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Russian, Armenian Leaders Continue War of Words

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia and Russia continued to trade accusations and threats this week. On April 1, responding to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's threats to pull Armenia out of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Russian-led military alliance said that it is committed to defending the country's borders recognized by its neighbors.

Pashinyan has repeatedly challenged Russia and other CSTO allies to clarify their "zone of responsibility" in Armenia while accusing them of not honoring their security commitments to Yerevan. He most recently did so at a news conference held on March 12.

"If the CSTO answers these questions and its answer corresponds to our expectations, it will mean that the problems between Armenia and the CSTO have been solved," he said. "If not, Armenia will leave the CSTO. When? I can't tell."

"The phrase zone of responsibility is quite complex and it is more intended to draw attention to the situation in the republic than to obtain a substantive answer," the Russian RBK news agency quoted an unnamed CSTO representative as saying. "Because in accordance with the 2010 agreement on the principles of interaction, which was signed by the CSTO, the zone of responsibility is the sovereign territory of the member states."

"The CSTO zone of responsibility ends at the state border which is settled on a bilateral basis between Armenia and its neighbors," added the official.

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EU Monitors Deny Azerbaijani Claims Of Armenian Border Buildup

By Arshaluys Barseghyan and Aytan Farhadova

The EU Monitoring Mission has denied claims from Azerbaijan that Armenia is amassing troops on the border.

On Sunday, March 31, the mission stated that the situation on the border was "calm and quiet" after having patrolled the border "all day long."

Later that day, the EU's Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar reposted the observer mission's statement, adding that the mission was open to more engagement with Azerbaijan.

Earlier on Sunday, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense accused Armenia of mobilizing troops and weaponry towards the border.

"Recently, the concentration of manpower, armored vehicles, artillery installations, and other heavy firepower of the Armenian armed forces and intensive movement of its troops in different directions of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conditional border is observed," read the ministry's statement.

They also accused Armenia of revanchism and escalating its "aggressive rhetoric against Azerbaijan" and of propagating "provocative information focused on aggravating the situation in the information environment in preparation for sabotage attempts."

"We once again declare that Armenia and its protectors will bear whole responsibility for the aggravation of the situation and any possible provocation," concluded



EU Monitors on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. (Panorama.am photo)

the Azerbaijani ministry's statement.

Armenia's Defense Ministry denied the accusations a few hours later, stating that "a number of Telegram channels" had portrayed convoy drills carried out by the Armenian Army as "military movement towards the border."

"The [Armenian] Ministry of Defense assesses the recent operational situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani state border as stable and does not perceive the need to implement additional measures to protect the border," stated the ministry.

On Monday evening, Azerbaijan again accused Armenia of continuing to "concentrate its troops" on the border, with the Defense Ministry publishing footage 'recorded by special technical means and visual observation' purportedly showing

Armenian forces transporting artillery systems and constructing reinforced concrete fortifications at the border.

Armenia has yet to react to Azerbaijan's latest accusations on April 1.

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Pashinyan Warns Karabakh Leaders after Shahramanyan *Le Figaro* Interview

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan lambasted Nagorno-Karabakh's Yerevan-based leaders for continuing to present themselves as a government in exile and threatened to crack down on them on March 28.

Opening a weekly session of his cabinet, Pashinyan stressed three times that "there can be no government in Armenia apart from the government of Armenia."

"If somebody in Armenia identifies themselves as a government [in exile,] then it's a national security problem for Armenia," he said. "I hope that the existence of that problem will not mean that our [security] bodies have underperformed in their work."

The warning was clearly addressed to Samvel Shahramanyan, the president of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). In an interview with France's *Le Figaro* daily published on March 27, Shahramanyan said that all NKR's bodies continue to formally operate after fleeing Karabakh along with the region's entire ethnic Armenian population last September.

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Samvel Shahramanyan (news.am photo)



TCA Greater New York To Host Serouj Kradjian And Band in Concert

PARAMUS, N.J. — Award-winning musician Serouj Kradjian and his band will perform for the New York metro area on Saturday, April 20 at the Ciccone Theatre in Paramus, NJ, in an event organized by the Tekeyan Cultural Association's Greater New York chapter.

Kradjian, a Grammy-nominated and Juno-winning pianist and composer, has performed around the world, and will now bring his unique blend of fusion music to the New York and New Jersey Armenian community, with his band, consisting of fellow talented Armenian musicians.

The concert, Piano Fantasy, will highlight a musical presentation of Kradjian's creative journey, based on places he's lived and traveled to worldwide.

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Vandals Target Stepanakert Cemetery

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijani vandals continue targeting Armenian heritage in occupied Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), warned Hovik Avanesov, who leads the Cultural Ombudsman of the Armenian Highlands NGO, on April 1.

A military cemetery in Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh, has become yet another victim of Azeri vandalism.

“A video from the Stepanakert Brothers’ Cemetery and Memorial Complex has recently been posted on Azerbaijani social media pages. The footage includes blatant insults to fallen heroes and their families,” Avanesov wrote on Facebook.

“This is yet another indication that Artsakh’s cultural heritage is at risk,” he added.

Azerbaijani Forces Fire at Armenian Army Positions

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Armenian Defense Ministry on Tuesday denied Azerbaijan’s allegations that the Armenian military fired at its positions in the southwestern part of the border late on Monday evening.

At the same time, the ministry said that the Azerbaijani armed forces opened fire on Armenian combat positions on April 1 at 10pm in Kut (Gegharkunik Province) and on April 2 at 12:40am in Tegh (Syunik Province).

“No violations were recorded in the directions mentioned in the statement by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense,” the statement added.

Armenia Defends Right To Engineering Work on Border

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenian Defense Ministry on April 2 defended the implementation of engineering works within the sovereign territory of Armenia after continuous accusations from the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry, alleging that the Armed Forces of Armenia are “actively concentrating, actively moving personnel, armored vehicles, artillery, and other weaponry in various directions along the border.”

Additionally, the Azerbaijani MoD has released edited videos depicting engineering, fortification, and construction activities of infrastructure of defensive nature and purpose in general undertaken in recent months in the rear protection areas of the Armed Forces of Armenia, thus trying to present it as intensive activities and troop build-ups along the front lines in the last few days.

“The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia asserts that the implementation of engineering works within the sovereign territory of Armenia is the exclusive sovereign right of the Republic of Armenia. These activities are purely defensive and are aimed at safeguarding the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia,” the Armenian Ministry said.

Armenian Banks Will No Longer Service Russian MIR Cards

YEREVAN (Jam-News) — Armenian banks stopped servicing MIR cards from March 30. Only VTB-Armenia, a subsidiary of the Russian VTB Bank, continues operations through the MIR system.

MIR is a Russian national payment system introduced in Armenia since 2017. In February, it came under U.S. scrutiny for allegedly helping Russia bypass sanctions and maintain ties with the international financial system.

Commercial banks terminated cooperation with the MIR system fearing sanctions. According to the Armenian Banking Association, this is linked to the package of sanctions imposed by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in February. The Central Bank of Armenia stated that commercial banks independently decide which payment systems to cooperate with based on their risk management strategy.

Armenian economists speculate that this decision could seriously impact the country’s economy. However, some view it as the “lesser evil” compared to the potential consequences of rejecting international standards.

Commenting on this decision, Dmitry Peskov, the spokesperson for the Russian president, stated that he does not consider the decision to stop servicing MIR cards as an “unfriendly” move against Russia. He believes it is a result of the unprecedented sanctions pressure exerted on Armenia by the United States.

Armenian banks are simply trying to avoid Western sanctions, according to economist Suren Parsyan.

He emphasizes that Armenia remains heavily dependent on the Russian economy, which could lead to a crisis.

Before the Russian-Ukrainian war, around \$1 billion was annually transferred from Russia to Armenia, claims Parsyan. However, in 2023, individuals alone transferred nearly \$3.9 billion from Russia to Armenia.

“Out of these \$3.9 billion, \$3.1 billion were transferred for commercial purposes, meaning individuals from Russia purchasing goods, clothing in Armenia. Of course, a significant portion of these \$3.1 billion was transferred through ‘MIR’ cards,” explained the economist.

According to him, the use of these cards revitalized trade and public services in Armenia.

The West imposed sanctions on Russia’s financial and banking system due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the expert reminds. MIR cards ceased to operate in all

Western countries, and even Kazakhstan completely abandoned them.

“Sanctions against ‘Mir’ cards are tightening every day. Certainly, Armenian banks could not stay away from this process. Under pressure from the West, commercial banks in Armenia declare that they are discontinuing their service,” says Parsyan.

The cessation of operations with MIR payment system cards may cause complications for Armenian exporters, believes economist Agasi Tavadyan. He says that 43 percent of Armenia’s exports go to Russia, so Armenian businessmen may face difficulties:

“The problem is that Russia is currently cut off from the global financial systems. International cards don’t work there. This will create additional challenges for Armenian businessmen and lead to increased incidental expenses.”

Agasi Tavadyan warns that as a result of

this decision, many businessmen working in the Russian market will have to abandon other banks and use the services of “VTB-Armenia.”

The economist believes that Armenian banks are “between a rock and a hard place”:

“On one hand, they are forced to stop servicing ‘Mir’ cards, which will lead to the aforementioned problems. On the other hand, continuing to service these cards entails the risk of sanctions being applied to them.”

In his assessment, the cessation of MIR card servicing in Armenia could also negatively impact domestic trade: “In 2022, around 130,000 repatriates arrived in Armenia. Now, most of them have returned to Russia or moved to other countries where conditions are better. The situation in Armenia will complicate money transfers and banking operations, which could lead to additional outflow of repatriates.”

Russian TV Programs Banned in Armenia

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian government has blocked the broadcasts to Armenia of political talk shows aired by one of Russia’s two main state TV channels following their pro-Kremlin host Vladimir Solovyov’s repeated criticism of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s policies.

A government agency, the Television and Radio Broadcasting Network, said the daily programs have systematically violated a 2020 Russian-Armenian agreement that allowed the Russia-1 channel to retain its slot in Armenia’s national digital package accessible to viewers across the country. It cited provisions of the agreement banning “offensive content against peoples and national values” and “interference in domestic political life.”

The government earlier sent a protest note to Moscow over comments made by Solovyov and another Russian media figure, Margarita Simonyan, during a February 25 talk show. They said that Armenian leaders should be mindful of what they called disastrous consequences of Western intervention in other ex-Soviet states.

Solovyov continued to attack Yerevan’s increasingly pro-Western foreign

policy after that complaint. He warned that Armenians risk losing their statehood because of it.

Minister of High-Technology Industry Mkhitar Hayrapetyan announced on March 18 that Armenian and Russian officials will meet in Moscow soon to discuss Armenian proposals regarding the content of retransmitted Russian programs. Hayrapetyan’s press office declined to clarify on Friday whether the talks took place and, if so, resulted in any agreements.

