

# Opponents Decry Dropping Int. Cases Against Baku

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian civic organizations and legal experts, joined by their exiled colleagues from Nagorno-Karabakh, denounced on Monday, March 18 the Armenian government, for expressing readiness to withdraw international lawsuits filed against Azerbaijan after the 2020 war.

The government has filed four such lawsuits in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and another one in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It accuses Azerbaijan of committing war crimes, violating the rights of Armenian prisoners, occupying Armenian territory and forcibly displacing Karabakh's population. Baku has likewise taken Yerevan to these international tribunals, alleging various violations of international law.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan suggested last week that it would be "logical" for the two sides to mutually drop these cases if they manage to finalize an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. Azerbaijani officials have not yet publicly commented on the idea.

In a joint statement, Armenia's former human rights defender, Arman Tatoyan, Karabakh's current and former ombudsmen as well as two Armenian experts on international law described Pashinyan's statement as "absolutely unacceptable." They said that ECHR and ICJ verdicts sought by Yerevan are essential for "preventing new see LAWSUITS, page 6

# Armenian PM Signals Willingness to Make Territorial Concessions to Facilitate Border Deal with Azerbaijan

Realizing his bargaining position is limited, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is making a pragmatic play to secure a border delimitation agreement with Azerbaijan: he appears willing to offer a unilateral give to ultimately get what Armenia needs.

Delimitation discussions appear stuck at present over Azerbaijan's demand that it gain control of eight villages in border areas currently under Armenian jurisdiction. Pashinyan in comments to journalists signaled a willingness to unilaterally hand over four of the disputed villages. In doing so, he also suggested a practical way of settling the boundary between the two states. His initiative appears intended to deprive Azerbaijan of a pretext to launch new military action to seize territory, including any assault that could cut Armenia's direct access to Iran.

"The de jure border that existed at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union was reaffirmed by the [1991] Alma-Ata declaration and not only by that declaration, but also by the agreements held in Prague on October 6, 2022," Pashinyan said at a March 12 news conference.



Lower Askipara. (Photo: Gasan Dzhalal via Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Four of the disputed villages – Baghanis Ayrim, Lower Askipara, Kheyrimli, and Gizilhajili – were on the Azerbaijani side of

the border between the two former Soviet republics and were occupied by Armenian forces in the 1990s, during the first Karabakh war, which concluded in 1994 after the signing of the Alma-Ata declaration.

Citing the Alma-Ata and Prague agreements, Pashinyan acknowledged that "the former administrative border, which existed during the Soviet Union, is somewhat beyond that present administrative border." He went on to call for both states to reaffirm the frontier defined by the Alma-Ata agreement.

"In the process of [border] delimitation, we must work on reproducing that border in any format," the Armenian prime minister said. "We must proceed from the de jure reality. What is Armenia is Armenia, what is not Armenia is not Armenia."

Following Pashinyan's logic, that means the Armenia's immediate return of the four villages within Azerbaijan at the time of the Alma-Ata agreement. Earlier in 2024, Armenia maintained that Azerbaijan currently see CONCESSIONS, page 3

## Pashinyan Meets Border Villagers on Land Transfer

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met on Monday with concerned residents of two villages in Armenia's northern Tavush province adjacent to border areas which he seems intent on handing over to Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan signaled last week his readiness to accept Baku's demands for Armenian withdrawal from four villages which were controlled by Azerbaijan in Soviet times and occupied by the Armenian army in 1991-1992. He did not make their handover conditional on the libera-



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets residents of a border village in Tavush region

tion of any Armenian territory occupied by Azerbaijani forces in the early 1990s and 2021-2022.

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## Disney Shines Light On Vardavar

LOS ANGELES — This March Disney released an official music video for *It's Vardavar*, a song featured in the episode "Vardavar!" from Mickey Mouse Funhouse, the Armenian Film Society reported.

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It's Vardavar Mickey Mouse Funhouse

## Kazakh Foreign Minister Visits Yerevan

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia and Kazakhstan have a chance to open a new page in bilateral relations for the benefit of the two countries, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said at a press conference in Yerevan on Monday, March 18, alongside his Kazakh counterpart Murat Nurtleu.

"Indeed, we are expanding the bases of our cooperation, the high level of our political dialogue testifies that the necessary prerequisites are there. Our trade and economic relations are developing dynamically," Mirzoyan

said, emphasizing that there is still a huge untapped potential.

During a tête-à-tête meeting earlier today the sides expressed willingness to develop the relations and make use of the untapped potential.

Ararat Mirzoyan stressed that Armenia is interested in developing bilateral relations with everyone – from the American continent to East Asia.

"Of course, the relations with Kazakhstan play an important role in this vision, and I'm glad to see the same interest from the Kazakh side.



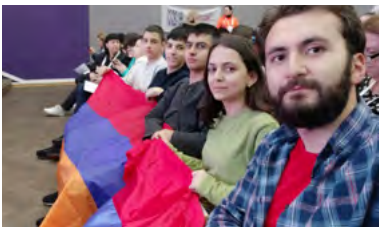
Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, right, with his Kazakh counterpart Murat Nurtleu

Today we reached concrete agreements on the development of these relations," the Armenian Foreign Minister said.

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

## Armenia to Sign EU Agreement in July

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenia is developing a new cooperation document with the European Union, it is planned to sign it by July, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Paruyr Hovhannisyán said this at the meeting of the Standing Committee on European Integration Issues of the National Assembly.

“If the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between Armenia and the EU is fully implemented, we will indeed have the status of a candidate country for EU membership. In addition to this, new directions of cooperation and new programs are being developed, which emerged as a result of a fact-finding mission that took place in November of last year,” said Hovhannisyán.

## Marukyan Slams Michel For Double Standards

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia’s former Ambassador-at-Large Edmon Marukyan strongly criticized European Council President Charles Michel for double standards following his sarcastic congratulations to Russian President Vladimir Putin on winning the presidential election on its first day.

“President of the European Council Charles Michel congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin with irony at the start of the Russian presidential elections, emphasizing that there is no opposition, no freedom, no choice. I wouldn’t react to this ironic congratulation, if the EU standards were applied equally by Charles Michel,” he posted on Twitter on March 18.

“A few days ago, the same Charles Michel congratulated the President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev on his reelection and extended best wishes for his new mandate. Strangely enough, the congratulation addressed to Aliyev, who inherited the Azerbaijani presidency from his father in 2003, is in power for 21 years and wins his fifth term by getting 92.05% of votes, doesn’t contain any sarcasm or irony,” Marukyan said.

## Russian Emigres in Armenia Vote against Putin

YEREVAN (Reuters) — At least a thousand anti-Kremlin Russian emigres queued for hours outside their embassy in Armenia on Sunday, March 17, waiting to cast ballots in presidential election they admit they have little chance of influencing.

A more than one-kilometer-long queue was snaked through the streets around the embassy complex, where voting was being held. All those who spoke to Reuters said they had come to register their opposition to Vladimir Putin.

Armenia, which allows Russians to stay without a visa, became one of the most popular refuges for Russians opposed to the Kremlin as political repression and conscription ramped up after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

## NATO’s Stoltenberg Visits Armenia, Azerbaijan, Pledging Closer Cooperation with Both

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited both Armenia and Azerbaijan this week, urging both to have closer cooperation with the organization.

During a joint press conference with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on March 19, the latter called for firm support from the international community, including NATO, for the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on known and mutually agreed-upon principles. He also emphasized the unequivocal rejection of the policy of coercion and threats.

“I presented to Mr. Stoltenberg the vision and approaches of the Government of the Republic of Armenia to establishing stability and peace in the South Caucasus. I reaffirm my repeatedly voiced willingness to normalize relations with Azerbaijan based on the 3 principles agreed at the highest level, namely, recognition of each other’s territorial integrity based on the Alma-Ata Declaration, the delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan interstate border according to the Alma-Ata Declaration for restoring the border that existed at the time of the collapse of the USSR in 1991 between the two republics, as well as the unblocking of regional infrastructures, respecting the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the countries they pass through, based on the principles of equality and reciprocity. Regarding the latter, I have also presented the “Crossroads of Peace” project, which summarizes our ideas on the issue,” Pashinyan added.

He added, “I also presented to the General Secretary the proposals for a simultaneous withdrawal of troops from the Armenia-Azerbaijan border of 1991, mutual arms control, and the signing of a non-aggression pact, which have not received a positive response from official Baku to date.”

Pashinyan noted that Armenia is also “committed to the agenda of normalizing relations with Turkey.”

He concluded, “Of course, we are interested in deepening cooperation with NATO, and I hope that the individually tailored program for Armenia will be adopted as soon as possible. As you are aware, we are currently undergoing significant reforms, and I trust that this program will prove beneficial for our foreign agenda as well.”

In his speech, Stoltenberg highlighted the importance of ensuring peace and stability in the region. He emphasized that NATO supports Armenia’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and peaceful aspirations.

“Thank you for hosting me and my delegation. We highly value cooperation with Armenia. You have participated in various NATO missions and operations for many years; we appreciate your participation in the Kosovo mission. We hope that we can now further deepen and strengthen our cooperation, including through the adoption of a program individually tailored for Armenia. Of course, we support your sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

“We also support your efforts to develop a more independent foreign policy, which we believe is important. I personally admire your leadership and commitment. We welcome your steps aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law. Additionally, we appreciate the fact that you are providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine,” he said.

Stoltenberg added, “I welcomed the fact that you are working to strengthen democratic control over your armed forces, including through your participation in NATO’s Building Integrity Programme. You have also shown real commitment to fighting corruption, strengthening your demo-

cratic institutions and upholding the rule of law.”

On March 17, Stoltenberg visited Baku. Meeting with President İlham Aliyev, the Secretary General welcomed Azerbaijan’s long-standing collaboration with the alliance, saying he looked forward to further strengthening the partnership.

Stoltenberg welcomed the opportunity to discuss energy security, saying, “energy matters for our security and I welcome that

ing peace after years of conflict. I can just encourage you to seize this opportunity to reach a lasting peace agreement with Armenia.”

On Ukraine, Stoltenberg welcomed support provided by Azerbaijan, and called on all countries in the region to step up: “more support is needed because the situation in Ukraine is extremely difficult.”

The Secretary General called the upcoming COP29 global climate summit in Azerbaijan an important milestone: “It is important for everyone concerned about climate change but also important for our security because those issues are closely interlinked.”

Finally, Stoltenberg praised the close cooperation between the “Azerbaijani army and the Turkish armed forces,” which he said, “will greatly contribute to the deepening of [Azerbaijan’s] relations with NATO.”

Not surprisingly, Russian officials were not thrilled

with the visit. “The North Atlantic Alliance’s attempts to expand its presence in the Caucasus are ‘visible to the naked eye,’” [TASS](#) quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as telling reporters on March 19.

“NATO’s wish to assert its presence in the Caucasus is well known to us. Its attempts are visible to the naked eye. Also, there is an understanding that, in fact, NATO’s attempts to somehow expand its influence and presence are hardly capable of adding to stability in the Caucasus and predictability of the situation,” he said, while commenting on NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg’s tour of the Caucasus.

(Stories from Armenpress, Panorama.am and Public Radio of Armenia were used in compiling this report.)



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Yerevan on Tuesday, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

Azerbaijan is developing closer and closer ties with several NATO Allies.” He further pointed to a track record of work on issues of mutual concern and thanked Azerbaijan for its contributions to NATO-led operations and missions – including in Kosovo and Afghanistan – since Azerbaijan joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace in 1994. The alliance and Baku have also cooperated through NATO’s Science for Peace and Security programme on counter-terrorism and cyber security.

On the situation in the South Caucasus, Stoltenberg stressed that “peace and stability are not only important here but for security more broadly.”

He said: “Armenia and Azerbaijan now have an opportunity to achieve an endur-

## Pashinyan Meets Border Villagers on Land Transfer

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The statement prompted strong condemnation from opposition leaders and serious concern from residents of several Tavush villages that would be affected by the withdrawal. The villagers say they would lose access to their land, have trouble communicating with the rest of the country and be far more vulnerable from Azerbaijani armed attacks.

Pashinyan visited two of those border villages, Voskepar and Kirants, and spent more than three hours discussing the issue with locals behind closed doors. Speaking to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service afterwards, he said he repeated his assertions that the areas in question are technically not part of Armenia’s internationally recognized territory.

“I told people that I came to not only answer questions but also collect questions and put them on the government’s table so that it thinks about answering them and I come back with those answers,” Pashinyan said without elaborating.

According to some of the villagers, Pashinyan failed to dispel all of their concerns despite assuring them that his administration has not yet made a final decision on the matter and will consult with them again.

“We said we have land holdings over there,” one Kirants farmer told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “He said ‘it’s part of our territory.’ But if [Azerbaijani] troops are deployed there, how will we go about cultivating our land? How can he make sure that we will be able to cultivate the land?”

“The Karabakh pattern is going to be repeated here,” he added grimly. “We won’t have access to our land. We won’t dare to let our kids go to school.”

Pashinyan’s government until recently linked potential Armenian territorial concessions to Azerbaijan with the liberation of some 240 square kilometers of Armenian territory which it says remains occupied by Azerbaijani forces. The premier appears to have stopped insisting on that linkage, sparking opposition claims that he is planning to cede more territory to Azerbaijan without getting anything in return.

Garnik Danielyan, an opposition lawmaker who was not present at Monday’s meetings, claimed that Pashinyan told the Voskepar and Kirants residents that Baku will unleash another war if Yerevan refuses to unilaterally and unconditionally hand over the four former villages. In his words, the premier admitted that even this concession would not necessarily prevent more Azerbaijani territorial demands in the future.





## ARMENIA

# Renewal at ATP Nurseries During the Winter Months

YEREVAN — During the winter, staff at the Armenia Tree Project nurseries prepare for spring growth.

During a recent unusually warm February morning, ATP's Nursery Specialists from the bustling Yerevan office, made their way through the Palvetzian Greenhouse. A visitor could notice the small containers lining the shelves, brimming with promise, filled with the rich, dark soil meticulously prepared by the dedicated hands of the Nursery Team last fall.

