest and the most popular.

Karo owns two men's clothing stores in downtown Yerevan. Previously, he imported clothing from Turkey because it was considered of good quality, and the delivery to Armenia took only a few days.

"After the third Karabakh war, I decided to stop importing Turkish goods and switched to Chinese ones. Initially, I worked with intermediary organizations. I provided them with a list of goods, they found them, took photos, and sent them to me. Then I made my selection and placed orders," says Karo.

This allowed him to get cheaper goods, enabling him to sell them to his customers at prices lower than Turkish ones. Later, he decided to travel to China himself to find warehouses of goods, assuming he could buy even cheaper:

Another advantage is the variety of Chinese goods. The main question here is quality, which is directly related to prices. For example, there are over a hundred varieties of the same type of hat, in the same color and style, ranging in price from one to 30 dollars. You can choose the quality you prefer to ensure demand in your market."

Karo assures that the myth about the poor quality of Chinese goods is gradually dispelled among his customers.

(This piece originally appeared on jam-news.net on February 25.)

Tekeyan Cultural Association Sponsor a Teacher in Ar

Since its inception in 2001, the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Sponsor a Teacher Program has raised 838,700 dollars and reached out to 7,386 teachers and school staff in Armenia and Artsakh. This year the program continues to support school teachers in Tekeyan Schools in Armenia, as well as teachers who had to flee Artsakh but continue teaching in Armenia's schools, as they educate new generations of children, our future leaders.







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

\$240	\$480	\$700	other			
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