Solovyov, who was known for his pro-Armenian views on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, did not immediately comment on the ban. But Simonyan was quick to condemn it and accuse Pashinyan of stifling free speech.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry already summoned the Russian ambassador in Yerevan last October to condemn Channel One, the other Russian broadcaster accessible in Armenia, for disparaging Pashinyan during an hour-long program.

The Armenian charge d’affaires in Moscow was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry the following day. Ministry officials protested against what they called anti-Russian propaganda spread by Armenia’s government-controlled media.

Russian, Armenian Leaders Continue War of Words

CONFLICT, from page 1

Armenia officially asked the other CSTO member states for support after Azerbaijan’s offensive military operations launched along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in September 2022. It has since repeatedly accused them of ignoring the request. It has declined CSTO offers to provide “military-technical assistance” and deploy a monitoring mission to the border.

Last year, Yerevan boycotted high-level meetings, military exercises and other activities of the CSTO in what Pashinyan described in February as an effective suspension of Armenia’s membership in the alliance of six ex-Soviet states. The premier went as far as to say that the alliance is becoming a security threat to his country.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

again insisted last week that the CSTO did not ignore Yerevan’s appeals. Lavrov also warned of the impending “collapse” of Russian-Armenian relations which he said is sought by the West.

In comments on March 28, Lavrov underscored heightened tensions between Russia and Armenia and accused Pashinyan’s government of ruining bilateral relations.

“I already had to comment on the current situation regarding Armenia; it of course does not inspire optimism,” he told the Moscow daily *Izvestia*. “Frankly, the Armenian leadership, under far-fetched pretexts, distorting the history of the last three or three and a half years, is deliberately leading things to the collapse of relations with the Russian Federation.”

Lavrov decried the Armenian leaders’

“defamation” of Russian soldiers and border guards deployed in Armenia as well as the CSTO.

He again insisted that the Russian-led military alliance did not refuse to defend Armenia and criticized Yerevan for rejecting the proposed deployment of CSTO monitors along the country’s border with Azerbaijan and opting for a similar mission by the European Union instead. It is now becoming a de facto NATO mission, having been joined by US, Canadian and Norwegian personnel, claimed Lavrov.

Pashinyan announced in late February the effective suspension of Armenia’s membership in the CSTO. He subsequently did not rule out the possibility of leaving the alliance altogether and applying for European Union membership.



ARMENIA

Mental Health Group in Armenia Hopes to Help People Affected by Karabakh Devastation

YEREVAN — Accomplishing mental balance and inner peace is much more challenging when navigating historical trauma, which passes through generations, over and over in a vicious circle.

In order to care for and be able to help those who are enduring great loss, it's vital to gain a deep understanding of the layers of particular challenges they face.

For Armenians across the world, whose ancestors survived the 1915 Armenian Genocide, the Azerbaijani attack on Karabakh (Artsakh) on September 19, 2023, heaped devastation upon unhealed wounds.

Established in 2021, the Mental Health Awareness Initiative (MHAI) NGO is dedicated to promoting mental health awareness, well-being, and accessibility to mental health care in Armenia. In the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, their mission became even more critical as the need for support and understanding reached unprecedented levels.

It is important to understand that people who have experienced trauma and extreme loss, and those who continue to face uncertainty, need a capable helping hand and support to be able to heal, live joyfully in healthy relationships, and have the chance to thrive.

Because of this simple truth, when faced with the reality of our compatriots being forcibly displaced from their homes, we have made an executive decision to act and to support/initiate programs for those impacted, in anticipation of a greater humanitarian crisis.

One such project is “Psychological Support for Forcibly Displaced Persons” which runs continuously and aims to close gaps in mental health care and address ever-pressing needs within the Armenian community. With a group of volunteer specialists that have undergone the necessary professional training to provide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in accordance with the United Nations, World Health Organization and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) frameworks, forcibly displaced persons are provided with psychological services, including psychological counseling.

The support services are strictly provided within the framework of MHPSS through the incorporation of evidence-based methodologies such as Problem Management Plus (PM+), both individually and in group settings, and delivered free of charge in



From left, Gevorg Gharibyan, Dr. Danna Mauch and Dr. Catherine Vuky at “The Role of Mental Health Awareness in Minority Communities” panel discussion in Boston, in June



Laura Bilazarian Purutyan, MHAI's independent advisor at “The Role of Mental Health Awareness in Minority Communities” panel discussion in Boston in June

While there is a lack of research specifically addressing the situation in Armenia, evidence from research conducted within populations having similar experiences shows that 22 percent of those living in a conflict zone are dealing with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

It is crucial to recognize that the experience of conflict, disaster, violence, loss and feelings of isolation can lead to increased risk for suicide and are associated with suicidal behavior. In other words, there's a dire need for support, understanding, and compassion in Armenian society.

The “Psychological Support for Forcibly Displaced Persons” project

was able to succeed on the basis of our first MHPSS project addressing the needs of caregivers, launched just a few months earlier in August 2023. Simply put, psychosocial support is important because it restores people's ability to take care of themselves

and others. MHPSS should therefore be part of the basic assistance provided in crisis situations, and this is why our organization prioritizes the integration and advancement of MHPSS guidelines, policies, and procedures while facing the ever-present stigma of accessing mental health services in Armenian society.

People often do not seek services due to a lack of information as well as cultural stigma, and they do not have personal contact with people who benefit from psychosocial support with a qualified and trained professional. Over the past 6 months, we identified a number of challenges that prevent our beneficiaries from accessing our services, for example, many people who left Artsakh due to a mass exodus settled in the regions of Armenia, and despite the fact that we provide services online, some do not have access to private spaces, the internet, or smartphones.

With this understanding, the organization seeks to expand our reach outside of Yerevan, to make the services equally accessible in all the communities affected by devastating displacement. We are working to accumulate resources in order to expand the number of specialists needed to launch an emotional support hotline on a 24/7 operation basis, for those who cannot afford private care in the form of counseling or therapy. By doing this, we will be able to address the widespread emotional distress and despair.

What Can We Do?

An important step is to understand and provide high-quality care to people suffering from the continuation of historical trauma and its effects on individuals and collective society. The lasting, negative consequences of failing to address mental

health concerns is to face increasing rates of suicide; violence; alcohol and drug abuse; low employment; higher domestic abuse; and higher crime. MHAI's efforts provide effective mental health information and tools in a caring environment to mitigate these negative effects and strengthen fami-



Sofya, Jemma and Gevorg at Alzheimer's Care Armenia's “From Early Detection to End of Life: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Alzheimer's Disease” conference

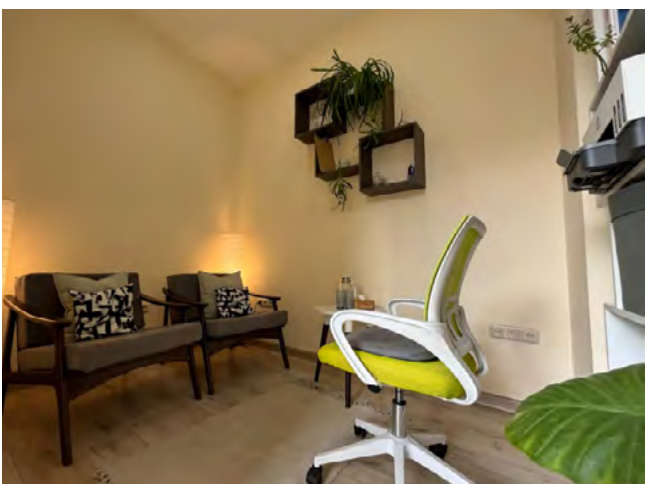
lies and society.

Supporting initiatives like ours ensures long-term care and recovery for trauma bounded society.

Additionally, from April 8 to 12, the Global Giving fundraising portal is offering an opportunity to match the impact of donations. All money contributed during this period will be matched, amplifying the reach of the group's efforts. This means that contributions will have twice the impact in providing vital mental health support to those who need it most.

To break it down further, \$25 will cover 5 one-to-one sessions, including therapy room and transportation fees. With \$50, the group can host a group session for 10 to 15 beneficiaries, including venue fees. A donation of \$75 will help run educational campaigns on social media and get 25 new beneficiaries registered.

To learn more, visit mha.am/en.



MHAI therapy room

person or online.

Generally speaking, in the past 10 years, approximately 9 percent of those individuals involved in war or other conflicts have experienced moderate or severe mental health challenges.



ARMENIA

Study Finds that Fresh Water Sources in Armenia May Contain Disease-Causing Parasites

By Levon Karamanoukian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

A recent study published in the journal *Food and Waterborne Parasitology* (March 2024) has identified high levels of disease-causing parasites in the water supply throughout the Republic of Armenia. Preliminary research findings suggest that the parasites *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium* may be widespread in Armenian source water.

Funded by the State Committee of Science of the Republic of Armenia, the research study was conducted by a collaborative effort of scientists in Norway and Armenia. Lead researcher and Parasitologist, Lucy Robertson of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, collaborated with experts at the Scientific Center of Zoology and Hydroecology in Yerevan to collect 24 water samples from rivers and lakes throughout Armenia. The scientists examined the water samples from Lake Sevan and major rivers to test for the presence of the diarrhea-causing parasites *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*.

The purpose of the study was to identify parasites in water sources that supply geographic population centers. Field investigators in Armenia collected samples from a wide geographic range, including fresh river water and sedimentary deposits in soil. Oleg Shcherbakov, a researcher at the Scientific Center of Zoology and Hydroecology



Hrazdan river in Yerevan

in Yerevan then traveled to Norway to further help in the laboratory analyses of the water samples. These water samples were then studied to identify the presence of parasites that may cause disease in animals in humans.

Parasites can cause disease in humans

and livestock. According to the Centers for Disease Control in the US, both *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium* are water-borne parasites that cause a diarrhea-type gastrointestinal illness. While animals with *Cryptosporidium* can transmit the parasite to humans, contamination of water supplies is

the primary source of transmission. These parasites are commonly associated with fecal material found in soils, human or animal contact, or food. One major source of these parasites are from animal sources that transmit the microbes to humans.

The study authors reported that “The main finding... was that both *Cryptosporidium* oocysts and *Giardia* cysts occur widely in water bodies in Armenia.” Although levels of *Giardia* were not tested in all 24 water samples, lead investigator Lucy Robertson concludes that the researchers “are certainly under the impression that contamination of the environment might be of concern.”

The highest levels of *Cryptosporidium* parasites were found in three river sources among those studied, including those at the Hrazdan River at Khachpar and Argavand; as well as those at the Pambak River downstream of Vanadzor.

Results are preliminary and warrant further investigation of existing water contamination levels and sources of contamination. Disease-causing parasites are a pervasive public health problem with widespread implications in susceptible populations. The investigators offer hope that this data can help implement measures to curb future transmission among the population.

(Special thanks to Lucy Robertson from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences)

Pashinyan Warns Karabakh Leaders after Shahramanyan *Le Figaro* Interview

WARNING, from page 1

“This building where I am receiving you houses the presidential, legislative and judicial offices of Artsakh,” he said. “Lawmakers can meet here to vote.”