Gevorg Zaroyan, the Khachpar Nursery Manager, unveils the magic behind the scenes. Winter is not a time of hibernation but a season of meticulous groundwork. The team fills containers with a soil mixture, a concoction of peat moss, red sand, and perlite, ready to nurture the seeds that will soon sprout into mountain ash, birch, pine, and oak trees. Thanks to a milder winter, the nursery team has been able to jump-start the cultivation process, paving the way for an early seed-sowing extravaganza.

Armenia's diverse climatic zones demand flexibility, and ATP delivers. The nurseries boast both bare root and container-grown trees, catering to various planting preferences. Container-grown seedlings, with their intact soil plugs, offer extended planting timeframes and a growth advantage in the first year. On the flip side, bare root seedlings offer affordability and ease during planting, addressing the diverse needs of communities during ATP's tree planting initiatives, including fruit tree distribution.

But it doesn't stop there. The Khachpar Nursery, a powerhouse of growth, churns out 200,000 plants annually. Zaroyan proudly shares, "Everything starts from a single seed sown in these tiny containers." Native seeds are the secret ingredient, producing geographically suitable species that are locally adapted. The nursery currently boasts over 90 species of trees and shrubs, each playing a crucial role in ATP's mission to green every corner of Armenia.

The nurseries are not just static entities; they are living laboratories of innovation. ATP is not only expanding existing species but delving into the realm of breeding, birthing new trees and shrubs. The upcoming stars include varieties of spindle tree, firethorn and hazel pine, adding a dash of novelty to Armenia's thriving ecosystem.

Beyond the confines of the nurseries, ATP's commitment extends to annual forest tree seed collection. Seeds collected

from different planting sites undergo a meticulous process, finding their way to the Mirak Reforestation Nursery in Margahovit Village for planting, ensuring a cycle of renewal that spans across Armenia's breath-taking landscapes.

Since 1996, ATP has been a stalwart in tree production, operating state-of-the-art nurseries with the mission of providing native tree seedlings of the highest quality for deployment across every region of Armenia. Almost three decades of dedication have culminated in significant increases in volume growth and resilient properties of key tree species, a testament to ATP's ongoing tree improvement programs.

As the winter winds whisper tales of growth and renewal, ATP's nurseries stand as guardians of Armenia's green legacy, orchestrating a dance of life that transcends seasons.



A Khachpar nursery employee

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controls 31 villages situated in roughly 200 square kilometers of land that are rightfully Armenian. There had been some talk in Yerevan of proposing a trade involving all the disputed settlements. But Pashinyan in his most recent comments made no mention of such a swap.

The remaining four villages that Azerbaijan is seeking is a trickier matter to settle. All are associated with one of the most bedeviling legacies of the Stalin era: they are village-sized exclaves that were primarily inhabited during the Soviet era by Azerbaijanis while being surrounded by Armenian territory.

On March 15, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan reaffirmed Pashinyan's position during a meeting with lawmakers.

"The process of mutual recognition of territorial integrity and subsequent border delimitation must be based on the Alma-Ata declaration," he said, referring to a 1991 document that committed newly independent ex-Soviet republics to recognizing their Soviet-era borders. Alma-Ata is presently known as Almaty, Kazakhstan's commercial capital.

"There is more mutual understanding on this issue now than, for example, a month

ago," added Mirzoyan. "At least at the moment, I have the impression that we are very close to reaching a mutual agreement on this issue."

Prior to Pashinyan's March gambit, Azerbaijan had staked out an intransigent position about the return of the eight villages. "As for the four non-exclave Azerbaijani villages occupied by Armenia, their affiliation to Azerbaijan is beyond any doubt and they are subject to immediate liberation," Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev said in the statement issued March 9, two days after the latest round of border delimitation talks. Mustafayev leads the Azerbaijani negotiating team.

"The issue of liberation of four of Azerbaijan's exclave villages occupied by Armenia will also be resolved within the delimitation process," he noted.

There has not been a specific Azerbaijani response to Pashinyan's gambit. But in a March 14 speech in Baku, President Ilham Aliyev indicated that Azerbaijan and Armenia were close to a peace deal.

"Now that the Karabakh issue is closed, we are very close to peace. That's what we think," Aliyev said. "Meetings at the level of the foreign ministers of both countries have now resumed, and we think that peace

is reachable. That is what we want. We restored historical justice and international law, and now it's time to put an end to hostility in the region."

The villages that Pashinyan seems willing to unilaterally hand back are important to Armenia from an infrastructure point of view. A highway to Georgia, as well as a pipeline carrying Russian gas to Armenia, pass through these villages. Pashinyan also addressed the issue in press comments, saying that he has instructed relevant state bodies to "reroute those lines so that they pass through Armenia's de jure territory and so that we don't have problems in that area."

The prime minister's remarks triggered an immediate outcry from long-standing government critics, who accuse Pashinyan of treachery and a failure to defend state interests.

"By unilaterally giving in, not only do you not create a guarantee that Azerbaijan will not attack, but on the contrary, you give them better conditions to attack you from those positions," Anna Grigoryan of the Hayastan alliance said in comments broadcast by RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

(This story originally appeared on the website eurasianet.org on March 18.)

## Armenian Students Win 1 Gold, 2 Bronze Medals at 9th Caucasian International Math Olympiad

MAYKOP, Russia (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Armenian team won one gold and two bronze medals at the 9th Caucasian International Mathematical Olympiad, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reported this past week.

The Olympiad held at the Adyghe State University in Maykop on March 11-16 brought together more than 160 students from 13 countries (Armenia, Peru, Belarus, Bulgaria, Uzbekistan, Abkhazia, Tajikistan, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Thailand, Dominican Republic, South Ossetia) and 18 regions of the Russian Federation. The Olympiad was held in two age groups: juniors (9th and 10th grades) and seniors (11th and 12th grades). The Armenian team participated in the youth age group.

Armenia was represented by a four-member team of the Artashes Shahinyan Physics-Mathematics School. Ninth grade student Sargis Arakelyan clinched a gold medal, Elen Keshishyan (9th grade) and Arman Asatryan (10th grade) received bronze medals, 9th grade student Grigor Samvelyan received a letter of commendation. The team was led by Narek Mkrtumyan, a mathematics teacher at PhysMath School.

Armenian students had won four bronze medals at the 8th Caucasian International Mathematics Olympiad.





## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## French Parliamentary Delegation to Visit Armenia

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — A delegation led by Anne-Laurence Petel, the head of the France-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group of the French National Assembly will visit Armenia from March 24 to 27, according to the statement of the speaker Alen Simonyan of the National Assembly of Armenia.

## Pashinyan Congratulates Putin on Re-Election

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sent a congratulatory message to Vladimir Putin on the occasion of his re-election as the President of the Russian Federation.

The message said: “Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich, Please accept my congratulations on your re-election as the President of the Russian Federation. I hope that the dialogue in all areas of bilateral interest will develop for the benefit of the peoples of Armenia and Russia. I wish you, dear Vladimir Vladimirovich, health, happiness and further success in your activities.”

## Conference on Armenia and EU After Depopulation Of Karabakh Held in Brussels

BRUSSELS (ArmenPress) — A conference titled “Armenia and the EU after the depopulation of Nagorno-Karabakh” was held at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), organized by the Nairyan Union in collaboration with the UN community at the Free University of Brussels.

The speaker at the conference was Tigran Balayan, Armenia’s Ambassador to Belgium and Head of the Armenian Mission to the EU.

According to Armenpress Brussels correspondent, the Ambassador presented to the students the events that occurred between 1988 and 2023, covering the history of Nagorno-Karabakh in all its facets: the movement, wars and negotiations.

He also touched upon Armenia’s views on the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, bilateral relations with the EU, deepening cooperation and future joint plans.

“The Armenian foreign policy is neither a turn towards the West nor a turn towards the East. Armenia foreign policy is a turn towards the state interest of Armenians,” said Balayan.

Many of the students were interested to learn about Armenia’s possible candidacy for EU membership. Balayan noted that Armenia is ready to be as close to the European Union as the European Union deems it possible.

# Azerbaijan Destroys 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Cross-Stone in Artsakh

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Azerbaijanis have destroyed the memorial dedicated to Armenian servicemen who died in the Artsakh War as well as a 1224 CE cross-stone (khachkar) located in Tsar village of Artsakh, the Scientific Research Center for Historical and Cultural Heritage

of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reported on March 15.

“Our observations and searches regarding the physical condition of the *khachkar* remained fruitless. Given Azerbaijan’s policy towards the Armenian historical and cultural heritage, it can be assumed that

this unique example of Armenian cross-stone art has been destroyed,” the Research Center says in a Facebook post.

Armenian cross-stones are on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



Before and after pictures of a 13th-century monument destroyed by an Azerbaijani soldier

## TCA Egypt Tour Underway

CAIRO — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Montreal Chapter tour of Egypt began on March 16 and will continue until April 3, under the leadership of Arto Manoukian, a member of the Central Board of the TCA of the United States and Canada. The group will visit Egyptian historical sites and cities, as well as Armenian venues.

On March 16, the group, in Cairo, visited the Goganian Hall for a reception, and in the evening attended the Sardarabad Dance Group’s program at the Housaper Cultural Association. On March 17, they attended a banquet organized by the HMEM (Armenian General Athletic Union) Noubar Club.







INTERNATIONAL

FemInno Conference on Women and Innovation Takes Place in Sydney

SYDNEY — Technology professionals, industry experts, academics and a local member of parliament participated in the FEMINNO Sydney 2024 conference on the International Women’s day. March 8 was a special celebration with a visiting conference in Sydney from Armenia. FemInno, which is the biggest female innovation platform in Armenia and in the whole Caucasus, successfully executed their 2nd outgoing “satellite” conference, choosing Sydney as a well-established innovation hub with a powerful Armenian diaspora community.

“Having had serious success in Armenia for several years, we realized that it is time to export the unique brand we have created and start bringing together the women engaged in innovation in the diaspora and foreign communities, as well as the men who support this cause,” says Seda Papoyan, the founder of FemInno. The first conference outside of Armenia was in San Francisco in October 2023.

The FemInno conference in Sydney was supported by Salesforce, which provided their newly opened Tower space with terrific views as conference venue and helped to organize this gathering of local Armenian technology leaders, as well as non-Armenians.

The speaker lineup featured prominent experts like the VP of Salesforce Sassoon Grigorian, NAB executive Linda Minasian, Global Goodwill Ambassador of SmartAID Alethea Gold OAM, UBS executive Leon Hagopian, deputy director of UNSW Data Science Hub Fatemeh Vafae PhD, one of AWS leaders Agnes Panosian, CEO of Saasyan Sidney Minassian and others.

“It was an honor to host FEMINNO conference at Salesforce Sydney Tower



Panel discussion on AI

for their satellite event on the international women’s day! It was a day of inspiration covering career development, AI, diversity, and I covered how you can be a voice in your company/organization showcasing our employee group ArmeniaForce,” noted Sasson Grigorian.

Established in Armenia, FemInno leads the development of female talent in STEM, as well as runs the main FEMINNO conference in the capital Yerevan every year on

the last week-end of July. FemInno 2024 is planned for July 27-28 on the topic of “GenAI in Action: Big Data, Big Impact.”

“This was a great platform to celebrate trailblazer women in Business, Science, and Technology, whilst inspiring careers for Armenian women to pursue in this space. I was humbled to share the stage with all the inspiring speakers who shared their stories while imparting invaluable wisdom and practical advice on navigating the often challenging terrain of a STEM career, in particular as a woman,” says Saro Mimassian, another speaker from Salesforce leadership.

The Sydney conference was supported also by the local Armenian Professional Network of ANCAU and a cybersecurity startup from Armenia with a global reach - Humanize Inc. Currently the FemInno team started a new global membership program — both for individuals and companies, to be able to stimulate mentorship, partnership and en-

agement opportunities in better and more concrete ways.

“Powerful talks, fun networking and the best views in Sydney,” said participant Armella Zadoorian, PhD.

Flavored with Armenian music, cultural food and wine, FEMINNO conference was



Sasson Grigorian



Speaker Linda Minasian



Feminno Sydney conference participants with Seda Papoyan and host Masha Mnjoyan in the center





INTERNATIONAL

# Turkey Continues to Demand Armenian ‘Corridor’ for Azerbaijan

ANAKRA (Azatutyun) — Turkey’s leaders have renewed their demands for Armenia to open an extraterritorial corridor connecting Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave.

Speaking after a trilateral meeting with his Georgian and Azerbaijani counterparts in Baku on Friday, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said that Ankara expects “general support for the opening of the Zangezur path.” He said that it is essential for “restoring peace in the South Caucasus.”

For his part, Turkish Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said in an interview publicized earlier in the day that the corridor would benefit not only Turkey and Azerbaijan but also the entire “Turkic world.”

Binali Yildirim, a former Turkish prime minister heading the Council of Elders of the Organization of Turkic States, made the same point when he spoke to journalists in Baku on Thursday.

“May the 21st century be a Turkic century,” Yildirim said. “The Zangezur corridor must also be opened.”

Unlike “mainland” Azerbaijan, Nakhichevan has a short land border with Turkey.

Armenia maintains that people and goods moving between Nakhichevan and the rest of Azerbaijan cannot be exempt from Armenian border controls and that the two South Caucasus states should have only conventional transport links guaranteeing their full control over all transit routes

passing through their respective territories.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan reaffirmed this position on Friday. Visiting Turkey earlier this month, Mirzoyan indicated that the issue is one of the two main sticking points in ongoing negotiations on an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. He met with Fidan during the trip.

The corridor demanded by Baku and Ankara would pass through Syunik, the only Armenian region bordering Iran. The Islamic Republic has repeatedly warned against attempts to strip it of the common border and transport links with Armenia.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi reportedly told a visiting Azerbaijani official last October that the “Zangezur corridor” is “resolutely opposed” by his country. Iran’s

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made this clear to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan when they met in Tehran in 2022.

Erdogan complained about Iran’s stance a year later. He insisted on the corridor in a speech delivered at a November 2023 summit of the leaders of Turkic states held in Kazakhstan.

## Yerevan Warned Against Dropping Lawsuits Against Baku

LAWSUITS, from page 1

Azerbaijani encroachments against the Republic of Armenia,” “investigating crimes committed against the people of Artsakh” and facilitating the Karabakh Armenians’ eventual safe return to their homeland.

Two dozen Armenian civic groups made similar arguments in a separate joint statement which was also signed by groups representing Karabakh refugees in Armenia.

“We believe that the Azerbaijani authorities, which do not seek peace and neighborliness at all, should not remain unpunished,” said Artak Beglaryan, the former Karabakh ombudsman.



Arman Tatoyan

Last November, the ICJ ordered Baku to ensure the security of Karabakh Armenians willing to return to the depopulated region. The United Nations court based in The Hague issued the “interim measure” during an ongoing consideration of the Armenian lawsuit. Beglaryan said that Pashinyan’s government will preclude any possibility of further ICJ action on the repatriation of Karabakh’s ethnic Armenian population if it withdraws the lawsuit.

Pashinyan’s statement also raised more questions about Armenia’s recent accession to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin a year ago. Yerevan’s stated rationale for accepting the ICC’s jurisdiction was to take more legal action against Azerbaijan and prevent further Azerbaijani attacks on Armenia, rather than to please Western powers.

# UK Car Industry Insists 2,000% Increase in Sales to Azerbaijan Has Nothing to Do with Russia

By Ed Conway

LONDON (Sky News) — Britain’s car industry has insisted that an unprecedented 2,000-percent increase in vehicle exports to Azerbaijan has nothing to do with Russia and is explained by the fact that the former Soviet state is a “flourishing market in its own right”.

Sky analysis released on March 18 has found that the British car sector sent another £40m worth of cars to Azerbaijan in the first month of this year, raising fresh questions about whether those cars were being sent there to circumvent sanctions on Russia.

New data from HM Revenue & Customs shows that while direct car exports to Russia remain at zero, where they have been since the imposition of sanctions in 2022, in January £43 million worth of cars were sent to Azerbaijan, the former Soviet state neighboring Russia.

That meant Azerbaijan, which hitherto had rarely made the top 75 export destinations for British cars, is now the 12th biggest foreign market, by value, for British-made cars: above Switzerland, Canada and Spain.

UK carmakers have pledged not to send cars to Russia, with sanctions formally banning the export of “dual use” items which could be repurposed as weapons in the Ukraine war. There are separate sanctions specifically banning the trade of cars

worth over £42,000.

However, Sky News analysis found last week that over precisely the same period as British car exports to Azerbaijan rose sharply, there was a near-simultaneous rise in car exports from Azerbaijan to Russia.

The average value of cars sent from the UK to Azerbaijan in

Trade data shows that similar increases in British exports have been seen in other former Soviet Russian neighbours, including Kazakhstan, Armenia and Georgia.

A spokesman from Britain’s motoring lobby group, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), said it had detected no evidence the vehicles being sent to Azerbaijan were destined for Russia - and that they were evidence that it was a “flourishing market in its own right”.

“UK vehicle exports to Azerbaijan - as to many countries globally - have increased due to a number of factors, not least a flourishing economy, new model launches and pent-up demand,” it said.

However, the notion that the exports were evidence of a flourishing economy stands in stark contrast to the economic data, which show that Azerbaijan’s GDP per capita has been flat for a decade and a half at around \$15,000 in purchasing power parity terms.

Since two years preceding the pandemic, the value of car exports to Azerbaijan has risen by more than 2,000%. No other sizeable car market in the world has come

close, save for Kazakhstan, the other Russian neighbour, whose imports of British-made cars are up 800%.

The SMMT said: “Wherever the UK automotive industry exports, it is committed to compliance with all trade and economic sanctions, and continues to work closely with government and the new Office For Sanctions to ensure the effective implementation of the regulations.

“There is no evidence available of that commitment being compromised, and it is right to monitor for any potential vulnerabilities in a fast-moving and evolving environment.

“The automotive industry remains in dialogue with government and other international partners enforcing coordinated trade restrictions, to ensure adherence to both the letter and the spirit of the sanctions, across all vulnerable sectors.”

While the sheer number of cars going to Azerbaijan is small, the value of those cars is consistently high, averaging well over £100,000 and suggesting they are mostly luxury cars.

There have been similar flows detected from other European nations, including Germany and Poland, to other former Soviet states neighboring Russia.

Following the original Sky News story last week, Foreign Office Minister Anne-Marie Trevelyan said car companies should examine their orders to ensure they are complying with sanctions rules.

# Georgia: Foreign Investors Losing Interest

Georgia experienced a big decline in foreign direct investment in 2023, according to the state statistics agency. The figures, which Geostat emphasizes are preliminary and subject to revision, suggest the Georgian government should be concerned that increasing political friction with the West may dampen the country’s attractiveness as an investment destination.

Total FDI last year amounted to just under \$1.6 billion, marking a 24 percent fall over 2022’s total of \$2.09 billion, Geostat reported. Four states – United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United States – accounted for over two-thirds of the FDI that Georgia attracted in 2023. Russia was responsible for the fifth highest FDI figure, with \$87.6 million.

The year-on-year dropoff in investment could be a reflection of concern in the West about the Georgian government’s future direction.

The government professes to favor membership in the European Union, and Georgia received a green light from Brussels in December to continue the accession process, but officials in Tbilisi have faced increasing criticism in the West for embracing illiberal practices. The government’s controversial actions in recent years include a failed attempt to adopt legislation to muzzle the non-governmental sector, stronger political ties with Russia, unsubstantiated accusations that a US government agency was funding subversive activity and tepid efforts to promote tolerance. The EU has mandated that the government implement liberal-minded reforms for Georgia to keep its membership bid on track.

Government officials have emphasized recently that the country is not dependent on any one country or region when it comes to FDI. “Despite a lot of speculation, the geography of our investments is quite diverse

and it is not connected to one country,” said Economic Minister Levan Davitashvili on December 5. “Up to 50 percent of direct foreign investments... [comes] from EU countries, followed by the United States of America and the Persian Gulf countries.”

Davitashvili’s portrayal was way off. According to the 2023 Geostat figures, European states (taking into account Brexit) accounted for well over half of the FDI figure, while no Gulf State appears in the Top 10 list of FDI sources in 2023.

In addition, the share of new FDI in the overall 2023 figure amounted to just 20 percent of the overall total of \$1.594 billion. The bulk of the money tallied as FDI in 2023 was reinvested funds. In 2022, the percentage of fresh FDI relative to the overall amount was 35 percent.

(This article originally appeared on Eurasianet.org on March 12.)





# Community News

## California Primary Election Results For Armenian Candidates

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — California held its primary elections for various municipal, state and federal positions on March 5 and there were a number of Armenians running in these races. As California uses a top-two primary system in which candidates of all parties compete against one another, the two top receivers of votes, no matter their party affiliation, will compete against one another in the November elections. The following includes preliminary results for many of the most prominent races involving Armenians, as of March 12.

### Congress

Santa Clara County Supervisor Saren Joseph Simitian, a former California State Assemblyman and Senator, ran for the 16<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Silicon Valley to replace the retiring Anna Eshoo, who held office for 16 terms. Simitian placed second out of 11 candidates with 25,379 votes (17.1 percent). He will be facing frontrunner Sam Liccardo, who received 32, 123 votes (17.1 percent) in November. Liccardo, like Simitian, is a Democrat.

In an even more crowded race, 15 candidates ran for the 30<sup>th</sup> Congressional District election, of whom two were Armenians. This district includes Glendale, Pasadena and Burbank so has many Armenian voters. Adam Schiff had chosen to run for US Senate instead of running again in this district so there was no incumbent.

Republican Dr. Alex Balekian achieved second place, with 23,140 votes (18.4 percent), meaning he will face frontrunner Laura Friedman, a Democrat with 36,754 votes (29.3 percent), in November. Democrat Dr. Jirair Ratevosian came in 9<sup>th</sup> place, with 2,447 votes (1.9 percent). Anthony Portantino, Jr., who has been very supportive of Armenians as a California State Senator, came in third place with 16,874 votes (13.4 percent).

### California State Assembly

In the preliminary results for California State Assembly District 41, John Harabedian received 31,580 votes (29.7 percent) as the leading Democratic Party candidate, followed by Phlunté Riddle with 16,312 votes (15.3 percent). However, the Republican candidate, Michelle Del Rosario Martinez, received the most votes, with 42,982 (40.4 percent). Final results will be available on April 12, but tentatively it appears that Harabedian will face the Republican candidate this November in this usually heavily Democratic-voting district.

Carmenlina Minasova ran unsuccessfully for two seats simultaneously (see below). In the preliminary results for California State Assembly see ELECTIONS, page 9



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan at the consecration

## Primate Consecrates New Church in Jacksonville

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — On Saturday, March 2, Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan consecrated the new St. Nerses Shnorhali Armenian Church in Jacksonville.

“This consecration holds a special place in my heart,” he said, “as it marks my first church consecration since becoming a bishop last October.”

The Armenian Church of Jacksonville has been a longstanding, active mission parish in the Eastern Diocese for many years. Acquiring and consecrating a church of their own is a major step forward for the faithful of the community.

“I was deeply moved by the warmth and dedication of our brothers and sisters in Jacksonville, whose efforts have made this dream a reality,” the Primate reflected. “Their commitment to preserving our rich heritage and faith is truly inspiring. I am confident that this church will be a beacon of God’s grace, guiding our people in Jacksonville in their spiritual journey and serving as a home for worship and community.”

Assisting Parsamyan during the ceremony was Fr. Paren Galstyan, pastor of Soorp Haroutiun Church in Orlando. Bishop Mesrop thanked him and “everyone who organized and joined us in this historic celebration: parish council members, donors, choir and altar servers, and every faithful soul in Jacksonville.”

“Your collective spirit and unity in Christ have truly made this day unforgettable,” he told the enthusiastic parishioners.

As part of the consecration ceremony and the reception that followed, the Primate bestowed two parishioners, Olivia Arslanian-Brooks and Soorin Vardanian, with the St. Vartan Medal. He offered congratulations to consecration godfather Carl Bazarian, as well as to the cross godfathers, and the parish leaders and benefactors.

In their remembrances of the community’s history, parishioners paid tribute to the determined souls who first started the parish, and to the role Fr. Tateos Abdalian played as Jacksonville’s dedicated visiting pastor for many years.

Now, secure in its home at 3900 Atlantic Boulevard in Jacksonville, the St. Nerses Shnorhali Church will go forward to begin a new chapter of spiritual growth and community solidarity.

In the words of the Primate: “May God’s blessings shower upon each of you, nurturing your faith and guiding your steps in His divine light.”



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan at the Jacksonville consecration

## Khachanov and Rublev Exhibition Tennis Match Raises \$100,000 for Artsakh Refugees

LOS ANGELES — On Saturday March 16, the Los Angeles Tennis Center at UCLA held an exhibition match featuring world-renowned tennis stars Karen Khachanov and Andrey Rublev, hosted by Homenetmen Glendale Ararat, a local non-profit organization dedicated to supporting youth through sports and scouting programs, [The Armenian Report](#) said.

The match kicked off with a heartwarming display as the Ararat Homenetmen Scouts proudly paraded the flags of the USA, Armenia, Artsakh, and California, with Khachanov and Rublev joining them. The crowd erupted with applause as the champions took to the court.

In the end, Khachanov won with a hard-fought 6-3, 4-6, 10-8 win. However, the true triumph of the day transcended the scoreboard as over \$100,000 was raised to support Armenian families forcibly displaced from Artsakh in Armenia.

Reflecting on the event, Homenetmen Glendale Ararat Chairwoman Roobina Arshakian expressed her gratitude for Khachanov’s ongoing support. She highlighted his commitment to inspiring young members through his success story and personal engagement with the community.

Khachanov, currently ranked #15 among the world’s male tennis players, boasts an impressive record, including five ATP Tour singles titles and an Olympic silver medal.

His partnership with Rublev has also seen success, clinching a doubles Masters 1000 title.

## US Suggests \$45M in Aid To Armenia for FY 2025

WASHINGTON — The Administration’s Budget request for Fiscal Year 2025 recommends \$45 million for Armenia within the Assistance to Europe, Eurasian, Central Asia (AEECA) account, along with \$6 million under International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE), and \$700,000 in International Military Education Training (IMET), reported the Armenian Assembly of America.

Similar to FY2023 and FY2024, the Administration proposed approximately \$10 million in aid to Azerbaijan, without taking into consideration the Aliyev regime’s genocidal intent and atrocities it has committed against the Armenian people of Artsakh and sovereign Armenia.

“We are disappointed and deeply troubled to see these types of insufficient actions to prevent and address genocide against Nagorno-Karabakh,” stated Assembly Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian. “The United States cannot selectively support democracy in the region, especially when Armenians continue to face attacks from authoritarian regimes, as well as the ongoing erasure of its centuries-old presence as documented by the Caucasus Heritage Watch,” the Co-Chairs added. “We urge the Administration to do much more to help a democracy at risk.”





OBITUARY

# Kevork Haig Tevekelian

## Proud of Armenian Heritage, Family

HOPKINTON, Mass. — Kevork Haig Tevekelian of Hopkinton, formerly of North Chelmsford and Watertown, passed away peacefully on March 9, 2024, surrounded by family and friends.

Kevork was born in Cambridge on December 19, 1941, to Haig and Lucy (Tutunjian) Tevekelian. Along with younger



brother Teddy, Kevork was raised in a loving environment in Belmont, surrounded by many Armenian friends and relatives. His fondest memories were of growing up and spending much time with his close-knit immediate and extended family, including his many cousins. Kevork was fiercely proud of his Armenian heritage and was happiest when enjoying Armenian music,

dance, food, and camaraderie, enjoying and listening to Armenian and Greek music until the day of his passing.