Shahramanyan also reiterated that his September 28 decree liquidating the NKR is not valid. He said that he had to sign the decree in order to enable the Karabakh Armenians to safely flee to Armenia amid an Azerbaijani military offensive.

Pashinyan’s political allies lashed out at the Karabakh leader in late December when he first declared the decree null and void. They accused him of putting Armenia’s national security at serious risk.

Pashinyan has reportedly refused to meet Shahramanyan and other Karabakh leaders since they took refuge in Armenia. He has repeatedly indicated that the Karabakh issue is closed for his administration. His detractors say that he is afraid of angering Azerbaijan.

Ishkhan Saghatelian, a leader of Armenia’s main opposition Hayastan alliance, condemned Pashinyan for “threatening” the Karabakh leadership and urged Armenians to counter a “new wave of repression” which he said could be unleashed against it.

“It is obvious that Artsakh’s page is not closed and Pashinyan and [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev are doing everything to find a pro-Azerbaijani solution to the issue,” Saghatelian wrote on Facebook. “Let me remind you again. the main threat to Armenia’s security is Nikol Pashinyan, not Artsakh’s state institutions.”

Pashinyan said on Thursday that Armenian security services should be prepared to take “appropriate measures” to also prevent “some circles forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh” from being used by unnamed “external forces.” He did not elaborate.

Earlier this week, Shahramanyan, who generally keeps a low profile, attended the screening in Yerevan of a Russian film about the war in Ukraine which was organized by the Russian Embassy in Armenia. Russian Ambassador Sergei Kopyrkin described people attending the event as Russia’s friends.

In turn, Nagorno-Karabakh political figures condemned on March 29 Pashinyan’s threats to crack down on them.

“It’s blackmail, it’s a threatening attitude and a clear message that concrete actions could be taken,” Artak Beglaryan, a former Karabakh premier and human rights ombudsman said, commenting on the threats.

Beglaryan, who now leads a non-governmental organization helping Karabakh refugees, said the Armenian authorities could now prosecute Karabakh leaders or shut down the NKR office in Yerevan.

“I don’t exclude any scenario,” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “But I would advise Armenia’s political leadership and law-enforcement bodies to be prudent and not to exploit this subject. If there are sensitive issues, they should discuss them with the Artsakh authorities and find solutions, rather than dissolve Artsakh’s state bodies.”

Metakse Hakobyan, a Karabakh lawmaker, said Pashinyan is trying to “intimidate, silence and ultimately jail” Karabakh leaders. “I think that they have already decided their further actions,” she said.

Arpi Davoyan, an Armenian parliament deputy and senior member of Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party, confirmed that law-enforcement authorities “will deal with” the NKR leadership.

“Yes, this is a matter of national security, and I think that law-enforcement bodies will draw relevant conclusions,” she told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

Le Figaro Interview

In the interview with *Le Figaro*, Shahramanyan focused on the return of Karabakh political prisoners held in Azerbaijan. He noted that in addition to 8 former leaders of Artsakh, there are 7 more soldiers who were captured in September.

Shahramanyan noted that at the moment, there is no set date for trials.

Shahramanyan asked France to put pressure on Azerbaijan to release all Armenian prisoners. “I demand their immediate and unconditional release, as well as the release of all Armenian prisoners arbitrarily arrested, unjustifiably imprisoned, and victims of unfounded accusations. And I ask France to put pressure on President Aliyev to achieve this release,” the President said.

Answering the question about the number of remaining Armenians in Artsakh, Shahramanyan announced the number as 10-11 who are too sick or disabled to move freely and have chosen to be close to remains of their ancestors.

Touching upon conversations about whether there is a connection between the elections of the fifth president of Artsakh and the subsequent attack, Shahramanyan rejected the possibility of a connection, recalling that the Azerbaijanis had already amassed troops on the contact line before.

“It was obvious that after nine months of blockade aimed at weakening us, they were going to attack,” he said.

Touching upon the topic of the “dissolution” of the state and the subsequent decree on the cancellation of this “document,” Shahramanyan stated. “On September 19th, from the very beginning of the aggression, we understood that we would be alone in our defense, and that even the Russians present on the spot would not interfere. Due to the imbalance of forces, we had no chance to resist, so we very quickly established contact with the Azerbaijanis

so that the civilian population would be as free from hostilities as possible. After twelve hours of negotiations, we put an end to the fighting. The very next day, the citizens of Artsakh asked to evacuate to Armenia, fearing mass killings by the invaders. So, we started the second round of negotiations so that their evacuation would go as smoothly as possible.

“Baku sent us a document for signature, in which the National Assembly was supposed to declare that ‘the people of Artsakh renounce their rights, their sovereignty, their symbols.’ But for this document to be valid, Parliament would have to vote. I made a counter-proposal: that the president, that is, myself, announce the dissolution of Artsakh on January 1. I knew very well that this document was illegal and unconstitutional, since it had to be ratified by the legitimate structures of the Republic of Artsakh, but it was a way to save my compatriots,” Shahramanyan said.

Asked whether there is a government in exile, Shahramanyan noted: “Yes, the building where I receive you in Yerevan houses the office of the President and the offices of the judicial and legislative structures of Artsakh. Parliamentarians can gather here to vote. In October, I signed a decree establishing that all government ministers remain in their posts on a voluntary basis.”

In response to a question about a possible return, Shahramanyan said: “In the current situation, it is unrealistic to think about returning to our territory occupied by Azerbaijanis. It is necessary to take into account the realities of the Azerbaijani and Artsakh peoples, who consider themselves enemies. In Baku, young Azerbaijanis are taught from school that Armenians are enemies. It will take years for the mentality of the Azerbaijani people to change and for peaceful coexistence between neighbors to become possible.”



INTERNATIONAL

US Iran Envoy Reveals Trip to Armenia, Region

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — US Deputy Special Envoy for Iran Abram Paley has met with senior Armenian officials in Yerevan during a tour of the three South Caucasus countries, it emerged on April 2.

Armenia was apparently the first stop of the regional tour revealed by Paley in a series of tweets.

“In Yerevan, I had insightful meetings with Armenia’s Deputy Minister of For-



Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Mnatsakan Safaryan (right) meets US Deputy Special Envoy for Iran Abram Paley, Yerevan, April 2, 2024.

eign Affairs [Mnatsakan Safaryan,] National Security Council, Central Bank, and State Revenue Committee on Iran, border security, sanctions enforcement, and Armenia’s economic and foreign policy diversi-

fication,” he wrote on the X social media platform.

None of those Armenian agencies issued statements on the meetings with Paley. The policy “diversification” cited by the latter is a euphemism used by the Armenian government in its ongoing efforts to forge closer ties with the West amid the continuing deterioration of Armenia’s relations with Russia. In recent months, Iran has repeatedly expressed unease over the pro-Western tilt in Yerevan’s foreign policy.

Paley posted similar messages on his talks in Georgia and Azerbaijan. As well as holding “fruitful discussions” with Azerbaijani officials, he met with Israel’s ambassador in Baku, George Deek. He said they discussed “our close coordination to address concerns about the Iranian regime’s destabilizing behavior in the region.”

“Wonderful to hear about Israel’s historical and cultural ties to Azerbaijan,” added

the US diplomat.

Israel has long been one of Azerbaijan’s main suppliers of weapons and other military hardware. Those supplies continued during and after the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Visiting Israel in March 2023, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov thanked the Jewish state for supporting Azerbaijan during the six-week war. His then Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen reportedly declared that the two nations will form a “united front” against Iran.

The close Azerbaijani-Israeli ties are one of the reasons for lingering tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran.

Tehran has also warned against any “geopolitical” border changes in the South Caucasus in response to Baku’s demands for an extraterritorial corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave that would pass through Syunik, the sole Armenian province bordering Iran. Iranian leaders say they would not tolerate attempts to strip the Islamic Republic of the common border and transport links with Armenia.

The Armenian and Iranian governments have pledged to help increase bilateral trade. Their joint commission on economic cooperation most recently met in Tehran in February. Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan visited the Iranian capital three weeks later.

Turkey’s Resurgent Opposition Trounces Erdogan in Pivotal Local Elections

By Can Sezer and Burcu Karakas

ISTANBUL (Reuters) — Turks dealt President Tayyip Erdogan and his party their biggest electoral blow on Sunday in a nationwide local vote that reasserted the opposition as a political force and reinforced Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu as the president’s chief rival.

With most of the votes counted, Imamoglu led by 10 percentage points in the mayoral race in Istanbul, Turkey’s largest city, while his Republican People’s Party (CHP) retained Ankara and gained 15 other mayoral seats in cities nationwide.

It marked the worst defeat for Erdogan and his AK Party (AKP) in their more than two decades in power, and could signal a change in the country’s divided political landscape. Erdogan called it a “turning point” in a post-midnight address.

He and the AKP fared worse than opinion polls predicted due to soaring inflation, dissatisfied Islamist voters and, in Istanbul, Imamoglu’s appeal beyond the CHP’s secular base, analysts said.

“Those who do not understand the nation’s message will eventually lose,” Imamoglu, 53, told thousands of jubilant supporters late on Sunday, some of them chanting for Erdogan to resign.

“Tonight, 16 million Istanbul citizens sent a message to both our rivals and the president,” said the former businessman, who entered politics in 2008 and is now widely touted as a likely presidential challenger.

Erdogan, who in the 1990s was also mayor of his hometown Istanbul, had campaigned hard ahead of the municipal elections, which analysts described as a gauge of both his support and the opposition’s durability.

Addressing crowds gathered at AKP headquarters in Ankara, the capital, Erdogan said his alliance had “lost altitude” across the nation and will take steps to address the message from voters.

“If we made a mistake, we will fix it” in the years ahead, he said. “If we have anything missing, we will complete it.”

Elsewhere in Ankara, thousands more supporters had earlier waved Turkish and party flags for a speech by reelected CHP Mayor Mansur Yavas, who trounced his AKP challenger in another disappointment for Erdogan.

According to 92.92% of ballot boxes opened in Istanbul, Europe’s largest city and the country’s economic engine, Imamoglu had 50.92% support compared with 40.05% for AKP challenger Murat Kurum, a former minister in Erdogan’s national government.

Polls had predicted a tight contest in Istanbul and possible CHP losses across the country.

Yet partial official results reported by state-run Anadolu Agency showed AKP and its main ally giving up mayoralties in 19 key municipalities including big cities Bursa and Balikesir in the industrialised northwest, possibly reflecting strains on wage earners.

The CHP led nationwide by almost 1% of the votes, a first in 35 years, the results showed.

Mert Arslanalp, assistant professor of political science at Istanbul’s Bogazici University, said it was Erdogan’s “severest election defeat” since coming to national power in 2002.

“Imamoglu demonstrated he could reach across the deep socio-political divisions that define Turkey’s opposition electorate even without their institutional support,” he said. “This makes him the most politically competitive rival to Erdogan’s regime.”