Kevork graduated from Belmont High School. He subsequently attended University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for a brief period and was a member of the Theta Chi Fraternity. He left college to work in his family's dry-cleaning business in Belmont (Minuteman Cleaners), later operating his own business as well, most notably Lantern Cleaners in Woburn. Kevork managed the family business, along with his Auntie Alice, for many years.

Kevork was a true gentleman who did not like conflict, never spoke negatively of others, and, above all else, cared for his family and friends passionately. He was a voracious reader, could hold a conversation with anyone on most topics, enjoyed boating as a member of the Charles River Yacht Club, and was a snappy dresser (100-percent cotton or wool only!).

His greatest achievements in his life were his children and he was a proud son, brother, father, and grandfather.

Kevork loved his family unconditionally. He is survived by his fiancée Sandra Boroyan; daughter-in-law Jennifer (Boudrot) Tevekelian; son Joshua Tevekelian and wife Diana; daughter Janeen (Tevekelian) Bazarian; daughter Alana (Tevekelian) Counts and her husband Roger; niece Dawn (Tevekelian) Keller and her husband Charles. He is also survived by his grand-

children Andrew, Derek, and Kyle Tevekelian, Avo and Armen Bazarian, Devin and Izabella Counts, Aline Tevekelian, and Max Levon Struble.

Kevork is also survived by his son-in-law Avo Bazarian and former spouse Carol (Sarkisian) Burnham.

Kevork was preceded in death by parents Haig Kevork Tevekelian, an Armenian Genocide survivor from Malatya, Armenia (present day Turkey), and Lucy (Tutunjian) Tevekelian of Granite City, IL; brother Gregory "Teddy" Tevekelian, son Kevork Tevekelian, Jr. of Shrewsbury, MA; and grandson Greyson Counts of Morehead City, NC.

Funeral Service will be at St. Stephen's Armenian Church, One Artsakh Street, Watertown on Saturday, March 16th at 11:30 a.m. Visiting hours will be at church from 10:00am – 11:30 am, immediately prior to the Funeral Service. Family and friends are invited to join the service at the church. Interment will be private for family.

Kevork lost his eldest son, Kevork Jr., to Multiple Myeloma in 2013. It was a loss that affected him greatly. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made in Kevork's name to the St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church or the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation, P.O. Box 414238 Boston, MA 02241.

# Louise G. der Sahagian Murphy

## Daughter of Genocide Survivors, Dedicated to Family

WORCESTER — Louise Grace (der Sahagian) Murphy passed away on February 24, 2024 after a brief illness, one day before her 101st birthday.

She was born in Worcester, the daughter of Haroutun (Harry) and Serpouhi (Sophie) Jorjorian and was a proud first-generation Armenian American. Her parents immigrated to the United States to escape the Armenian Genocide.

In August of 1933, when Louise was 10, she and her family attended an Armenian outing at Pineland Gardens, a picnic area at the Kaprelian Farm in Westborough, Mass. Archbishop Leon Tourian was attacked at this picnic. Louise witnessed this and while the adults ran to capture the would be assassins, she went to comfort the archbishop and held his hand, telling him "you will be fine."

She married the love of her life in 1956, her beloved, James David "Jim" Murphy. They were happily married for 53 years until his passing in 2009. They were the perfect couple, in love from the moment they met, saving every card and love letter they wrote to each other.

Donna was their first born, followed by the twins, Sheila and Sherrill. Her life's calling was being a devoted wife and mother. She had such a motherly presence, she considered many to be her "honorary children."

Louise graduated from New Woodland Prep, Commerce High School and the Worcester School of Business Science.

She studied voice with the influential instructor Miss Iride Pilla at the Boston Conservatory of Music. She was a lyric soprano with the voice of an angel.

She worked at the Worcester Mutual Fire Insurance Company as private secretary for the vice president and was manager of the Endorsement Department. She made lifelong friends, forming the "49ers" social group that faithfully met from 1948 until recently.

After raising her children, she worked for the Greater Gardner Credit Bureau, as a secretary at Bergeson Wood Products and was assistant bookkeeper, and secretary at Country Home Furnishings, retiring in 1993.

She began singing at an early age. At the age of 12, she was one of the youngest members in the choir of the Laurel Street Armenian Church in Worcester, the first Armenian Apostolic Church in the United States. She sang in the chorus of the Worcester Music Festival and was one of the youngest participants. She was a member of the choir and a soloist at the Armenian Church of Our Saviour in Worcester, where she was a lifelong member. She

was a member of the Paul Breault chorale and a soloist at the Holy Rosary Church in Gardner. She had the honor of singing the National Anthem on the USS Massachusetts commemorating the 45th Anniversary of the signing of the document that ended WWII on the USS Missouri. She enjoyed cooking Armenian food, singing, playing the piano, reading, gardening, bird watching, decorating and time spent with family and friends, especially at her annual Christmas Eve party.



She was a member of the Women's Guild at her Church, the Gardner Museum, and was politically active, working as a volunteer for many local, state and national campaigns.

She leaves her daughters, her special first cousin Irene Sahatjian, her children Susan Labandibar (Bob Master) and Alan Sahatjian (Theresa Lynn), cousins Dolly Tharp (Stephen), Tom Teager (Pat), Kim Teager (wife of David who predeceased her) and their children and grandchildren. She leaves her nephews George Murphy and Brian Murphy, and her lifelong best friend, Pauline Agazarian and her family. She leaves many cousins and friends whom she cherished.

Besides her parents and husband, she was predeceased by her brothers Oscar and Ardavast der Sahagian and her baby sister, Mary, her dearest first cousins June Sahagian and Gloria Teager; nephew Kevin Murphy, and her lifelong friend and "sister," Irene Shooshan.

Arrangements were by the Callahan-Fay and Caswell Funeral Home, 61 Myrtle Street, Worcester. Her funeral was held at the Armenian Church of Our Saviour.

Donations may be made in her name to the Armenian Church of Our Saviour, 87 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609 ,

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Hermineh Babayan, Saddle River, NJ donated \$250 in memory of Nerses Babayan

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# AIWA- LA Honors Educators at Women's Day Reception at Consulate

GLENDALDE — On Friday, March 8, 2024 the Armenian International Women's Association held a reception honoring women educators at the Armenian Consulate here. The co-chairs, Hermine Janoyan and Ani Aivazian, planned the event spotlighting the accomplishments of the local women. Both ladies are longtime AIWA members who have held various positions in the organization.

As the crowd gathered while enjoying refreshments, Nicole Nishanian, president of the Los Angeles Affiliate, opened the program with welcoming remarks. She was followed by Mistress of Ceremonies Alice Petrossian, PhD, AIWA Central Board representative, who in turn introduced Dr. Karen Israyelian, consulate general of Armenia in Los Angeles. Israyelian acknowledged the importance of recognizing and



ni Aivazian, co-chair of event, Honoree Anahid Nalbandian, Honoree Ellie Andreassian, Hermine Janoyan, co-chair of event, Alice Petrossian, Mistress of Ceremonies, Nazeli Hambardzumyan, Counselor of the Consulate; (Back row) Consul General Dr. Karen Israyelian



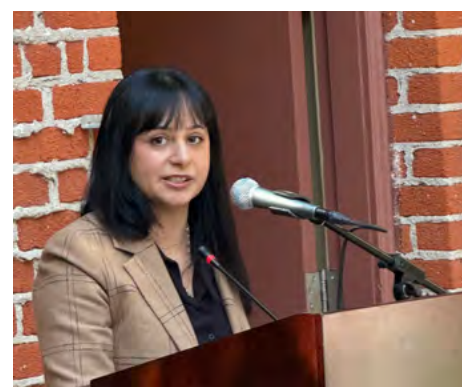
Honorees, Consulate staff, AIWA -LA board members and a few attendees.

valuing the significant contributions made by women, today and throughout Armenian history.

The honorees were Ellie Andreassian, head of the Eastern and Western Diocese Saturday Schools; Maral Boyadjian, principal of the Sahag-Mesrop School; Anahid Nalbandian, vice principal of the AGBU Marie Manoogian School and Souzy Ohanian, PhD., principal of the Merdianian School. They expressed their thanks and shared their experiences in the field of education.

Guitarist, Arthur Khachents, an Artsakh native, thrilled the crowd with a lovely performance of selected songs in honor of women.

Guest speaker, Prof. Lillit Kesheshyan, from the USC Institute of Armenian Studies explained the importance of the project she is currently working on, "Preserving Oral Histories," which documents stories and experiences of individuals. As the first project of its kind, it will have a lasting impact on our local history with first-hand accounts from the variety of diasporan Ar-



Prof. Lillit Kesheshyan, Keynote Speaker

menians who have made up our community today.

Margaret Mgrublian, vice-president of the Los Angeles Affiliate closed the program by thanking the Consulate General and the staff, as well as the attendees. In honor of the significance of the day, all attendees left with long stem fuchsia-colored roses.

For more information about AIWA, visit [aiwainternational.org](http://aiwainternational.org)

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## California Primary Election Results For Armenian Candidates

ELECTIONS, from page 7

District 43, she came out fifth in a six-person race with 1,782 votes (4.3 percent).

### Los Angeles City and Glendale City Councils

In the primary for Los Angeles City Council District 2, which was held by Paul Krekorian until he timed out of this seat, former California State Assemblyman Adrin Nazarian is the frontrunner, with 12,793 votes (37.32 percent), with Jillian Burgos (7,426 or 21.66 percent) in second place as his likely opponent in the November election. Two other Armenians were among the 7 candidates running, including Sam Kbushyan in third place, with 5,284 votes (15.42 percent), and Marin Ghandilyan in last place, with 935 votes (2.73 percent). Final results will be announced on March 28 for City Council races.

In LA City Council District 4, including parts of Silver Lake to Los Feliz, Hollywood Hills, Sherman Oaks to Encino, and parts of Studio City, Van Nuys and Reseda, Levon Baronian came in third place with 6,324 votes (10.81 percent), losing to front-

runner and incumbent Nithya Raman with 29,377 votes (50.19 percent), and challenger Ethan Weaver with 22,825 votes (39 percent).

In the race for Los Angeles City Council District 6 (which includes Arleta, Lake Balboa, North Hollywood, North Hills, Panorama City, Van Nuys and Sun Valley), Carmenlina Minasova came in third place with 1,776 votes (9.71 percent), losing to incumbent Imelda Padilla with 15,190 votes (78.42 percent) and Ely de la Cruz Ayao with 2,301 votes (11.88 percent).

In Glendale, four out of seven candidates for two at-large seats in the City Council were Armenians. Ardy Kassakhian, with 11,955 votes (22.65 percent) was the front-runner, followed by Vartan Gharpetian, with 8,924 votes (16.91 percent) and Vrej Agajanian with 8,793 votes (16.66 percent). Karen Kwak was in fourth place with 8,589 votes (15.03 percent). Andre Haghverdian was in last place, with 2,463 votes (4.67 percent). The two top receivers of votes when final results will win Council seats.





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Ful for Love

## Boston Tekeyan Brings Together Community With Good Food and Entertainment

By **Aram Arkun**  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Boston Chapter organized a brunch with impromptu entertainment on Sunday, March 10 at the main hall of the Baikar Building in Watertown. There were over 80 people in attendance, including a table of youth in their teens and twenties.

Members of the chapter, led by newly-elected chapter co-chair Rita Balyozian and her talented husband Hagop prepared *ful* (fava beans) with all the requisite sides, with *mamouniyeh* for desert for the capacity crowd. Co-chair Dr. Aida Yavshayan pointed out some of the newly elected TCA Boston executive members and spoke about the forthcoming plans of the chapter. It has initiated a cooking demonstration lecture series, the first of which, on how to prepare *kata/gata/nazouk*, will be conducted by Dr. Knarik Arkun on Thursday, March 21 at 7 p.m. at the Baikar Building. A jazz evening with light refreshments is being planned tentatively for early April starring up-and-coming singer Angelina Nazarian, who



A plate of *ful*

recently appeared on the competition reality show “The Voice,” together with several other young musicians. On April 28, the chapter is cosponsoring a theatrical performance by Nora Armani at the Armenian Cultural Foundation.

During the brunch, Angelina Nazarian sang Édith Piaf’s *La Vie en Rose* for the guests. Poet Sarkis Gavlakian, a longtime TCA member, recited several of his own poems in Armenian. At the end of the afternoon, Sarkis Antreassian, another longtime TCA member, told a few humorous anecdotes which left the crowd in a genial mood.

A raffle was organized by newly-elected chapter co-treasurers Suzy Naroian and Jeanine Shememian to support the forthcoming activities of the chapter. Vatche Der Torossian thanked the Gyumri Lavash bakery on behalf of the Tekeyan Boston chapter for its kind donation of lavash for the brunch.

For more information on the cooking series, contact chapter co-secretary Sossy Yogurtian at 617 281-1647

or email [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net). For more information on the chapter and other events, email [bostontca@gmail.com](mailto:bostontca@gmail.com).



Dr. Aida Yavshayan



Angelina Nazarian



From left, Jeanine Shememian, Lianna Shememian, Suzy Naroian



From left, Angelina Nazarian, Natalie Shememian, Lianna Shememian, Raffi Arkun, Ara Naroian, and Katya Maserejian, ready to collect raffle tickets



Maral Der Torossian, left, and Rita Balyozian in the Baikar kitchen



Sarkis Gavlakian reciting poetry at podium to full house





# TURKS AND AZERIS GUILTY OF Ethnic Cleansing



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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Celebrating the Arev Children’s Development Center in San Francisco

By Kim Bardakian Demirjian

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — On Friday, March 8, guests from the San Francisco community gathered at the home of Elaine

Several dozen guests learned about the center’s efforts to improve the lives of children with Down syndrome, providing medical care, education, and advocacy. It is the only center of its kind focusing on Down syndrome in Armenia.

Fr. Grigor Grigorian, Arev Center’s founder, was in attendance from Armenia and shared the center’s journey and mission including how it has personally played a vital role in the development of his young son, also with Down syndrome.

Fr. Grigor also discussed the Bell Choir formed by the children at the center, illustrating their dedicated efforts to reshape societal perceptions of individuals with Down syndrome across Armenia. Families bringing their children to the center are not required to pay for the rehabilitation services their children receive, which is a huge burden lifted for the families.



The San Francisco Bay Area community came together to gain insights from Fr. Grigor Grigorian, founder of the Arev Center, fifth from left in front row, during his visit from Armenia



From left, Kim Bardakian Demirjian, Fr. Mesrop Ash, Fr. Grigor Grigorian and Elaine Kapjian-Pitt

Kapjian-Pitt and Morley Pitt in San Francisco to honor the impactful work of the Arev Children’s Development Center in Yerevan, Armenia.

Generously hosted by St. John Armenian Church, Fr. Mesrop Ash, Elaine Kapjian-Pitt, Kim Bardakian Demirjian and Valina Agbabian, the event highlighted the power of community in uplifting the lives of those in need.

The event showcased compassion, inclusion, and empowerment for all children, irrespective of ability. To learn more about the Arev Center or to donate, visit: [stjohnarmenianchurch.com/donate/arev](http://stjohnarmenianchurch.com/donate/arev)



## Tekeyan Cultural Association Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

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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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association  
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# Arts & Culture

## Valerian Markarov



### Writing Russian and Being Armenian in Georgia

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/TBILISI — Valerian Markarov, born in 1967, in Tbilisi, is a Russian-writing author and historian from Georgia. After graduating with honors from the History Department of the Pushkin State Pedagogical Institute in Tbilisi, he began teaching. Later he studied business and management in the USA (California State University, Sacramento) and Israel (MASHAV Centre for International Cooperation), worked in a number of international organizations and diplomatic missions.

Since 2005 he has been working as director of the Golden Bridge International Educational Center in Tbilisi. Markarov is the author of popular books *Everything has its time, Geniuses are People too... Leonardo da Vinci, The Legend of Pirosmeni, The Personal Diary of Olivia Wilson, A Streetcar of her Desire*, etc., translated into different languages. He is a winner of the Pushkin and Gogol, Mark Twain (US), DIAS awards, winner of the Golden Knight Award, Best Book of the Year Award (Germany), a finalist for the Fazil Iskander and Ernest Hemingway awards (Canada), etc. He is the founder and chairman of the Organizing Committee of the International Literary Award “Gradus ad Parnassum,” jury member of international literary contests.

**Dear Valerian, the first question I would like to address is related to language. In post-Soviet Georgia, Russian is no longer popular; I know from my own experience, most locals either do not answer tourists’ questions in Russian or answer in other languages. But Russian-language literature continues to be created in Georgia. In what condition is it today and how does a Russian-speaking writer live in today’s Georgia?**

Yes, when a huge country collapsed and disintegrated into small components, and its inhabitants were see MARKAROV, page 15



Sevan Boghos-Derbedrossian, left, and Mihran Toumajan, right, congratulating author Katia Tavitian Karageuzian

## Exploring Identity and Advocacy A Journey with Katia Tavitian Karageuzian

By Sevan Boghos-Derbedrossian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ALTADENA, Calif. — On Sunday, March 17, the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter warmly welcomed attendees to a book presentation at the TCA Beshgeturian Center featuring Katia Tavitian Karageuzian, author of the memoir *Forbidden Homeland*.

Through the lens of her memoir, readers embark on a profound exploration of the Armenian diaspora, delving into its complexities and reflecting on our own journeys within our diverse community. *Forbidden Homeland* serves as a resource reflecting our heritage, struggles, and triumphs, while inviting us to question and evaluate our identities and narratives.

Katia’s narrative spans continents and generations, weaving together personal reflections with historical and political threads. From Western Armenia through the Middle East to the United States, her story resonates deeply, offering profound insights into our collective past and prompting us to contemplate our present and future.

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Katia’s upbringing amidst civil unrest instilled in her a passion for literature and a thirst for knowledge. Today, she continues to contribute to her community through her work as a pediatric specialty pharmacist and her involvement in various Armenian organizations.

Her journey of self-discovery began innocuously, sparked by a single comment in college. However, what ensued was a decades-long quest for the truth, revealing not only her own family history, but also the broader geopolitical forces shaping the destiny of her homeland. Her resilience in the face of adversity and her commitment to uncovering buried truths serve as an inspiration to all.

The significance of *Forbidden Homeland* extends beyond personal introspection. It serves as a vital tool for educating others about the Armenian experience, shedding light on historical truths and ongoing injustices. As Dr. Rubina Peroomian, a noted genocide scholar, aptly describes, Karageuzian’s memoir equips readers with the ammunition to confront falsehoods and preserve historical memory for future generations.

The book also aims to enrich students’ education, broadening their understanding of our cause and exposing them to geopolitics, political, economic, and informational dynamics. It seeks to expand their perspective on global affairs, offering thought-provoking insights. It has the potential of an invaluable educational resource. As an educator myself at the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of *Forbidden Homeland* on our students. It has ignited discussions, fostered introspection, and instilled a sense of pride in our collective identity. Through initiatives by our administration like inviting Katia to present her book at our school, we ensure that our heritage is preserved, celebrated and shared with the world through our future generations.

Karageuzian’s work inspires readers to embrace their identity, advocate for justice, and educate others about the rich heritage.

## Şahan Arzruni Dazzles Audience With His ‘Women Composers’

By Christopher Atamian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK — On March 12, Armenian pianist and musical promoter Şahan Arzruni delivered a brilliant concert which featured the work of eight female Armenian classical composers, at the National Arts Club.

Founded in 1898 by Charles de Kay, the Nation Arts Club is a cultural treasure located on Gramercy Park, whose role it is to promote public interest in the arts and educate Americans in the fine arts.

Between his presentation of each new composer, Arzruni delivered short but informative histories of the women: where they were from, what distinguished their respective compositions and how he was personally introduced to their works. Arzruni used humor to good advantage in relating anecdotes about the women, going back in time to their predecessors Sahakdukht and Khosrovidukht, who both lived in the 8th century and composed liturgical chants.

One particular anecdote which related a story about his maternal aunt, the renowned *Bolsahai* composer Sirvart Karamanuk, her mother-in-law and a dancing bear, had the audience in stitches.

The overarching message of the concert and presentation however, was more serious: to demonstrate that women have always been central to Armenian culture. In the case of Sahakdukht and Khosrovidukht, Arzruni posits that they may in fact have been the first female musicians in the world.



Şahan Arzruni

The Istanbul-born Arzruni, a noted composer, recitalist and ethnomusicologist who attended Juilliard and has been decorated with numerous awards and recognitions, began the two-hour presentation by performing three of Gayané Chebotaryan’s *Six Preludes* (1948). Born in Rostov-on-Don in Russia, Chebotaryan (1918-1998) was a composer, pianist and musicologist who taught for many years at the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan. A prolific composer for piano, she also created choral works and folk song arrangements. The *Preludes* run the gamut of musical expression, and as Arzruni explained, “they test the technical, see ARZRUNI, page 17



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian

(PHOTO [HTTPS://VEGANARMENIANKITCHEN.COM/RECIPES/RED-LENTIL-SOUP-PRIESTS-SOUP/](https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/recipes/red-lentil-soup-priests-soup/))



## Lenten Recipe: Vartabed Chorba (Priest's Soup)

This recipe is courtesy of the St. John Armenian Apostolic Church in San Francisco that was founded in 1924.

According to the church website, “This soup is so named because it (or a variation of it) was a favorite with priests who had to prepare their own meals in the monasteries. Women and laymen were not permitted within the monastery walls, and so the priests did their own cooking.”

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup red lentils, washed, rinsed and drained
- 3 to 4 cups cold water
- 2 medium onions, quartered or sliced thinly
- 1/4 cup long-grain rice
- 4 cups boiling water
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper or paprika, to taste
- Fresh minced parsley and lemon wedges

### PREPARATION:

Wash and rinse lentils. Add to a large saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to the full boil, lower flame and simmer, uncovered, for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring, until the water is almost absorbed and lentils have turned yellow. Mixture will resemble a thick paste.

Gradually stir in the onions, rice, boiling water, salt and pepper. Simmer gently for 30 to 35 minutes or a little longer, stirring occasionally until the rice has softened. Watch that soup does not boil over. Add more boiling water if it seems too thick when done. Check seasonings.

Garnish with minced parsley and red pepper, and serve with lemon wedges on the side.

Yield: 6 or more servings

Variation 1: Sauté the onions in 1/4 cup olive oil (or some butter) until brown, and stir into soup for the last few minutes of cooking time, or spoon over soup as a garnish when serving.

Variation 2: Heat 1/4 cup olive oil and sauté 2 or 3 tablespoons of small bread cubes until golden brown. Drain olive oil into soup, stir well, and garnish soup with toasted bread cubes when serving.

Tip: This recipe can easily be doubled. If the leftover soup thickens too much in the fridge, simply add more hot water to thin it out when warming.

St. John Armenian Apostolic Church  
@stjohnsanfrancisco  
275 Olympia Way  
San Francisco, CA 94131  
(415) 661-1142

## Music in Poetry to Be Celebrated At Cultural Foundation

ARLINGTON, Mass. — Poetry and music have been intertwined since time immemorial. In the millennia-old Armenian history, origins of this rich cultural legacy dates to the fifth century CE and beyond. On Saturday, April 6 at 4 p.m., the Armenian Cultural Foundation in cooperation with Amaras Art Alliance and the Armenian Music Festival of Rhode Island will be hosting the Vahan Artsruni (guitar) Duo and Nelly Manukyan (flute). The event is dedicated to the 155th anniversary of Komitas Vardapet, the great Armenian musicologist, composer, arranger and choirmaster.

Born in Yerevan, Vahan Artsruni is a renowned singer and composer known for his innovative approach to music. He is a multifaceted artist known for his contributions to Armenian and Assyrian spiritual music, theater, and cinema. Artsruni explores a wide range of musical styles, from chamber and alt-rock to electronic, symphonic, choir and film/theater compositions. His notable



Nelly Manukyan (left), Vahan Artsruni

work includes the Komitas: Ten Revelations song cycle based on Komitas' poetry, arrangements of sacred Assyrian Church of the East music, and reinterpretations of Armenian monophonic hymns by St. Mesrop Mashtots', a linguist, composer, theologian, statesman and hymnologist best known for inventing the Armenian alphabet (c. 404-406 CE).

Over his nearly four-decade career, Artsruni has released 14 albums and DVDs, composed the soundtrack for 21 documentaries, six animated and three feature films, and provided the music for eight theater productions and as well as a ballet. Additionally, he has been involved in organizing music festivals and concert programs.

His contributions to the world of music are recognized by his inclusion in the Armenian Musical Encyclopedia of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia (2019). His song cycle *Komitas: Ten Revelations* was even integrated into the State General Education School Program as a part of the Music school textbook in 2007. Furthermore, his album *Mashtots': Sacred Armenian Songs from the fifth century* was featured in the collection *Mashtots'* by the Center for Christian Education of Holy Echiadzin and served as the Official Release of the international initiative, Rock Aid Armenia.

Nelly Manukyan, born in Armenia into a musical family, is a flute player, improviser and pianist. The range of her improvisational skill has no boundaries, from all known styles of jazz, Latin jazz, to rock music as well as ethno-jazz projects.

A graduate of the Tchaikovsky Music School with Excellence Diploma in piano and flute studies, Manukyan entered the Yerevan State Conservatory of Music after Komitas, double-majoring in piano and flute, simultaneously serving as a flute teacher in the music school after Konstantin Sarajyan.

Manukyan took part in the first Japanese music festival held in Armenia in 1994, performing compositions of Atsuhiko Takenaka, who inspired by her great performances, wrote many piano compositions dedicated

to her. In 1999, she performed these piano compositions during the second Japanese music festival in Yerevan.

Manukyan's first steps as a jazz flutist passed under the leadership of world famous American jazz piano player Armen Donelian. Her performances also include various musical styles such as Latino, Fusion, Jazz-Rock, Progressive Rock, etc.

She has also participated in different musical projects and jazz festivals in Armenia and performed in prestigious halls such as Royal Festival Hall in England. Manukyan played with many outstanding musicians such as Bobbie Sanabria, Armen Donelian, Garner Thomas, Rick Taylor, Anatoly Kroll, Jay Rodriguez, Alexis Bosh and Rony Barak. She is a winner of the first Jazz Competition-Festival of jazz improvisators “Master-Jam Fest” which was held in Odessa in June 2013.

One of the most prominent poets of Armenia, Razmik Davoyan (1940-2022) grew up in Gyumri. Upon graduating from high school and later, the local medical college in 1958, he moved to Yerevan in 1959 to study philology and history at the State Pedagogical University and graduated in 1964. From 1965 to 1970 he was the editor of the poetry and prose section of the Literary Weekly, and later, served as senior advisor at the Committee for Cultural Relations with the Diaspora (1970-1975), and Secretary of the Central Committee for Armenia's State Prizes (1975-1990). In 1994 he became the first elected president of the Writers' Union of Armenia. From 1999 to 2003 he served as Adviser (on cultural and educational issues) to the President of the Republic of Armenia.

Davoyan's first poem was published in 1957 in the daily, *Worker of Gyumri*. His



Razmik Davoyan

works, more than 30 volumes, were widely translated all over the Soviet Union and published in countless literary magazines and journals in Russian, Czech and English. Selections of Davoyan's poems have also been translated and published in literary periodicals in Italy, France, Syria, former Yugoslavia, Iran, China and the US.

He is the recipient of several prizes and commendations, among them, Armenia's State Prize for Literature (1986), Order of St. Mesrop Mashtots (1997), President's Prize for Literature for his children's book (2003) *Little Bird at the Exhibition*, a Medal “for services to the fatherland” (2010), and the CIS “Stars of the commonwealth” international award in Moscow in 2012.