In 2019, Imamoglu had dealt Erdogan a sharp electoral blow when he first won Istanbul, ending 25 years of rule in the city by AKP and its Islamist predecessors, including Erdogan’s own run as its mayor in the 1990s. CHP also won Ankara that year.

The president struck back in 2023 by securing reelection and a parliamentary majority with his nationalist allies, despite a years-long cost-of-living crisis.

Analysts said the economic strains, including nearly 70% inflation and a slowdown in growth brought on by an aggressive monetary-tightening regime, moved

voters to punish AKP this time.

“The economy was the decisive factor,” said Hakan Akbas, a senior adviser at the Albright Stonebridge Group. “Turkish people demanded change and Imamoglu is now the default nemesis to President Erdogan.”

Erdogan said ending the second election cycle in less than a year will itself bring a reprieve for the economy.

In front of the Istanbul Municipality building, flag-waving supporters said they wanted to see Imamoglu challenge Erdogan for the presidency in the future.

“We are very happy. I love him so much. We would like to see him as president,” said Esra, a housewife.

Rising popular support for the Islamist New Welfare Party, which took an even more hardline stance than Erdogan against Israel over the Gaza conflict, also sapped AKP support. The party took Sanliurfa from an AKP incumbent in the southeast.

Imamoglu was reelected despite the collapse of the opposition alliance that failed to topple Erdogan last year.

The main pro-Kurdish party, which backed Imamoglu in 2019, fielded its own candidate under the DEM banner in Istanbul this time. But many Kurds put aside party loyalty and voted for him again, the results suggest.

In the mainly Kurdish southeast, DEM reaffirmed its strength, winning 10 provinces. Following previous elections, the state has replaced pro-Kurdish mayors with state-appointed “trustees” following previous elections over alleged militant ties.

Violence erupted earlier in the day, including one incident in the southeast in clashes by groups armed with guns, sticks and stones, killing one and wounding 11. In another, one neighbourhood official, or “muhtar”, candidate was killed and four people were wounded in a fight, Anadolu reported.

Several others were hurt in other incidents while one person was shot dead and two were wounded overnight ahead of the vote in Bursa, the Demiroren news agency reported.

INTERNATIONAL

Seven Armenians make It to FIDE rankings

PARIS (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Seven Armenian grandmasters have made it to the International Chess Federation (FIDE) rating of top chess players for April.

Haik M. Martirosyan, Gabriel Sargissian and Samvel Ter-Sahakyan from the men’s team, and Elina Danielian, Anna M. Sargsyan, Lilit Mkrtchian and Mariam Mkrtchyan from the women’s team made it to the list.

Levon Aronian and Samuel Sevian — both Armenian representing the United States — have landed in the 22nd and 38th positions, respectively, of the rankings.

Russian, Azerbaijani Defense Minister Meet

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Issues of bilateral relations and prospects for the normalization between Baku and Yerevan were the focus of a meeting between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin and his visiting Azerbaijani counterpart, Elnur Mamedov, Tass reported on March 30, citing the Russian foreign ministry.

“The sides discussed in detail the current state of and prospects for further development of Russian-Azerbaijani relations. The senior diplomats discussed further joint steps toward the implementation of the declaration on allied relations between Russia and Azerbaijan of February 22, 2022,” it said.

Karabakh Leaders Will Probably Be Last To Be Returned

YEREVAN (News.am) — “We still have about 80 individual cases from the 44-day war [in 2020], here Azerbaijan has a denial policy and does not want in any way to solve the cases through investigation and ensure the right to the truth for the families. Lawyer Siranush Sahakyan, the head of the Center for International and Comparative Law NGO of Armenia, stated this at the press conference Monday, April 1.

“The issue of the missing persons is also continuously considered unsolved. About 210 captured persons were repatriated from Azerbaijan to Armenia. Political discussions are underway regarding the return of Armenian captives. But these political discussions are of secondary importance; that is, the primary object of the negotiations is not the repatriation of these persons, but mainly the negotiations are being conducted on issues of an interstate nature, including the peace treaty. ... I believe that the high-ranking [Nagorno-Karabakh] leaders [being held in Azerbaijan] will be repatriated the last, and at the moment when Azerbaijan will have used their factor to the maximum for both domestic and foreign political purposes,” Sahakyan noted.

According to her, if Armenia withdraws its international lawsuits against Azerbaijan, it will also lose the legal leverage to repatriate those persons.



INTERNATIONAL

AECP-Trained Physician Travels to Kyrgyzstan to Train Doctors in Prevention of Childhood Blindness

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — The Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP), in collaboration with its longtime partner Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), has been working to combat childhood blindness in Armenia since 2010. This is when physicians in Armenia, along with the AECP, noticed a disturbing trend of babies going blind due to retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), a debilitating eye disease that leads to blindness if left untreated.

Soon after, the AECP, with help from CHLA, began a targeted program to treat infants with ROP; developed a cutting-edge new facility in partnership with USAID — the Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness — in Yerevan; and started saving the sight of hundreds of babies in Armenia one surgery at a time. The results have been incredible: No child in Armenia has gone blind from ROP since 2018.

With such a successful program, the

in developing a nationwide ROP program in Armenia and training local specialists in Kyrgyzstan came from Kyrgyz doctors who had participated in the AECP-CHLA International Conference last year and visited the Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness in Armenia.

Hovhannisyanyan arrived in Kyrgyzstan on February 29 and began his work with ophthalmologists from the country's National Center for Maternal and Child Welfare. In the span of the intensive two-day visit, he examined 40 children. This included pre-term infants of 35-37 weeks of gestation who had a high probability of having retinopathy of prematurity as well as older children with severe eye pathologies and/or chronic eye diseases.

Hovhannisyanyan also trained three specialists in the country on screening and treatment techniques for childhood eye disease



Dr. Hovhannisyanyan is welcomed in Kyrgyzstan upon his arrival.

AECP is often asked to share its expertise and knowledge in the prevention of childhood eye disease with other developing countries. Most recently, Dr. Tadevos Hovhannisyanyan, a vitreoretinal surgeon and AECP's chief ROP surgeon in Armenia, traveled to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, to train physicians there in the prevention of ROP and other childhood eye disease.

The request to share AECP's experience

and performed laser procedures and anti-VEGF injections. During the hands-on training, trainees had the opportunity to examine newborns' eyes with the use of a retinal camera that Dr. Hovhannisyanyan had brought from Armenia. The trainees also carried out laser treatment under Dr. Hovhannisyanyan's supervision.

"We have started a very interesting collaboration and my hope is that it will be



Patients waiting for consultation with Dr. Hovhannisyanyan

quite impactful," Dr. Hovhannisyanyan said. "Our colleagues from Kyrgyzstan have good theoretical knowledge but they lack practice and that is why they reached out to the Armenian EyeCare Project."

Of the trip, he said it was "short but very intense" and that as a result of the training that took place during the visit, local doctors in the country have now started performing laser procedures.

"Many aspects of cooperation were discussed and I am ready to continue providing medical mentorship to these physicians," Dr. Hovhannisyanyan said. "I also met with neonatologists at the hospital and reiterated the importance of strong collaboration among all parties involved while dealing with ROP as a necessary prerequisite for good outcome of intervention."

Kyrgyzstan's Chief of the Department of Pediatric Eye Diseases Dr. Emilbek Misirov expressed great appreciation for

the opportunity to work with Dr. Hovhannisyanyan and gain the appropriate education and training for local physicians to treat childhood eye disease like ROP.

"Previously we could only diagnose retinopathy of prematurity... we had no skills to do laser treatment by ourselves," Misirov said. "Parents need to spend a lot of money to travel abroad for treatment and the worst thing was that children whose families could not afford the trip had no opportunity to escape further severe vision deterioration. Now we can implement sight-saving laser treatment in our country!"

In line with its mission, the Armenian EyeCare Project strives to eliminate preventable blindness and the organization is ready to share its experience and knowledge with all who are interested, replicating what once CHLA did by sharing its wealth of knowledge in ROP prevention with Armenia's specialists.



Colleagues from Kyrgyzstan welcome Dr. Tadevos Hovhannisyanyan

EU Monitors Deny Azerbaijani Claims of Armenian Border Buildup

BORDER, from page 1

It comes as tensions continue along the border. On Saturday, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again warned that Azerbaijan was seeking pretexts to begin a new war, referring to four Azerbaijani villages that have been under Armenian control since the 1990s.

Azerbaijan's Strained Relationship with the West

Azerbaijan's accusations, and their rebuttal by the EU, came a week after Baku criticized the EU, along with the US and Armenia, for planning to hold a meeting in Brussels without their presence.

At the time, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Aykhan Hajizade accused Brussels and Washington of bias towards Yerevan and of spreading "anti-Azerbaijani propaganda."

US State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller responded that the meeting was to discuss "economic resilience to help Armenia diversify its trade partnerships and address humanitarian needs."

"I fail to see why that would be escalatory or would be of a concern to any country in the world," said Miller.

Peter Stano, the EU Affairs and Security Policy spokesperson, also stressed that the meeting would be focused on the "sustainability of Armenia's economy" and not on providing it with "security guarantees."

(This article originally appeared in OC-Media on April 1.)



Community News

Wisconsin Armenians Promote Education on Armenian Genocide And Artsakh

By Nick Akgulian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

MADISON, Wisc. — The Wisconsin Council of Social Studies (WCSS) annual conference was held in Madison March 15-17, 2024. The Armenian National Committee of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Armenian community at large, each had booths at the conference, providing numerous resources related to the Armenian Genocide to educators and others in attendance, including methods available to incorporate this history into the classroom. In 2021, Wisconsin passed Act 30, which mandates the teaching of the “Holocaust and other genocides” at least once at both the middle and high school level. As social studies teachers are charged with implementing Act 30, the Armenian community’s participation in the WCSS conference was aimed at providing these educators the tools to teach effectively on the Armenian case.

In addition to the booths, a presentation was delivered on the history of Armenians in Wisconsin by community members Talene Kelegian and Armen Hadjinian. Dr. George Dalbo, a Wisconsin educator and Genocide Education Project Fellow, was instrumental in organizing the presentation, and was present to lend his expertise to the follow up discussion. A brief but powerful film on the exodus from Artsakh in September 2023 was included.

To further equip Wisconsin educators with the ability to incorporate the Armenian Genocide and recent events in Artsakh into the classroom in support of Act 30, a one-day workshop will be held April 27, 2024 at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). The event is sponsored by the UWM Institute of World Affairs in collaboration with the Wisconsin Armenian community and cosponsored by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR). Highly respected Boston area-based photographer Winslow Martin, who has been returning to Armenia regularly for the past 25 years, will present on the Artsakh refugees from his time in Armenia last September. He will be one of several featured presenters. The link to the workshop is <https://uwm.edu/iwa/event/teaching-about-the-armenian-genocide-a-professional-development-workshop-for-educators/>.

In July, the Wisconsin Armenian community will again take part in the Milwaukee-based Holocaust Education Resource Center’s annual virtual conference on Holocaust and Genocide. Prof. Khatchig Mouradian (Columbia University, Library of Congress) is scheduled to participate.