The program, followed by a reception, will include two works: *My Tear of Penitence* and *Your Compassion Is Abundant* by *Mesrop Mashtots* (362-440 CE); several works by Komitas (1869-1935), five works based on the poetry of Davoyan (1940-2022) as well as original works by Artsruni.

Concert tickets (\$25) can be secured through [amarasonline.com](http://amarasonline.com) or by contacting the Armenian Cultural Foundation office, weekdays from 10 am to 2 pm.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Valerian Markarov: Writing Russian and Being Armenian in Georgia

MARKAROV, from page 13

scattered to different parts of the world by the rising wave, a policy of refusal of the Russian language began in independent Georgia. However, I can say that the Russian language is still in demand among Georgians and representatives of national minorities living in Georgia. By the way, we are very fond of quoting Chekhov, who said: "However many languages you know — you are a man that many times." And so it is. A good job seeker who is able to express his thoughts beautifully, competently and fully in three languages — Georgian, English and Russian — will be fought over by the best recruitment agencies, as I can see from the example of my own students, many of whom work in international companies operating in Georgia. Obviously, Russian will remain an important regional language for a long time to come, in which Georgians will communicate not only with Russians, but also with Armenians and Ukrainians, Kazakhs and Azerbaijanis. And as for Russian-language literature in Georgia — yes, it is being created. It means that someone needs it, someone is interested in it. And I live quite comfortably, because I live at home — Georgia is my homeland. My readers are Russian-speakers all over the world, as well as foreign-speaking ones, to whom my books are available in translations into English, Spanish, French, Italian and other languages.

**Are there complaints that you, as a native of Tbilisi, don't write in Georgian?**

I have never heard such reproaches or claims against myself. And, frankly speaking, I hope it will never happen. Georgia has been a multinational country since ancient times, and this factor predetermined the entire historical path of its development. Many nations have found a shelter here, which in time became their native home. Moreover, since ancient times languages of other nationalities and ethnic groups coexisted in Georgia along with Georgian. Everyone who has a favorable

and respectful attitude to the bright and distinctive Georgian culture and traditions is welcome in Georgia.

**As a fiction author, I am always interested to know about the process of literary inspiration with fellow creatives. How is it for you?**

Usually in such cases, my fellow writers talk about the inspiration that visits them. But seriously, there is an objective reality, and to think that something "from above" will come into your head is naive. We have a huge and powerful machine — consciousness; it needs to be loaded correctly, and it will produce quality and interesting things. And inspiration is the schizophrenia of a creative person. Open any memoirs of recognized classics about how they wrote. You will not find there a word about "inspiration," but you will find information about how they set up the process: how they wrote down their thoughts, how they worked with drafts, how and when they returned to the text, how they found themes, how they processed and finalized the text. That is what it is about, not inspiration that you cannot wait for. The secret is to make an effort, to sit down — and, being ready to roll mountains, to work, and work, and work until the last point. And then you can rest. I, by the way, prefer the sea and traveling.

**Your novel about Leonardo da Vinci was included in the top seven books about the great artist. Some researchers, referring to the so-called "Armenian Letters" of Leonardo, believe that he traveled in Cilician Armenia, while others refute it. Have you come to a conclusion about it?**

For me as a writer it is important to follow historical accuracy in the description of events, it is important to search for facts and verify them. That is, the main sign of a quality historical novel is its authenticity. One must be prepared to work painstakingly with sources. Also, in order to feel the spirit of the time and the historical era it-



self, it is very useful to travel to the places where the events of the book unfolded. The novel *Geniuses are People too... Leonardo da Vinci* was partly written in Italy; the legacy of the great genius is carefully preserved in the luxurious museums and libraries of Florence, Rome, Venice. Of course, I also visited the Ambrosian Library in Milan, where the manuscript "Armenian Letters" is located: in it Leonardo mentions the country of Herminia, describes the mountains of the Taurus, the Euphrates River, which, as it is known, originates in the Armenian Plateau. However, in conversations with me a number of Italian historians who have studied the issue, categorically denied the fact of Cilician journey, putting it among many other artistic fictions of Leonardo and every time noting that the life of the Renaissance genius is studied in detail year by year, and there is no evidence of his departure from Italy in this period. Based on the above, I felt that this question has yet to be investigated in detail.

**Please speak about the Armenian writings of the Georgian artists Niko Pirosmiani, about whom you have written.**

The eccentric "painter Niko" was always ready to paint a wheelbarrow, a wall or a sign for food and drink — just as the customers asked. He had never seen polar bears, Tungus or black lions in his life, but he painted them — because the customers asked him to. He worked quickly, never correcting anything. He claimed to see the saints, and his brush writes itself, which also did not aggravate the serious attitude to himself. Niko's vocation was drawing. And he began to draw in childhood, which he spent in the rich Armenian houses of the Kalantarovs and the Khankalamovs. It is not surprising that he could speak all three languages of Tiflis, and yes, he sometimes inscribed his works in Armenian.

**I believe that your novella *There, Beyond Seven Mountains* about the life of several generations of an Armenian family against the background of historical events is autobiographical to some extent.**

Yes, it is.

**Your hero, Mushegh, from the same novella says: "Strong is the nation that has strong families living peacefully and in virtue." Interestingly the same is proclaimed by Gevorg Marzpetuni, the hero of the novel of the same name by Muratsan, a classic of Armenian prose. It will be interesting to know about your family.**

I was born in Sololaki, a historic neighborhood in the capital of Georgia. As a child, I was baptized in the Armenian Surb Gevorg (Saint George) Church in Tbilisi. At the age of 6 I was enrolled in the 43rd school (former Mantashev trade school, where such celebrities as Rouben Mamoulian, Viktor Hambartsumyan, Mikael Tariverdiev, Bulat Okudzhava, Marlen Khutsiev, Yevgeny Bashinjagyan, Alexander Metrev-

eli and others studied). My mother was a biologist by education, my father was a geodesic engineer and an honored artist of Georgia. Mother's ancestors lived in Georgia since the times of one of the most prominent rulers of Georgia — King David IV the Builder (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries). On my father's side I am a descendant of survivors of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. My father was the person who introduced me to the works of Leonardo da Vinci. And I dedicated my book about this artist to him. Of course, he instilled in me love for my historical homeland, telling me about the ancient state of Urartu, then about the Hellenistic era in Armenia, which enriched the national culture. But the main thing that my parents left me is family values, also love and respect for all honest people, regardless of the color of their skin and eyes.

**How familiar are you with Armenian literature and what contacts have you had with Armenian writers?**

A little bit familiar. First of all, Mesrop Mashtots. And, of course, Hovhannes Tumanian. And the great ashugh and master of love lyrics — Sayat Nova, also Gabriel Sundukyan, both are from Tiflis. I cannot but mention Khachatur Abovyan, the founder of the new Armenian literature ("Wounds of Armenia"). I read Charents, Paruyr Sevak. Stephan Zorian's novels are wonderful. Of course, I read books by Raffi ("The Fool", "David-Bek", "Samvel") and Shirvanzadeh ("Namus"). As for my contacts with Armenian writers, the question is who to call Armenian writers. Writers who write in Armenian? Or writers who are ethnic Armenians but write in other languages, such as William Saroyan, who was born in California and wrote in English? Among contemporary Armenian writers and poets I like Narine Abgaryan, Karine Arutyunova, Liana Shakhverdyan, Hovhannes Aznau-ryan, Konstantin Shakaryan, and others. I keep in touch with some of them.

**You have many hobbies, including you are fond of cooking (I am fond of it too, especially traditional cooking). Many old recipes are now, alas, consigned to oblivion. Do you have any little-known family recipe?**

I remember my grandmother making apour, a delicious Armenian soup, and repeating every time that it is the pride of the Armenian people. This soup was considered so healthy that they used to bring it to sick people in the hospital.

For its preparation you will need dzavar (groats), but you could also use bulgur, rice or pearl barley. So, the ingredients are: dzavar — 1 cup, butter — 50 g, egg — 1 pc, flour 2-3 tbsp, sour cream — 200 g, yoghurt — 1 liter, onion — 1 head, coriander and parsley — one bundle each, mint (to taste), salt. So, dzavar should be well washed and boiled until fully cooked. Drain the water, rinse. In a bowl, beat the egg with flour. Add sour cream and yoghurt. Mix everything well. Pour it all into a saucepan with ready dzavar, stirring constantly to avoid lumps. Bring to a boil. If it is too thick, you can add boiled water. Then fry onions on a skillet in butter until they become golden and put them in the soup. Add finely chopped herbs, let the soup simmer for another five minutes and... voila — apour is ready! It is served hot or even cold. I am ready to eat it every day. Bon appétit!

**Thank you for your answers, dear Valerian, as well as for this recipe! I hope that your books will be published also in Armenian and in near future you will visit your ancestral homeland again!**

Thank you very much for the pleasant conversation!

## ARMENIAN CULTURAL FOUNDATION

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# Dinkjian and Petrosyan to Perform with Chamber Players of Greenwich Symphony in Brooklyn

BROOKLYN, N.Y. — On Saturday, April 6, at 8 p.m., masters of Armenian music, oudist Ara Dinkjian with perform with duduk virtuoso Arsen Petrosyan, accompanied by a string quartet from The Chamber Players of the Greenwich Symphony (Sami Merdinian, Annamae Goldstein, David Creswell and Daniel Miller), at the Roulette.

Dinkjian, who began his musical career by accompanying his father Onnik Dinkjian, a celebrated Armenian folk and liturgical singer, founded the acclaimed Night Ark quartet and recently performed at RBA concerts with The Secret Trio. Petrosyan, who has emerged as one of his generation's main proponents of the Armenian duduk, is following in the footsteps of such masters as Djivan Gasparyan and his mentor Gevorg Dabaghyan. The concert features duets with Ara Dinkjian and Arsen Petrosyan, duduk solos with Petrosyan, pieces played by the string quartet, and music performed by Dinkjian, Petrosyan and the string quartet.

This program includes music composed by Ara Dinkjian; folk dance melodies; love songs; sacred music; music composed by Libarid Nazarian in memory of the Armenian Genocide martyrs; and folk songs collected and transcribed by Komitas Vardapet (considered the founder of the Armenian national school of music), which portray the nostalgia, sorrow, bliss and hopeful voice of a resilient nation.

Ara Dinkjian learned several Western and Eastern instruments (piano, guitar, darbuka, clarinet, cümbüş) and in 1980 graduated from the Hartt College of Music, earning the country's first and only special degree in the instrument for which he has become most well-known, the oud. For over 40 years, he served his Armenian Apostolic Church as organist. Throughout his musical life, he has continued to develop his highly personal compositional style that blends his Eastern and Western roots. In 1985, to help realize these compositions and musical concepts, he formed his Night Ark quartet, which recorded four CDs for the international RCA/BMG and Universal/PolyGram labels. For over a decade he has been a part of the Secret Trio (with Tamer Pinarbasi and Ismail Lumanovski), a group that performs distinctive chamber-music style arrangements of ethnic folk, pop, classical, jazz, and original compositions. His songs have been recorded by world-famous instrumentalists and singers in 16 different languages. His hit song *Dinata*, *Dinata* was performed by Eleftheria Arvanitaki at the closing ceremonies of the 2004 Athens Olympics. Many of his compositions have appeared in movie and television soundtracks. He has performed in 24 countries, including teaching master classes. CD releases in the past decade include "Diyarbakiri Hokin" (The Soul of Dikranagerd), a collaboration with his father, Onnik; "1915 – 2015 Truth & Hope," commemorating the 100-year anniversary of the Armenian Genocide; "Live At Princeton University," with the Secret Trio and the New York Gypsy All Stars, and "Coexist" with the Secret Trio. The documentary film, "Garod," tells the story of how Onnik Dinkjian kept Armenian folk music alive in the diaspora and handed it down to his son, Ara.

Arsen Petrosyan was born and raised in Charentsavan, Armenia, where he currently lives. His familial roots are from the ethnic Armenian enclave of Javakhk (in the

Republic of Georgia), while his ancestral homeland is in Erzurum (now in modern day Turkey). He received his master's degree in Music (concentrating on duduk) at the Komitas Conservatory of Yerevan



Arsen Petrosyan (Arsineh Valladian photo), at left, and Ara Dinkjian (Alena Soboleva photo)

in 2016. He has managed to carve out his own pathway through diverse collaborations with Steve Hackett (Genesis), Emirati composer Ihab Darwish, and oudist Omar Bashir, among others. With both of his ensembles — the A.G.A. Trio and the Arsen Petrosyan Quartet — he has performed throughout Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. As a solo artist, he has also toured extensively in North America, as well as the forementioned regions. His recordings include "Charentsavan: Music for Armenian Duduk," "A.G.A. Trio Meeting" and "Hokin Janapar" (My Soul's Journey), in which his pieces document a nation and culture which refuse to die. In addition to his active recording and touring schedule, he has conducted master classes and lectures on the Armenian duduk and made notable media appearances.

The Chamber Players of the Greenwich Symphony is now in its 52nd season. Its musicians are drawn primarily from the principals of the Greenwich Symphony Orchestra, and are often joined by guest artists. Its repertoire includes music of all the familiar and beloved classical composers as well as pieces by less well-known but noteworthy masters that the musicians enjoy introducing to their audiences.

Sami Merdinian has appeared as a soloist with the Montevideo Philharmonic, the Argentinian National Symphony, The Charlemagne Orchestre, the Gagneung Philharmonic in South Korea, and the Buenos Aires Philharmonic, among others. He has been a prize winner in several international competitions, including a Gold Medal in the XII International Young Solo Instrumentalists Competition in Argentina, and the New Talent Competition in Slovakia organized by the European Radio. As a highly sought-after tango violinist, he has performed and recorded with some of the most prominent artists of the genre and received a Grammy nomination for Masters of the Bandoneon for Best Tango Album.