In the fall, Mouradian will then lead an online university level course on comparative genocide offered through UWM, cosponsored by NAASR. This for-credit course is open to all qualified high school students, any degree enrolled student from UWM or elsewhere, and the interested non-degree general public.



AMAC Toronto Concert honoring Benefactor Antibas Loussarian - March 2, 2024. L to R: Concert Chair Dr. Ani Janbazian Hasserjian, Past President of AMAC Mihran Jizmejjan and Antibas Loussarian

AMAA Artsakh Representative Tours US, Canada

By Harout Nercessian

Viktor Karapetyan, AMAA Representative to Artsakh, embarked on a three-week speaking tour in March 2024, visiting Montreal and Toronto in Canada, and New Jersey in US. Hosted by the Armenian Missionary Association of Canada (AMAC) and the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), Mr. Karapetyan engaged with the local Armenian communities through keynote addresses and informal discussions. He also participated in media interviews and held visits with Armenian dignitaries during the three-week tour.

Karapetyan delivered the keynotes at two AMAC-organized “Together with the Armenians of Artsakh” benefit concerts in Toronto and Montreal. These acclaimed events were attended by political and religious dignitaries, representatives of Armenian organizations, journalists, and members of the local communities. The events were reported on by two Armenian TV stations and several Armenian newspapers. His effectively delivered and often applause-interrupted keynotes highlighted AMAA’s REVIVE Program, which is dedicated to assisting the displaced people of Artsakh.

He conducted a series of official visits. His engagements included a meeting with Anahit Harutyunyan, ambassador of Armenia to Canada, representatives of see AMAA, page 8



Visit Montreal Diocese of Canada. L to R: Diocese Council Chairperson Meguerditch Kanondjian, Harout Nercessian, Viktor Karapetyan and Very Rev. Komitas Mirzakahnian

‘Armenian Memory, Writing Across Borders: A Reading and Talk’ With Peter Balakian

FRESNO — Pulitzer prize-winning poet Peter Balakian will speak on “Armenian Memory, Writing Across Borders: A Reading and Talk” on April 22, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center (UBC), Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus. A reception will precede the presentation at 6 p.m. in the UBC Gallery. The event is supported by the Florence Elaine Hamparson Armenian Memorial Fund.

Balakian will read and discuss his poetry and prose with a focus on Armenian historical and cultural memory and diasporan imagination. In his many books of poems and his memoir *Black Dog of Fate*, Balakian has explored – in his distinct poetic form and elliptical language – traumatic intergenerational memory of the Armenian Genocide, as well as the power and beauty of Armenian culture: visual art, architecture, music, and Armenia’s dramatic, natural landscapes.

Balakian is the author of 8 books of poems and 4 books of prose and 3 collaborative translations and several edited books. *Ozone Journal* won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for poetry, *Black Dog of Fate*, a memoir won the 1998 PEN/Martha Albrand Prize for the Art of the Memoir, and was a best book of the year for the *New York Times*, the *LA Times*, and *Publisher’s Weekly*; *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response* won the 2005 Raphael Lemkin Prize and was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *New York Times* Best Seller. His collaborative translation of *Grigoris Balakian’s Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* was a *Washington Post* book of the year. *Vice and Shadow: Essays on the Lyric Imagination, Poetry, Art, and Culture* was published in 2016.

Balakian is the recipient of many awards and prizes and civic citations: the Pulitzer Prize, The Presidential Medal and the Movses Khorenatsi Medal from the Republic of Armenia, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, The Spendlove Prize for Social Justice, Tolerance, and Diplomacy (recipients include President Carter); and the Emily Clark Balch Prize for poetry from the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. He has appeared widely on national television and radio programs such as 60 Minutes, PBS News Hour, ABC World News Tonight, Charlie Rose, CNN, C-SPAN, NPR, and Fresh Air, and his work has been translated into a dozen languages and foreign editions.

Balakian is Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities, Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Colgate University.

A selection of his books will be on sale at the event. The lecture is free and open to the public.

The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.

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

COMMUNITY NEWS

AMAA Artsakh Representative Tours US, Canada

AMAA, from page 7

all five Armenian Evangelical churches in Canada and NJ, and religious leaders of the Prelacy, Diocese, and several Armenian Apostolic and Catholic Churches in Canada. The discussions explored the plight and future outlook of Artsakhis, including the possibility of a return to their Homeland. In response to questions, Mr. Karapetyan gave a firsthand account of the events and AMAA's unwavering support during the 2020 war, the 10-month blockade, the mass exodus, and the people's efforts in rebuilding their shattered lives. "AMAA's assistance was ceaseless during the hostilities and the blockade. It was the inaugural diaspora humanitarian group to initiate programs in Artsakh in 1995 and remained steadfastly present until the culmination of the mass exodus," he recounted.

He delivered sermons, conducted Bible studies, and discussed the situation in Artsakh with the congregations of five Armenian Evangelical Churches and two Armenian Brotherhood Churches in Canada and New Jersey.

Karapetyan visited all five Armenian schools in Canada and New Jersey, talked to students, and answered questions. The students asked incisive questions such as "What was your most painful experience?" "What were you thinking and feeling when you were leaving Artsakh?" "How can we liberate Artsakh?" and "What can we do for the people of Artsakh?" His message to the students was to revive their "Armenian genes," learn the Armenian language, learn about Artsakh, and study well. I believe in you and together, if we put our minds to it, we can liberate Artsakh, returning it to its rightful owners."

In addition, he addressed members of the Armenian Students' Association of Seton Hall University and the attendees of an event organized by the St. Leon Apostolic Church in NJ. The participants expressed their concern and interest by asking many questions after the talk.

In his presentations, Karapetyan addressed three pivotal themes: the tribulations faced by the Artsakhis during and following the 2020 war; AMAA's response in providing aid to the Artsakhis in both Artsakh and Armenia; and a rallying cry to the Armenian diaspora for unity and action.

Karapetyan recounted the relentless and brutal aggression endured by the Armenians of Artsakh throughout the 44-day conflict in 2020. The suffering and despair of the peace-loving Artsakhis, who yearn only to dwell in tranquility on their ancestral lands, defy adequate description. He added "there is not a single Artsakhi who has not lost a family member or a close friend." He highlighted the resilience of the people, who, despite severe shortages of essentials like fuel, water, and electricity, found solace and strength on their land. This resilience, passed down through generations, stands as a testament to their unbreakable spirit and divine mandate to safeguard their sacred homeland. He emphasized the enduring Armenian spirit, encapsulated in the millennia-old presence in Artsakh—a land graced with a rich tapestry of cultural heritage and deep Christian faith, as evidenced by its myriad of historic monasteries, churches, and khachkars. Yet, these sacred sites and their guardians face existential threats, as the adversary seeks to obliterate the Armenian legacy from these ethnically cleansed territories. Drawing



Visit Armenian Prelacy of Canada. L to R: Harout Nercessian, Viktor Karapetyan and Prelate Hagop Charian

parallels to the 1915 Genocide, Mr. Karapetyan lamented the global indifference to the recent 10-month blockade and forced displacement, underscoring the lesson that Armenians must primarily rely on each other for support.

He lauded AMAA's longstanding commitment to Artsakh, noting its pioneering role since 1995 in establishing educational, humanitarian, and Christian Education programs in the region. Despite the war and blockade, the AMAA's facilities remained operational, providing a beacon of hope even amidst the mass exodus. During the forced exodus, AMAA's team welcomed the new arrivals, providing them with shelter and emergency aids of basic necessities. For the mid and long-term, AMAA devised

the REVIVE Program which addresses two long-term needs: housing and income. (2)

Karapetyan's impassioned plea to the students and the wider Armenian community was clear: to excel in their endeavors, to awaken the dormant Armenian spirit, and to unite in the mission to reclaim Artsakh. "Never has Artsakh been devoid of Armenian presence throughout its millennia of existence," he reminded his audiences. He posed a poignant question to all Armenians: "What will history say of our generation? Will it speak of a generation that lost Artsakh or one that liberated the Homeland?" His message was unequivocal—Artsakh's fate is intertwined with the collective will and action of Armenians worldwide.



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OBITUARY

Iskouhie (Dournayan) Eurdolian

Industrious Businesswoman, Dedicated Mother

STONEHAM, Mass. — Iskouhie (Dournayan) Eurdolian of Stoneham, passed away at 94, on March 26.

She was the wife of the late Nishan Eurdolian; mother of Mary Yertissian, John Eurdolian and his wife Carolyn, Nora Rosse and her husband Richard, and Roushi Sahagen and her husband Gregory. In addition, she was the grandmother of Karen, Alexandra, Lara, Renee, Andrew, Christina and the late Vicken and the great-grandmother of Alex, Daniel, Sterling, Skylar, Maia and Lucas.

Iskouhie was born on December 6, 1929, in Lebanon, to Rebecca and Joseph Dournayan. She was the third of five children, who were Antoine, Marie, Alphonse, and Raphael. They had narrowly escaped to Lebanon during the Armenian Genocide in the 1920s. In her early years, the family moved back to Alexandrette, Turkey for a time. When the French left Turkey in 1939, she, and some of her siblings, returned to Beirut with a group of nuns, the rest following later.

She attended French schools in Beirut. In her teens, Iskouhie worked in a clinic where she was empowered to treat patients under a doctor's supervision. She became an important member of the community because she was able to dispense medications, and give injections, to the sick and needy.

Iskouhie met Nishan Eurdolian in 1946, after exchanging glances on a tram. Finding her very beautiful, Nishan inquired about her, and a meeting of the families was arranged. They married when Iskouhie

was 17 and had four children, Mary, John, Nora and Roushi. Iskouhie was a devoted mother and masterful at so many things (sewing, crochet, gardening) but her greatest talent was cooking. She recalled that, as a very little girl, she desperately wanted to learn to cook. Too young for most tasks, her mother and aunt would give her dough to roll out so she would feel industrious.

Always enterprising, one of Iskouhie's proudest triumphs was supervising the construction of a four-story apartment building, in Beirut, in which they lived, and where she served as landlady for the other 3 units.

In 1969, Iskouhie and Nishan moved the family to the US, under the sponsorship of their cousins in Wakefield. The day after they arrived, Iskouhie and Nishan went to work in the factory at LB Evans Shoes and the four kids started school.

In 1977, Iskouhie and Nishan began to help John with cooking for the cafe he had opened on Newbury St. called Karoun. Ultimately, John opened the larger Karoun Restaurant in Newton, and they both helped full-time with that venture. Nishan passed away in 2015, and Iskouhie was devastated.

Iskouhie's delicious dishes from her family recipes were the backbone of Karoun's menu, and her dedication in the kitchen was unparalleled. One of the greatest joys of her life was having her four children work together at the restaurant and eventually her grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, too. She enjoyed extending her hospitality to Karoun's customers, and many became like extended family.

Virginia Jane (Topalian) Najarian

Gracious Hostess

WALTHAM — Virginia Jane (Topalian) Najarian of Waltham, passed away on March 14, 2024 in Cambridge.

She was the wife of Berj Najarian. Devoted mother of Nancy Fournier and her husband Jeffery, Armen Najarian and his wife Naya, and Jason Najarian and his wife Teryn.

She was the grandmother of Patricia, Luke, Noelle, Tate, Emery, Bree, Troy, Logan, Elena and Delilah; and the sister of Irene (Topalian) Hicks and her husband Michael and the late Paul Topalian and his wife Solinu'u. She is also survived by many loving nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Anyone who had the privilege of knowing Virginia knows that she was a vibrant, colorful, fun-loving woman who had an unquenchable thirst for life. She loved her family and was a woman of faith.

She was born in Dorchester, on October 28, 1943. After graduating from Belmont High School, she attended Katherine Gibbs Secretarial School.

Virginia met the love of her life, Berj, in 1964. They married three months later on October 12, and spent 59 wonderful years together residing in Waltham.

Virginia was no stranger to hard work. Over the years she was employed at Massachusetts Medical Society, Regis College and Waltham and Weston Public Schools. She also taught preschool at Piper Preschool and was a licensed real estate agent and broker.

Virginia loved to read and cook, which was her specialty – she could make a delicious meal out of anything. She also loved to entertain friends and travel the world with her husband. Her favorite pastime and home away from home was in West Yarmouth on Cape Cod.



Virginia lived a wonderful life and left her mark on the world with everything she did.

Funeral services were held at the First Armenian Church of Belmont, 380 Concord Avenue, Belmont, on Saturday, March 23.

Interment followed at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Dana Faber Cancer Institute in Memory of Virginia Najarian to support cancer research and patient care at: Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, P.O. Box 849168, Boston, MA 02284 or via dana-farber.org/gift. Or the First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont, MA 02478

Arrangements were made by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home.



Iskouhie was a loving, caring, and generous matriarch. Elegant, smart, strong, and practical, she was a tour de force. She

regaled in telling stories of her childhood, and loved to laugh. She was exceedingly sharp, and her card playing skills were impressive, even into her later years.

Iskouhie adored each of her children, and their families, and cared about their happiness above all else. She would pray daily for their well-being. She was a beautiful role model of faith, courage, selflessness, hard work, and hospitality. She leaves an enduring legacy, and will be dearly missed. Hers was a life fully lived.

Funeral service was at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont on Tuesday, April 2.

Interment followed at Ridgelawn Cemetery, Watertown.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church www.holycrossarmenian.com, or Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) www.coaf.org

Arrangements were by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Boston Tekeyan Cooking Series Kicks Off with *Kata*

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Boston Chapter held the first of a series of Armenian cooking demonstrations on the evening of Thursday, March 21. Dr. Knarik Arkun illustrated how to prepare the traditional sweet pastry known as *kata/gata* or *nazouk*.

Chapter Co-chair Dr. Aida Yavshayan introduced Dr. Arkun, who is a neuropathologist at Tufts Medical Center in Boston, and former Dirouhi of the Daughters of Vartan Arpi Otyag. She has also recently become a member of the local TCA chapter. Chapter Co-chair Rita Balyozian spoke about the cooking demonstration series, for which she is the coordinator. Audience members were asked to write down suggestions for future cooking classes.

Arkun spoke a little bit about her own background and about the ancient traditions of *kata* in the Armenian highlands before beginning the demonstration. A live feed to a screen on the wall allowed participants to view her actions more closely,



Audience members make their own *kata* at front table (photo Aram Arkun)

while those who wanted could try their hand afterwards at making their own *kata*. Balyozian assisted in the preparation.

Some *kata* was already prepared for participants to eat after the demonstration, while others were in boxes for those who wanted to purchase them.

Dr. Yavshayan announced that in addition to the next cooking demonstration, the TCA Boston Chapter has several upcoming events, including a celebration of Hampartsoum on Sunday, May 5 and a barbecue for Father's Day, June 16, both at the Baikar Building, along with several cosponsored events: the April 10 screening of Nubar Alexanian's "Finding Armenia" at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and Nora Armani's performance in "Mercedes and Zarouhi" at the Armenian Cultural Foundation on April 28. In the fall, there will be a jazz night starring

Angelina Nazarian and other musicians. For more information, contact the chap-

ter via email at bostontca@gmail.com or see its Facebook page.



Rita Balyozian (photo Aram Arkun)



Rita Balyozian, left, and Knarik Arkun preparing the dough (photo Aram Arkun)

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Samples of *kata/gata* or *nazouk* (photo Sossy Yogurtian)



Gift boxes of *kata* ready for purchase (photo Sossy Yogurtian)



Some of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter executive members: from left, Rita Balyozian, Maral Der Torossian, Jeanine Shememian, Knarik Arkun, Suzy Naroian, Sossy Yogurtian, Aida Yavshayan (photo Aram Arkun)



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Genocide Commemorative Committee of Fresno to Hold Commemoration on April 24

FRESNO — On April 24, the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee (AGCC) will host the annual Armenian Genocide Commemorative Program at California State University, Fresno (5241 N. Maple Ave, Fresno). The community is invited to join the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of survivors of the Genocide in laying flowers at the Armenian Genocide Monument at 6:30 p.m. (end of the Rose Garden, in between the Satellite Student Union and Peters Business Building).



Stefani Booroojian

The formal program will commence at 7 p.m. with the presentation of the United States and Armenian flags. It will include a religious and civic service with clergy from local Armenian churches, as well as the Armenian community school. The keynote speaker for the evening will be Stefani Booroojian, KSEE24 anchor and reporter. The AGCC invites all members of our Central Valley community to participate in the upcoming commemorative program and remember the victims of this great calamity.

AGCC is a broad-based coalition of the leading religious, educational, social and political organizations of the Armenian community of Central California. Our mission is to honor the 1.5 million Armenians who perished in the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government beginning on April 24, 1915 and ending in 1923. The committee is responsible for forming commemorative programs and educating the community about the Armenian Genocide to raise awareness and prevent future genocides from occurring.

ARS Chapter Hosts Photographer Winslow Martin's 'Forced Out' to Raise Funds for Artsakh Refugees

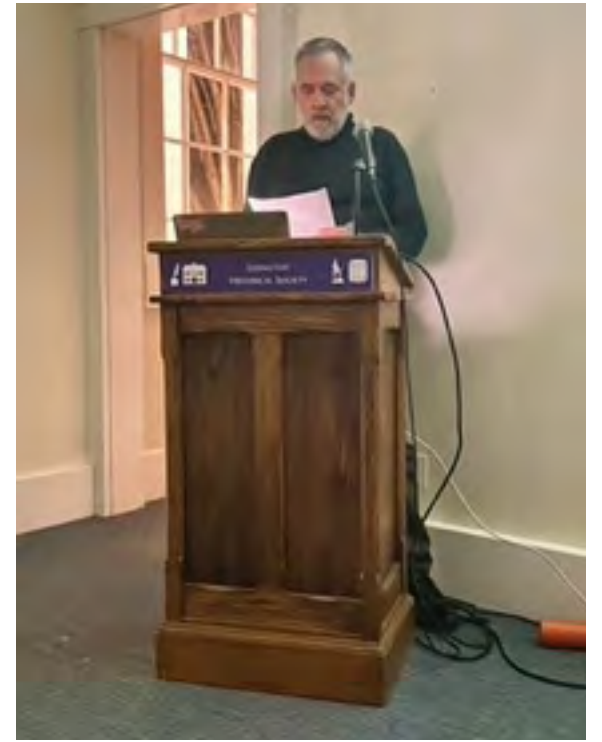
LEXINGTON, Mass. — The historic Depot in Lexington Center was filled to capacity on February 9 as the Lowell Lousintak Armenian Relief Society (ARS) Chapter hosted "Forced Out: Refugees from Artsakh in Armenia," by Winslow Martin. It was a heartfelt evening of storytelling, photography, music, and poetry - all to benefit the displaced Armenians of Artsakh.

Before the official program began, guests were greeted by Martin during the cocktail reception, which set the tone for the evening, along with music provided by Datev Gevorkian on oud. Lowell Lousintak ARS Chair and Master of Ceremonies Sona Gevorkian talked about the mission of the ARS and the accomplishments of the Lowell chapter, which is one of the oldest chapters in the US, dating back to 1915.

Easing into Martin's photo presentation, Teni Apealian, of the acapella trio, Zulal, accompanied by Datev Gevorkian on oud, sang a touching rendition of *Sare-ree Hoveen Mernem*. This set the stage for Martin to captivate his audience with his amazing storytelling skills, photographs and his unwavering love for the Armenian people over the past 25 years. As a documentarian, Martin's photographs were brought to life with stories of survival, sorrow, and hope of the people of Artsakh. His highlights were not only from the recent evacuation of 120,000 Armenians from Artsakh, but also from the war of 2020 and the relationships he made with the people of Artsakh and Armenia.

A poetry reading of "Akh Eem Artsakh, Akh Mer Artsakh" written by Varak Ghazarian, a diasporan Armenian from Los Angeles, who is currently living and studying in Armenia, was recited by Shakeh Dagdigan (Armenian) and Zarouhi Minassian Suggs (English). The poem was written days after the surrender in September of 2023 to express Ghazarian's personal emotions of the loss of Artsakh.

Martin ended the evening with a final slide repre-



Winslow Martin

senting the ARS and all its work. In his own words, Martin is a self-proclaimed "Armenian by choice." His most notable accomplishment to date was in the summer of 2023 when he compiled more than 140 of his photographs and had an exhibit at the National History Museum in Yerevan, depicting the daily lives of Armenians. He is the first living, solo artist, and non-Armenian to have the honor of a retrospective exhibition at the legendary History Museum of Armenia.

The chapter donated all the proceeds to the displaced families of Artsakh.



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).

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Arts & Culture

NAASR to Host First Public Screening of Nubar Alexanian's 'Finding Armenia'

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host the first-ever public screening of *Finding Armenia*, a documentary by Nubar Alexanian, on Wednesday, April 10, at 7:30 p.m. at its Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont, MA. This movie screening is free and open to the general public.

This special program in commemoration of the Armenian Genocide is jointly sponsored by NAASR with Amaras Art Alliance, the Armenian Cultural Foundation, the Armenian Museum of America, Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society, Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives and the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

The program will be introduced by esteemed filmmaker and producer Theodore Bogosian and will include remarks by and discussion with director Nubar Alexanian and editor Sabrina Zanella-Foresi following the screening.

An intimate portrayal of one man's search for the essence of an Armenian identity, Massachusetts native Nubar



Nubar Alexanian with his daughter Abby

Alexanian's *Finding Armenia* not only provides a vital history lesson for those unfamiliar with the Armenian Genocide, but also challenges its viewers to grapple with the profound questions that influence all of our identities. What does the healing of intergenerational trauma look like? What does it mean to regain control of our ancestral narratives? How can these narratives be reconciled with a hostile world? And what responsibility do we have to painful histories, even when they are not our own?