Annamae Goldstein has been a violinist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra for over three decades and previously performed with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and the Jacksonville Symphony. She also performed with the Metropolitan Opera Chamber Ensemble under the direction of James Levine, the IRIS String Quartet, and Musica Amici. She began her studies at Juilliard at the age of 11 and graduated there with Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

David Creswell has been an integral part

of the New York music scene for over 20 years, spanning nearly every musical style and setting: classical, contemporary, recording studio, stage, solo performance, opera and orchestra, including the New

phony, Glimmerglass Opera, Orchestra of St. Luke's, and New York Pops. He has appeared as soloist with the Greenwich Symphony, the New Amsterdam Symphony and the Mostly Mozart Festival, and is



York Philharmonic. He has been part of over 30 Broadway productions, and played both viola and violin for the bluegrass musical "Bright Star" by Steve Martin and Edie Brickell. He has also been part of numerous film soundtracks and television events. A dedicated music educator, he co-developed a lecture series on the elegant intersections of tuning and mathematics.

Daniel Miller, principal cellist of the Greenwich Symphony Orchestra, is an active concert, theatre, and recording musician in the New York area. He performs with numerous ensembles, including the American Ballet Theatre, American Sym-

phony, Glimmerglass Opera, Orchestra of St. Luke's, and New York Pops. He has appeared as soloist with the Greenwich Symphony, the New Amsterdam Symphony and the Mostly Mozart Festival, and is

the cellist in the Broadway production of "Wicked." A former member of the Orchestra Del Etno San Carlo in Naples, Italy, he is also the cellist with Cuartetango, the tango string quartet which recently recorded the Grammy-nominated "Masters of the Bandoneon" album.

Roulette is located at 509 Atlantic Avenue at 3rd Avenue, Downtown Brooklyn. For info and tickets: <https://www.robertbrowningassociates.com/2024-music-of-armenia.html>

The concert is made possible in part with public funding provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## CONNECTICUT

**APRIL 27** — The Connecticut Genocide Commemoration Committee will observe the 109th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on Saturday, 10 a.m., at the historic Connecticut House Chamber at the State Capitol, 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Melanie O'Brien, President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, Associate Professor of international law at UWA law school at the University of Western Australia, Perth, currently visiting at the University of Minnesota. The program will include the Martyrs' Service which was created on the centennial of the Genocide and the canonization of the Martyrs. Clergy from Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate in the service. A reception will follow the commemoration. For questions call Melanie at 860-651-0629.

## MASSACHUSETTS

**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 8** — Saint James Monthly Dinner & Fellowship, Monday, Father and Son Night, with the Knights of Vartan, Guest Speaker, Watertown Chief of Police, Chief Justin Hanrahan, Losh Kebab and Kheyma Dinner, Social hour [mezza] 6:15, Dinner 7:00 p.m. \$20.00 per person 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown.

**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.

**JUNE 5** — Armenian Night at the Pops with pianist Marta Aznavoorian and Boston Pops Orchestra, Keith Lockhart, conductor, Wednesday, 7.30 p.m., Symphony Hall, Boston. Presented by Friends of Armenian Culture Society.

**JUNE 16** — Boston Tekeyan Cultural Association is hosting a Father's Day Bar-B-Q. Sunday, 2 p.m. at the Baika Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown (Use Norseman Street side door). \$40 per person. Khorovadz, pilaf, salad and more. Special raffle. RSVP bostontca@gmail.com or call Sossy at 617-281-1647.

**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.

## Şahan Arzruni Dazzles Audience With His 'Women Composers'

ARZRUNI, from page 13

tonal, harmonic, rhythmic, lyrical and percussive capabilities of the piano." Here, the changes in rhythm and technique were all handled with rare aplomb. Chebotaryan was also a Khachaturian scholar and one could hear echoes of the master in the preludes as well.

Arzruni then moved on to a delicate piece by Argentine-Armenian composer Alicia Terzian, *Ode to Vahan*. Born in Cordoba, the renowned Terzian founded Grupo Encuentros in 1979 and is considered one of the world's foremost musicologists and composers. Interestingly, *Ode to Vahan*, which is indicated in Armenian mnemonic

notation, was commissioned and composed for Arzruni, based on the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Armenian liturgical chant *Zarmanali e ints*. ("It amazes me"). Depending on whose account one chooses to believe, the chant was originally composed either by Sahakdukht or by Khosrovidukht. In the more popular version, related by Father Alishan, Khosrovidukht composed the piece while imprisoned, as a lament for her brother Vahan — a genius who was beheaded by his Arab overlords after he converted back to Christianity.

Terzian's wonderfully deep-toned piece was followed by a presentation of Koharik Gazarossian's *My Child, Your Mother is Dead* (1947) and *Your Name is Shushan* (1947). The author of some 24 piano études, Koharik Gazarossian (1907-1967) was born in Constantinople and studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris with Paul Dukas and Lazare Lévy before performing in some of the world's great concert halls. Born across the street from building where Komitas lived, Gazarossian was able to copy many of his folk songs and use them as a basis for some of her own compositions.

And then there was Mary Kouyoumdjian, a brilliant contemporary composer, and her short piece *I Haven't the Words* (2020). Kouyoumdjian, the brilliant new music composer behind last month's operatic adaptation of Atom Egoyan's film, "Adoration," at the Sheen Center, is also one of 19 women composers who make up the New York Philharmonic's "Project 19" and will see her work performed there later this year under the guidance of conductor Jaap van Zweden. The spellbinding *I Haven't the Words*, composed of unevenly accented eight notes, was a response to COVID-19, the George Floyd murder and other terrible events altering the global landscape in 2020: the composer was simply unable to express herself verbally in the face of such trauma. As Kouyoumdjian related to Arzruni: "I had no words to describe all of the heartbreak going on but could take the unspeakable to music."

Born in 1863, Lucy Hazarabedian lived only 20 short years before dying in 1882. The first Armenian woman to specifically write for the piano, she composed the lovely polka *The Nightingale of Armenia* at the tender age of 16. Lighthearted and jaunty, it charmed the audience.

Arzruni then seemed to pour his entire musical self while performing Karamanuk's brisk *Dance Song* (1965). A child genius born in 1912 in Scutari, Karamanuk took lessons from the Ottoman Empire's renowned Stepan Papelyan, the most emi-



Mary Kouyoumdjian

nent musical pedagogue of the time, before studying with Lazare Lévy and Jean Roger-Ducasse.

This was followed on the program by Ethiopian-born Sirvart Kazandjian's *Les Clôches d'Ani* (1971) which mime the tolling of the bells of the so-called "City of 1001 Churches" located on the Turkish-Armenian border. The piece's mounting crescendo perfectly embodies the tragic fate of a city laid to ruins by successive invaders.

Arzruni capped off this stellar evening by playing Armenian-born pianist Geghuni Chitchyan's *Sonatina* (1986), a wonderfully restrained and melodic piece in three movements that he performed with quick agility. All in all, it was a night to remember.



Alicia Terzian



Koharik Gazarossian





COMMENTARY

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



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# Difficult Decisions For Armenia

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Throughout its history, Armenia has been a captive of its own geographical position as well as the interests and conflicts of the big players in its neighborhood. For centuries, due to these circumstances, Armenia lost not only territories but also statehood, recovering it with difficulty only due to the collapse of the USSR. If through centuries Armenia was divided between different regional empires, losing land and subjected to massacres and genocide, then in the modern era, Armenia has again appeared at the center of the interests of regional and global players, such as Russia on one side and the West on the other.

Today, yet again, this young state faces the loss of its own statehood and territories due to the same geopolitical reasons, plus the lack of effective governance as well as a reliable national security system and strategy. Modern Armenia is now challenged not only by neighboring Turkey but also by Azerbaijan. The strained relations between Iran and the West, Iran and Israel, and, as already mentioned, the West and Russia, are extremely disturbing. If we look at history, we will see that, as a result of conflicts between global players, Armenia has always lost, and its territory has been divided at various stages of its history between Iran, Turkey, Russia, etc.

As relations between the West and Russia are extremely tense currently, Armenia will be put to the test again. After the end of the Cold War, relations between Russia and the West appeared more or less settled, but they are now more tense than ever before, and the endless sanctions placed by the West highlight that reality. In the past, Armenia was not required to make a clear choice between Russia and the West; today, it is almost impossible to remain impartial, and any conflicting party expects a clear position from Armenia, including the demands of the West to join the sanctions applied against Russia.

We see that Armenia has to play a dangerous game and make

a choice imposed on it. If Armenia chooses the Russian side, it will be punished by the West, and if it chooses the European direction and NATO, it will definitely be punished by Russia, as we witnessed in the scenarios of Ukraine and Georgia.

It is fairly clear what kind of tools can be used by the super-powers to punish Armenia, and today, as in the various stages of its history, Armenia again is losing territories and once again faces the loss of sovereignty. However, at this period of time, it is very difficult to make accurate predictions about future developments in Europe, and Armenia should advance only on one principle: to preserve statehood and territorial integrity. In the early 1990s, for the first time in the last centuries of its history, Armenia created statehood and was able to regain historical territories. But unfortunately, free Artsakh survived only for 30 years, failing due to the same old reasons plus the fact that the Armenian government was ready to hand Artsakh to Azerbaijan.

As already mentioned, Armenia faces a difficult choice. It may lose sovereignty and territory, and it may again be subject to massacres and ethnic cleansing. There is noticeable pressure on Armenia to decide whether it remains in the Russian orbit or wants to look towards Europe and NATO. Whether Armenia wants to leave the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and turn its face to the EU is still an unresolved question. Making this kind of decision requires weighty arguments, deep calculations, complex and multi-step combinations, geopolitical forecasts, a clear strategy, and, of course, political will.

In other words, Armenia has entered the stage of calculations and deep analysis. Whether Yerevan has such abilities and skills, I leave to the judgment of the readers, but it is obvious that it should make these calculations on its own without relying on any other party, because any other player will offer solutions based on its own interests, not those of Armenia.

In my next article, I will discuss whether the West itself is ready to accept Armenia as a family member.

(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.)

# Is Russia Losing Armenia to France?

By Dr. Anzhela Mnatsakanyan

What established the asymmetrical partnership between Russia and Armenia? What are the drivers for its Eurasian choice? Armenia's position towards Russian initiatives was framed by the country's key security problem, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has pushed Yerevan toward Russia. The "strategic partnership" between Moscow and Yerevan is completely unequal, and arises in a "3G" form, with Armenia as a recipient of guns and other weapons; gas supplied at beneficial rates; and goods, as both a major trading ally and with Russia as the primary destination for Armenian migrant labor.

After Azerbaijan seized Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia started to show signs that the country was moving away from Russia's security umbrella and here France ramped up very quickly the role of Armenia's possible next strategic partner.

After the Munich Security Conference, Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia embarked on a two-day working visit to France alongside his wife, Anna Hakobyan. During his time in Paris, Pashinyan engaged with President Macron, and Senate representatives, and partook in the burial ceremony of WWII resistance fighter, Missak Manouchian and his wife at the Pantheon, a momentous event imbued with political significance. This ceremony served as a platform for France to explicitly convey its unwavering support to Armenia.

France strategically sought to underscore the French people's stance towards Armenia, emphasizing the historical importance of the Armenian Community in France. Pashinyan held discussions with leaders of French business, expressing his interest in

fostering French business initiatives in Armenia. Noteworthy was Pashinyan's meeting with Anne Hidalgo, the Mayor of Paris and a speculated candidate for the next French Presidency. Hidalgo's prior humanitarian efforts during the Nagorno-Karabakh blockade and her visit to bordering areas of Armenia added a layer of significance to their interaction. Additionally, Pashinyan engaged with the new Prime Minister of France, focusing their discussions on economic collaboration, energy, water resources, and tourism.

A pivotal moment in this diplomatic venture was Prime Minister Pashinyan's interview with French 24, where he conveyed critical messages. Pashinyan highlighted Azerbaijan's perception of Armenia as "Western Azerbaijan" and expressed concerns about Azerbaijan's preparations for a new war. He underscored President Aliyev's reluctance to sign a peace agreement based on the recognition of territorial integrity, emphasizing an arms race initiated by Azerbaijan. Pashinyan also addressed Armenia's frozen participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and raised issues concerning the Russian military base in Armenia. Notably, he disclosed Moscow's alleged encouragement of Armenians to initiate a revolution against the government, attributing it to propagandist efforts directed personally at him. Furthermore, Pashinyan discussed the activities of Russian servicemen in Armenia and the arrest of Dmitry Setrakov in Armenia by the Russian military police.

This interview marked a significant departure as Pashinyan openly scrutinized Russia's policies towards Armenia and hinted at the possibility of a new war. The timing of this interview, a few days before

Azerbaijan presented a re-edited version of the so-called "peace treaty," suggested that the "peace" offered by Azerbaijan is more about the capitulation of Armenia. This interview was a kind of "call for help" from Pashinyan to Western countries on the eve of a possible new war.

Simultaneously, as Pashinyan returned to Armenia, French Armed Forces Minister Sébastien Lecornu arrived to Armenia to personally deliver defense weapons. The arms agreement, initiated in October 2023, materialized in February 2024 with the arrival of weapons in Yerevan. This development contrasted starkly with Armenia's prior attempts to purchase weapons from Russia, where only a limited quantity arrived after a bid submission in 2020. The visit of Minister Lecornu and the discussions with Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan underscored the deepening defense links between France and Armenia. An agreement was reached for the French Army to conduct three mountain combat training sessions in Armenia in 2024. Worth noting is Armenia's withdrawal from hosting CSTO exercises in 2023, indicative of the evolving dynamics in its defense relationships.

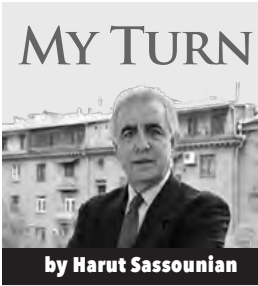
On the whole, in Armenia there is a lack of trust in Russia. Armenians feel betrayed by Moscow after Azerbaijan launched an offensive to retake the breakaway Armenian-inhabited region of Nagorno-Karabakh in September. Russia had a peacekeeping contingent stationed there, which stood aside and didn't interfere. Trends in public opinion also impose certain constraints on policymaking in Armenia.