Nubar Alexanian is a documentary photographer whose work has been featured in major magazines in the United States and Europe, including *The New York Times Magazine*, *Life*, *Fortune*, *Geo*, *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and others. For the past 40 years, he has travelled to more than 30 countries focusing on long-term personal projects that describe the human condition. He is a Fulbright Scholar with six books in print and one-person exhibitions at the Walker Art Center, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Caren Golden Fine Art Gallery (NYC), Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, LOOK3 Festival of the Photograph, Clark University, and the Burden Gallery, New York.

For more information contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org.



A scene from the play

Tekeyan's New Azad Pem Theater Group Stages 'Khoskeh Mechernis' to Large Audiences in Pasadena

PASADENA, Calif. — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) organized a staging of Vatche Adrouni's "Khoskeh Mechernis" by the Azad Pem Theater Group on March 22 and 23. The performances took place at the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Performing Art Center in Pasadena, and was followed on March 23 by a gala, which was held in the Center's quad.

In attendance were more than 350 community members, as well as members of the Armenian theater community, including Krikor Satamian and Vahe Berberian — several of whom were former members of the AGBU Vahram Papazian Theater Group in Beirut, Lebanon.

In her welcoming remarks, Lora Kouyoumjian, chairman of Azad Pem, spoke on the cultural significance of the TCA and its initiatives, specifically the new theater group. The weekend marked Azad Pem's first-ever performance, which proved to be a success with nearly 450 attendees on opening night.



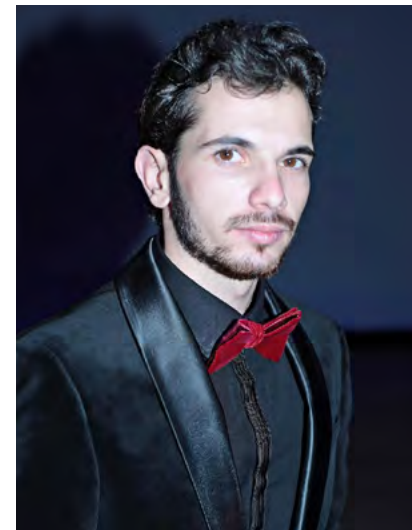
Azad Pem committee members and actors

Following Kouyoumjian's remarks, Mayda Kuredjian, executive secretary of the TCA Western United States and Canada, took to the podium to welcome attendees. Kuredjian highlighted the importance of Armenian theater, while adding that engaging with the youth and encouraging them to participate is vital to sustaining such initiatives.

Directed by Vartan Meguerditchian, who plays the role of Boghos, "Khoskeh Mechernis" [Between Us, or Off the Record] centers on Nina and Setrag, a young couple who yearn to be together, but Nina's parents disapprove. The play explores powerful themes, such as love, familial conflict, and friendship. Although Meguerditchian is known for directing several plays in Lebanon, the performance is the first he has directed in Los Angeles.

"Vartan Meguerditchian is an incredibly gifted actor who, over the years, has see THEATER, page 14

Gagik Tadevosyan



A Grand Pas from Parpi to LA

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/LOS ANGELES — Dancer Gagik Tadevosyan was born in 1993 in the village of Parpi, in Armenia. He started studying Latin American dance when he was 11, later he was accepted into the Armenian Berd Ensemble Studio and also studied in Armenian National Folk Ensemble. At 17, he became a soloist in the Berd Ensemble. In 2016 he graduated from the Khachatur Abovian Armenian National University with a master's degree in dance. He performed in the ballets "Spartacus," "Aznavour La Bohema" and "Two Sons" at Yerevan Spondiarian Theater of Opera and Ballet.

In 2018, Gagik moved to the US and began his dancer career as a principal dance teacher in heritage dance and cultural academy and a soloist dancer in Petrossian Dance Theatre Company since 2019. He took the Grand Prix in Paris, in 2019 at the International Dance Championship. Currently Tadevosyan is a soloist and principal dancer of Petrossian Theatre and Dance Company. He has participated in dozens of international dance festivals and is a member of the International Dance Council — CID UNESCO.

Dear Gagik, are your genes "choreographic?"

First of all, thank you for your attention. There are no professional dancers in our family. However, my mother practiced dancing for a long time during her school years, and since then, she has developed a great love for dancing, which she then passed on to me and guided me in this direction, making me love and appreciate this beautiful art.

Few Armenian boys dance Latin dances, and you have been practicing them since childhood. Didn't they tell you that those dances are not suitable for an Armenian boy?

Of course, even though there were such conversations at that time, especially in the village, I felt that many people wanted to learn to dance. No matter how much they talked and joked, they all were watching with great pleasure, I can even say, with see BALLETS, page 14



ARTS & CULTURE

Gagik Tadevosyan: A Grand Pas from Parpi to LA

BALLET, from page 13

envy, when I danced with my partner at some event, who was my cousin.

They say every successful artist has a successful teacher whom he or she remembers with gratitude throughout his life. Who is that for you?

At first, when I was learning sports dances, my teachers were young beginners, and when I started dancing more seriously, already in the “Arin-Berd” ethnographic dance group, my master was my beloved teacher, the late Boris Gevorgyan. He laid a solid foundation of ethnographic and folk dances in me, to whom I will remain grateful throughout my life. Later, my very dear and respected ballet master Rudolph Kharatyan, as well as choreographer Hayk Avagyan, made a great contribution to the development of classical dance in me.

What was military service like for a professional dancer?

Of course, military service poses a significant obstacle to the further professional growth and development of a dancer, but my time in the army was spent in the opera, alongside my training. Given the current situation of the country, as well as its geographical location, military service is necessary, but if we aspire to nurture talented artists, this matter requires regulation. However, exceptions are often made for the best artists.

I remember you from the full-length ballet “Two Suns” directed by Rudolph Kharatyan, a unique work in the history of Armenian ballet, which was broadcast many times on the Mezzo TV channel.

“Two Suns” was a wonderful performance that had a significant impact on my development as a ballet artist. It was a very enriching time, filled with classes and rehearsals, and there were artists from different countries around the world, so col-

laborating with them also left a profound impression. It was a performance where the dancer seemed sanctified, with powerful theatrical strength. Those were truly remarkable days, and I miss them. Mr. Kharatyan did an outstanding job, which is certainly appreciated.



Both the Heritage Dance and Cultural Academy and the Petrossian Theatre and Dance Company have mostly Armenian auditoriums. And have you cooperated with non-Armenian dance groups?

Heritage is our school academy, where almost all the children are Armenian, and naturally, the audience is mostly Arme-

nians. The Petrossian Theatre and Dance Company, on the other hand, is a group created by professional dancers where the best artists of different nationalities perform. Since we are surrounded by the Armenian community, our audience is mostly Armenians, but there are also foreigners.

the schedule: “Once Again Charles Aznavour,” directed by Narine Petrossian, dedicated to the chansonnier; “Million Red Roses,” dedicated to Russian pop diva Alla Pugachova; and “Aram Khachaturian: Masquerade Ball,” in which I am a solo dancer in one of the main roles. They are exceptionally beautiful and wonderful performances, where dance styles of different genres are interwoven, based on the classics

It would be interesting to know the details of the last competition in Paris, where you won the Grand Prix. Did you represent Armenia?

I participated in the Paris competition as an Armenian artist and choreographer of the Armenian dance troupe. I performed an improvisation, embodying the character of Charles Aznavour to one of his own songs. The performance was met with great joy and applause from both the audience and the participants, and they demanded an encore of the number, during which I won the Grand Prix. Additionally, the students of our school won the “Children’s Competition” section, also receiving the Grand Prix.

Some parts of California do bear a resemblance to your native Parpi, am I right? Does the local landscape help ease your homesickness in any way?

This state attracts me with its warmth, as I love summer very much. Yes, here there is something in common with the nature of Armenia. I feel a touch of Armenia here; the landscape often reminds me of my village, my homeland. The stones here are also similar, further invoking memories of Armenia. My Armenian students help ease my homesickness; they give me great strength and energy. If my work were not related to children, I assure you, I wouldn’t have much to keep me here.

We have big plans to tour other countries and have received various invitations.

You performed in programs dedicated to Charles Aznavour and Alla Pugacheva at the Petrossian Theatre and Dance Company. I believe it was a delightful experience.

Yes, we have three big staged plays on

Tekeyan’s New Azad Pem Theater Group Stages ‘Khoskeh Mechernis’ to Large Audiences in Pasadena

THEATER, from page 13

become a prominent member of the Lebanese-Armenian theater community. After performing in more than 20 plays, and directing a series of productions, this ‘crazy’ and charming actor has left an indelible mark on Lebanese Armenian modern theater,” said playwright Vatche Adrouni.

“Khoskeh Mechernis” features Vartan Meguerditchian, Narine Avakian, Linda Gergerian-Meguerditchian, Arpi Samuelian, Sossy Varjabedian, Aram Mouradyan, Roupen Harmandian, Henry Abadjian, Arthur Abousefian, and Haig Ourishian. Several of the performers are veteran actors who have participated in Armenian theatre groups in the US, Lebanon or Canada.

Later, attendees enjoyed a cocktail reception in the AGBU Performing Arts Cen-

ter quad, while artist Razmig Khatchigian performed on the piano.

The final staging of “Khoskeh Mechernis” at AGBU will take place on Saturday, April 27 at 8 p.m. at the AGBU Performing Arts Center. Tickets are available at agbupac.net online.

Azad Pem will also perform “Khoskeh Mechernis” on May 5, at 4:30 p.m. at St. Paul Armenian church, 3767 N First St, Fresno.

The Azad Pem theater group was founded by the Tekeyan Cultural Association’s Pasadena-Glendale Chapter in 2023 with the aim of inspiring joy, engaging with the community, and helping to foster a love and appreciation for theater in Armenian youth. Follow Azad Pem on Instagram and Facebook to learn more.

TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
PASADENA GLENDALE CHAPTER

AZAD PEM THEATRICAL GROUP

Presents

A Comedy written by
VATCHE ADROUNI

Directed by
VARTAN MEGUERDITCHIAN

AGBU Performing Arts Center
2495 E. Mountain St, Pasadena, CA

Friday 3/22/2024 at 8PM
Saturday 4/27/2024 at 8PM

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GALA NIGHT:
Saturday 3/23/2024 at 8PM

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VARTAN MEGUERDITCHIAN	SOSSY VARJABEDIAN	HENRY ABADJIAN	HAIG OURISHIAN	ARTHUR ABOUSEFIAN



Azad Pem members taking a bow



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



A Tribute to Barbara Hansen: Shrimp and Bok Choy Bowl

LOS ANGELES – On June 27, 2022, Barbara Hansen featured this recipe at TableConversation.com, her international food blog. Hansen was a James Beard award winner and one of the first food writers to bring attention to international cuisines in Los Angeles through her years of work at the *Los Angeles Times*. She covered everything from Thai, Armenian, Japanese, Korean, French, Italian, Greek, Indian, Oaxacan, Mexican, and Salvadoran food, and published a cookbook on California cuisine. In 1969 alone, she wrote about Israeli consulate dinners, soul food, Egyptian cuisine, Colombian food, the regional antojitos of Central America, and Filipino restaurants, to name a few.