At the same time, CSTO leaders have demonstrated a repeated propensity to shoot themselves in the foot. This pattern is  
see RUSSIA, page 20





COMMENTARY



# German Television Exposes Azerbaijan’s Massive Bribery of European Officials

This is not the first time that autocratic Azerbaijan has come under scrutiny for handing out billions of dollars in bribes to Western officials to ignore its massive violations of the human rights of its own population and Artsakh Armenians. The term ‘Caviar diplomacy’ was coined to describe specifically the corrupt practices of Azerbaijan in European institutions. Regrettably, some equally corrupt European officials were happy to pocket the millions of dollars offered to them by Azerbaijan.

“Bringing this intricate web of influence and manipulation to light is a groundbreaking film by German broadcaster ARD, ‘Am Abgrund’ (on the precipice). Though the film is fiction, it is based on a series of investigations dubbed ‘Azerbaijani Laundromat,’ exposing how the Azerbaijani government bribed the Council of Europe politicians. The investigations published in 2017 discovered how the government of Azerbaijan was the driving force behind a \$2.9 billion secret slush fund that may have helped it pay off European politicians,” Lamiya Adilgizi wrote on the globalvoices.org website.

“Baku has cleverly navigated the corridors of power in Europe, winning over politicians with a mix of luxurious trips and direct cash payments. The aim? To ensure these influential voices speak up for Azerbaijan’s interests, particularly within the halls of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and even Germany’s own Bundestag,” wrote Adilgizi.

The film, directed by investigative reporter Daniel Harrich, premiered at an event organized by the German Parliament on February 20. A follow-up documentary is planned to further reveal Azerbaijan’s corrupt lobbying efforts in Europe.

The film exposes both the bribe-giving Azeris and bribe-taking European officials. “At the heart of this tale is both Azerbaijan, a country rich in energy resources and scrutinized over its ruling government’s authoritarian practices, but also European countries, known as champions of democracy, rule of law, and human rights, who have long been mentors to the emerging nations from the Soviet era. But here’s the twist -- instead of spreading these cherished values, it seems they, too, are vulnerable to corruption....”

The movie starts with Azerbaijan’s efforts to silence its domestic opponents who are thrown in jail for bravely exposing the regime’s human rights violations. It features “dramatic scenes that replicate footage from hidden cameras

planted in the bedroom of renowned journalist Khadija Ismayilova in 2012, exposing her private life. Ismayilova penned a series of investigations into government corruption linked to the ruling family of Aliyevs. The leaked footage aimed to tarnish the journalist’s reputation. Ismayilova was later jailed on bogus charges and spent two years behind bars as a result.”

The film follows “Gerd Meineke, a fictional member of the German Bundestag who also serves in the Council of Europe. Meineke discovers that the latter institution created back in 1949 to foster democracy and the rule of law has been compromised and that German Members of Parliament have been swayed by Azerbaijan’s regime, trading their votes in the Council of Europe for money, gold, prostitutes, and other bribes, betraying the principles of democracy and human rights.”

Meineke’s attempt to pass a resolution condemning Azerbaijan for its numerous political prisoners is defeated by other members after receiving bribes from Azerbaijan.

During the discussion following the screening of the film, director Harrich said: “The issue extended beyond the government of Azerbaijan and implicated Western politicians and societies in the corrupt practices fueled by Azerbaijan’s natural resources. Among the guests to the screening was the German Member of Parliament Frank Schwabe who has recently become known for his loud criticism of the Azerbaijani government. It was Schwabe who challenged the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation at the PACE during the Assembly’s opening winter session in January 2024.”

Schwab told Global Voices that his attempt to tell the truth about Azerbaijan “aligns with the mission of the Council of Europe. If a member of this organization doesn’t respect its principles, then action is necessary.” After boycotting Russian gas due to the war in Ukraine, Europe started buying gas from Azerbaijan which is partly imported from Russia. However, “it’s crucial that we don’t overlook human rights violations for the sake of trade relationships,” Schwab said.

After PACE’s refusal to ratify the credentials of Azerbaijan’s delegation in January 2024, “‘the timing [for the film’s launch] couldn’t be better,’ said Gerald Knaus, the chairman of the European Stability Initiative, a think tank, and a vocal critic of the Azerbaijani government, in an interview with Global Voices. His think tank coined the term ‘caviar diplomacy’ in 2012 and was the first to document Azerbaijan’s influence at the Council of Europe.”

Knaus warned of the possible expulsion of Azerbaijan from the Council of Europe if it does not release its political prisoners by April 2024, the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

There are over 200 political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

# NATO Tolerance Of Cyprus’ Occupation Weakens Case On Ukraine

**By Michael Rubin**

After two years of a heroic defense that cost Russia more than one-third of its active duty military, Ukraine is nearing its breaking point. It is short of both men and ammunition.

Still the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) continues its uncompromising position on Ukraine’s sovereignty. Frankly, NATO is right. The defensive Alliance considers Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea to be “illegal and illegitimate.” No NATO members recognize Russia’s claim to Crimea, nor does NATO recognize Russian attempts to annex Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. At the 2023 Vilnius Summit, NATO heads of state issued a communique that stated, “We do not and will never recognize Russia’s illegal and illegitimate annexations, including Crimea.”

NATO also dismisses claims by both the Kremlin and its apologists that ethnic Russian Ukrainians accept Russian occupation. “The sham referenda in these regions were engineered in Moscow and imposed on Ukraine. They have no legitimacy, and NATO does not recognize them,” a NATO factsheet explains. Russian settlers entering the occupied zone have no legal legitimacy or claim.

At his annual State of the Union address, US President Joe Biden castigated those who would end Amer-

ican support to the besieged country. “Assistance for Ukraine is being blocked by those who want us to walk away from our leadership in the world,” he declared, adding: “It wasn’t that long ago when a Republican president, Ronald Reagan, thundered, ‘Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.’ Now, my predecessor, a former Republican president, tells Putin, ‘Do whatever the hell you want.’”

Behind the scenes, though, cracks show. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has put out feelers to his Russian counterpart for talks in Yerevan, Armenia to discuss a resolution that would involve Russian acquisition of Ukrainian territory as well as Ukraine’s disarmament. Any reward for Russian aggression, though, only encourages further aggression. The only question is whether Moldova, the Baltic states or northern Kazakhstan are next in Russia’s cross-hairs.

Biden and European leaders may be frustrated at former president Donald Trump and his isolationist

“IF NATO TRULY WANTS TO SHOW RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN THAT EUROPE DOES NOT TOLERATE AGGRESSION, IT IS TIME TO GET NATO’S OWN HOUSE IN ORDER. NATO MUST STOP TOLERATING THE AGGRESSOR WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS.”

supporters for both impeding assistance to Ukraine and questioning the utility of NATO. NATO, however, must shoulder much of the blame for policy precedents that convince the Kremlin that invasion, occupation and annexation pays dividends.

NATO, for example, remains largely silent and impotent on the precedent for Russia’s land grab against Ukraine: NATO member Turkey’s invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus. European leaders can, with

anti-American verve, blame former secretary of state Henry Kissinger and absolve themselves for responsibility for Turkey’s actions in Cyprus. Kissinger may represent original sin, but today’s European, US, and UN quiet acquiescence signals that time and an aggressor’s perseverance matter more than moral clarity and international law.

Nor can NATO members simply dismiss Cyprus as not their concern given its non-membership in the Alliance. At a minimum, Cyprus is as European as Ukraine. NATO has also undertaken missions in Libya, Afghanistan and off the coast of Somalia.

Ukraine certainly needs ammunition replenishment. Ukrainians hold at bay Russian imperialists who threaten all Europe. But if NATO truly wants to show Russian President Vladimir Putin that Europe does not tolerate aggression, it is time to get NATO’s own house in order.

NATO must stop tolerating the aggressor within its own ranks. If Biden and European leaders want the Kremlin to recognize Western fortitude in the face of aggression, they must cease accepting irredentism in their own ranks. Any diplomatic process that normalizes Turkish aggression or does not return Cyprus to the status quo ante remains a green light for Russian aggression. So too does US and European tolerance to host offices for the self-declared “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” or to allow airlines that fly to occupied Cypriot airports to also utilize US or European airports. Turkey should suffer every US or European sanction Russia does.

After all, Ankara and Moscow’s crimes are the same.

Biden is right that Ukraine matters, but resistance to a neighbor’s imperial designs should be the rule, not the exception. There is no difference between Russian aggression and Turkish aggression in Europe. It is time Western policy reflected that fact.

(This column originally ran in the Greek publication *Kathimerini* on March 19.)





# American University of Armenia Accreditation Renewed for Ten Years

YEREVAN — In a letter dated March 6, 2024, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) reaffirmed the accreditation of the American University of Armenia (AUA) for 10 years, the longest possible term. The decision is a reflection of the university's ability to consistently uphold the highest international standards in higher education, joining the ranks of top-rated institutions like Stanford University, the University of California Berkeley, and the University of Southern California, among others. AUA is currently the only university in the former Soviet Union boasting this accreditation.

WSCUC's decision was made following the submission of AUA's Self Study report, the process for which took almost two years, and a site visit and submission of a report by a panel of WSCUC experts, as well as a meeting with AUA President Dr. Bruce Boghosian, Chairman of the Board Larry Pitts, President Emeritus Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, and Dean of General Education Dr. Sharistan Melkonian, who also led the Accreditation Steering Committee, on February 15, 2024.

This re-accreditation represents a resounding validation of AUA's commitment to continuous improvement: the fact that the University hires high-quality, internationally-educated faculty; conducts regular program reviews; and operates as a student-centered institution with high state-of-



From left, Dr. Sharistan Melkonian, Dr. Bruce Boghosian and Ruben Topchyan at the press conference announcing the reaccreditation of the American University of Armenia

the-art campus facilities. AUA is grateful to USAID/ASHA for its continuous support of renovations and upgrades to the University's facilities.

One of the top commendations the university received from WSCUC was its financial stability, largely facilitated by the longtime and generous backing of the Diaspora, which has supported the University both financially and academically since its inception. Along those lines, WSCUC posi-

tively remarked on the fact that AUA offers heavily subsidized tuition, with half of the student body receiving some sort of financial aid.

WSCUC also shared several recommendations, which the University is already working to address. These include formalizing and developing the University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; adapting to enrollment growth by identifying necessary infrastructure; strengthening consistency and transparency in faculty workload, among others.

"The AUA Boards of Trustees are extremely happy and proud to learn of the University's ten-year reaccreditation by the US accreditation organization, the Western

Senior Colleges and Universities Commission," said Chairman of the AUA Board of Trustees Dr. Larry Pitts. "Dean Dr. Sharistan Melkonian and her re-accreditation team did an outstanding job of preparing the applications and hosting the visiting WSCUC team, which awarded AUA their longest reaccreditation period, ranking AUA among some of the finest U.S. universities. Congratulations to everyone who helped AUA meet this remarkable milestone!"

On March 13, AUA hosted a [press conference](#) to announce the reaffirmation of its accreditation.

"The process of reaffirmation would not have been possible without the commitment and hard work of AUA's students, staff, and faculty, all of whom actively participated in working groups and campus-wide discussions," said Boghosian. "I am sincerely grateful to all of you who contributed to the success of this process, and especially to Dr. Melkonian for her leadership of the Accreditation Steering Committee. Thanks to our community's active participation in University life and commitment to AUA's mission, we have been able to achieve this significant milestone in our institution's history, together."

For her part, Melkonian remarked on the extensive accreditation process and the significance of this achievement. "Earning U.S. accreditation is a sign to potential students and their families that an AUA degree is worth their time and effort, a sign to potential and existing faculty that AUA is an institution that is worth sharing their expertise and time. And, it is a sign to the market that AUA graduates are ready to take on the challenges of a changing local, regional and global environment."

## Is Russia Losing Armenia to France?

RUSSIA, from page 18  
exemplified by President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus, who unequivocally stated that in the event of a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, CSTO members would refrain from intervention. This stance directly contradicts the principles outlined in the CSTO charter. Lukashenko's position seems to be influenced by the perception that Azerbaijan is considered an allied nation by the CSTO member countries, except of course by Armenia.

On the eve of a new possible war, while

dialogue with Moscow remains almost completely unproductive, Armenia needs to find allies, and we can only hope that Yerevan will not overestimate the quality of the cards it is playing in Europe.

(Dr. Anzhela Mnatsakanyan holds an Advanced Master's Degree of Arts in European Interdisciplinary Studies from the College of Europe in Natolin and a Master's Degree in International Relations from Yerevan State University. This commentary originally appeared on Common-space.eu on March 14.)

## Disney Shines Light on Vardavar

DISNEY, from page 1

The song appears when Astghik is introduced. The music video includes new visuals not previously seen in the episode.

"Vardavar!" centers entirely on the traditional Armenian festival involving water games and celebrations. In the episode, Minnie Mouse wears the wrong outfit to celebrate Vardavar, when she is greeted by the goddess Astghik. The episode is filled with cultural references and Armenian is spoken throughout the episode.

The episode is written by Kathleen Sarnelli Kapukchyan (@kathleen\_sarnelli). The character of Astghik is voiced by Liana Bdéwi (@lianabdewi), who is Armenian on her mother's side and Lebanese on her father's side.

"Vardavar!" is available to watch on YouTube in the US, and is also available on DisneyNow.com and in the DisneyNOW app. The episode will be available on Disney+ at a later date.





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# BAR-B-Q

Boston's Tekeyan Cultural Association invites you

## to celebrate FATHER'S DAY

**Sunday, June 16**  
**2 p.m.**

**The Baikar Building**

**755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown**  
**(use Norseman Ave. side door)**  
**\$40 per person, khorovadz, pilaf, salad, etc., AND**  
**SPECIAL RAFFLE**  
**RSVP [bostontca@gmail.com](mailto:bostontca@gmail.com) or call**  
**Sossy 617 281-1647**