Hansen died at the age of 90 on January 28, 2023 at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center following a fall she had suffered earlier.

A supporter of Mexican and Asian cuisine, she said. “I love these other cultures and cuisines. We are lucky in Southern California with the variety of amazing, diverse ethnic foods available.” She shopped all over for fresh fruits and vegetables, from local farmers markets to supermarkets, where the produce was always fresh. She kept a carton of gochujang, a red pepper paste, on hand in the kitchen to spice up dishes, and added hong cho, pomegranate flavored vinegar, to her drinking water. (Note: gochujang and hong cho are both Korean ingredients).

Born in Hollywood on October 30, 1932, she lived in Hancock Park, in the same house she grew up in, for her entire life. After earning a B.A. from Stanford University, she went on to earn a master’s in journalism at UCLA before joining the Los Angeles Herald-Express, where she was relegated to writing in the women’s section. Her six best-selling books include: *Mexican Cookery*; *Southeast Asian Cooking: Menus and Recipes From Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines*; *Cooking California Style*; *Good Bread*, and a revised edition of the Southeast Asian cookbook with new format and recipes. By request, she wrote *Korean Restaurant Guide: Los Angeles*. She was an avid world traveler and considered an authority on Indian and Mexican food. She wrote two blogs, www.tableconversation.com and www.eatmx.com, that is dedicated to Mexican food.

In the mid ’60s, Hansen was recruited by Los Angeles Times food editor Jeanne Voltz to help out with the section. Hansen’s insatiable curiosity predated even the arrival of cilantro in Los Angeles, an ingredient she eventually found in Chinese markets labeled “Chinese parsley.” In the decades that followed, Hansen’s precise, deep reporting documented waves of immigration to Los Angeles:

<<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-06-24-fo-6516-story.html>> Thais, <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-apr-29-ca-32126-story.html>> Armenians, <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-jul-17-fo-bimbap17-story.htm>> Koreans, <<https://www.latimes.com/food/la-fo-biryani-20160423-story.html>> Indians, <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-jan-24-wk-counter24-story.html>> Oaxacans, and <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-11-11-fo-55408-story.html>> Salvadorans, whose cuisines she embraced.

She was a keen admirer of easy single bowl meals: “With everyone’s busy schedules today, these dinners are simple to shop for and make. You layer everything you need for a complete meal in a single bowl, in this case, a starch (rice), protein (shrimp) and veggies (baby bok choy, mushrooms) combined with a sauce. Cook the rice, and keep it warm while stir-frying the shrimp and choice of veggies. Put the shrimp and vegetables on top of the rice. It’s that fast.”

Melissa’s Produce in Los Angeles distributes baby bok choy widely, she said, so customers can find it in most supermarkets. Hansen also bought her bok choy from a nearby Korean market. For the rice, she cooks jasmine or basmati rice in boiling water, drains off the water and lets the rice stand, covered, for 5 or 10 minutes. “This way, you get perfect rice every time, you don’t have to measure the water, and the rice never sticks. An Indian chef taught me this method.”

“Prepare the rice in advance and assemble the other ingredients ahead of time so it takes only a few minutes to put the dish together. For the shrimp, I use big EZ peel shrimp that I keep in a bag in the freezer. Thawing them enough to peel takes only seconds, if you rinse them with cold water. This recipe is designed for one serving on the days when you’re alone or need something that’s delicious and quick and easy to prepare.”

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons oyster sauce
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1/3 cup jasmine or basmati rice
- 2 heads baby bok choy
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 large clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 (1/4-inch) slice ginger root, peeled and finely chopped
- 4 large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- Additional soy sauce, if needed

PREPARATION:

Soak the shiitake mushrooms in the water until very soft. Remove and slice or chop, discarding stems. Reserve the soaking liquid.

Place the cornstarch in a small bowl or measuring cup. Add 1/4 cup of the mushroom soaking liquid, the soy sauce, oyster sauce and sesame oil, and stir until blended. Set aside until needed. Reserve the remaining soaking liquid.

Wash the rice, drain, then place in a saucepan and cover generously with water that should come well above the rice. Bring the rice to a boil and boil for 10 minutes. Drain the rice and let stand, covered, in the saucepan until needed. (The rice may be prepared in advanced and reheated before using). Cut the bok choy crosswise in slices about 1-inch wide, or slightly wider. Discard the root end and any tough pieces at the bottom.

Heat the vegetable oil in a wok. Add the ginger and garlic and stir fry a few seconds, but do not allow to burn. Add the bok choy and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes. Add the mushrooms, then the sauce mixture and cook and stir for 2 minutes, until the sauce is thickened. Place the hot rice in a heated large single serving bowl. Place the bok choy on top. Add 1 tablespoon of the reserved mushroom soaking liquid to the empty wok. Add the shrimp and cook about 2 minutes, turning once. Place the shrimp on top of the bok choy and serve at once, with additional soy sauce on the side to adjust seasoning, if needed.

Makes 1 serving.

For this recipe, go to:

<https://www.tableconversation.com/2022/06/index.html>

Note: Melissa’s Produce is the nation’s largest specialty produce distributor, delivering the freshest ideas in produce from the global market to your local grocery stores, favorite restaurants, and go-to sports venues.

Over the years, the company’s Food Service Division has become a full-service operation that supplies culinary professionals with culinary staples, exotic fruits and vegetables, and Melissa’s full line of organic produce. From year-round staples to seasonal favorites, Melissa’s provides quality ingredients many customers rely on. Visit their website or follow them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. See: <https://www.melissas.com/>

Connect at:

<https://www.facebook.com/barbara.hansen.9235/>

<https://www.instagram.com/tableconversation/?hl=en>

www.tableconversation.com

www.eatmx.com

<https://www.laweekly.com/guest-author/barbara-hansen/>

<https://muckrack.com/barbara-hansen/articles>

Korean Restaurant Guide: Los Angeles

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Ethnic food writer and author Barbara Hansen shopping at a local Los Angeles market for fresh produce.



ARTS & CULTURE



Pegasus: The Orchestra

Pegasus: The Orchestra to Pay Tribute to Aram Khachaturian On 120th Anniversary of Birth

NEW YORK — On Saturday, April 13, Pegasus: The Orchestra, led by founder, principal conductor, and artistic director, Karén Hakobyan, conducts the 2023-2024 Season's Finale in a commemoration of Aram Khachaturian's 120th Anniversary at Merkin Concert Hall at 8 p.m.

Soloist will be cellist Sergey Antonov.

The program opens with Stravinsky's stunning 8-movement Suite from the "Pulcinella Ballet," highlighting Pegasus's principals as soloists. The first half concludes with Tchaikovsky's delightful Variations on a Rococo Theme and features

2007 Tchaikovsky International Competition gold medalist Sergey Antonov (cello) as the soloist.

The second half opens with Beethoven's colossal *Symphony No. 7* and culminates with Khachaturian's *Waltz* from the "Masquerade" Suite, a fitting conclusion to the season.

Grammy-nominated cellist Sergey Antonov enjoys a versatile career as a soloist and chamber musician. Critics throughout the world have hailed him as "destined for cello superstardom" (Washington Post), "combining formidable technique and an

incredibly warm, penetrating and vibrant tone to a romantic musical sensibility to create music - making of a highest caliber" (Budapest Sun).

After winning the Gold Medal in the 2007 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Russia, Antonov has been touring extensively throughout Europe, Asia, North and South America performing in halls ranging from the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory to Suntory Hall in Tokyo. He has collaborated with musicians such as Denis Matsuev, Bernadene Blaha, Kevin Fitz Gerald, Ekaterina Mechetina, Harve A' Kaoua, Carl Ponten, Dora Schwartzberg, John Lenehan, Colin Carr, Cynthia Phelps, Martin Chalifour, David Chan, among others, as well as his permanent piano partner Ilya Kazantsev. The duo has recorded several CDs of traditional cello-piano repertoire as well as their own transcriptions, recorded in their CD album *Elegy*.

Sergey is a member of the acclaimed Hermitage Piano Trio with Ilya Kazantsev and violinist Misha Keylin.

Pegasus: the Orchestra's mission empowers rising musicians with artistic freedom and promotes performances of inventive repertoire in an environment that supports creative thought and expression.

Founded by Karén Hakobyan in 2017, the orchestra harnesses the transcendent power of music to bring musicians and audiences of diverse backgrounds and cultural heritages together. For its first four years, Pegasus: the Orchestra was awarded a residency at Mana Contemporary Cultural Center in the heart of Jersey City. In a variety of series organized by Hakobyan, concerts featuring a full chamber orchestra, solo piano, jazz performance, and chamber groups were offered, and many of those focused on education and youth.

During the height of the pandemic in 2021, Pegasus accepted a residency with Monira Foundation, also housed at Mana Contemporary. In the course of the 2021-2022 season, the orchestra created a high-quality digital stage and presented its Fourth Season entitled *Baroque and Beyond* streaming a total of ten very varied programs of chamber, solo piano, and orchestra concerts.

Pegasus celebrated its Fifth Anniversa-

ry Season in 2022-2023 with remarkable artists and unique programming. In October, 2022, Pegasus had its Lincoln Center Debut with Karén Hakobyan conducting a breathtaking concert of all five Rachmaninoff Piano Concertos with five soloists in a single night to a wildly appreciative house. Earlier, Pegasus launched its season with Vivaldi's and Piazzolla's *Four Seasons* in Oneonta, New York featuring its own concertmaster, Eiko Kano as a soloist. An evening concert was paired with an after-



Sergey Antonov

noon educational concert for 750 school children from the Oneonta region. Pegasus returned to Bach's magnificent Brandenburg Concerti featuring its own concertmaster and principals this time in the Meridian Performances series at DiMenna Center for Classical Music in November. In March, 2023, Pegasus presented cellist Suren Bagratuni—silver medalist of the prestigious Tchaikovsky Cello Competition and professor at Michigan State University—with Hakobyan conducting a colorful concert featuring Mozart, Schnittke, and Haydn in a New York City's Christ & Saint Stephen's Church.

To learn more about Pegasus, visit: <http://www.pegasustheorchestra.org>

For tickets, go to <https://www.kaufmanmusiccenter.org/.../Pegasus-Season-Finale>

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ARTS & CULTURE

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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 — St. James Armenian Church Men's Club, Monday, will host Justin Hanrahan, Chief of Police, Watertown Police Department. Chief Hanrahan grew up in the east end of Watertown and is a graduate of Watertown High School. He joined the Watertown Police Department in 1997, and was promoted to Chief of Police on November 30, 2023. Chief Hanrahan is also an attorney who teaches police officers and police supervisors throughout the Commonwealth in the areas of criminal law and criminal procedure, as well as many other topics such as critical incident management and domestic violence. 6:15 pm Mezza, 7:00 pm Losh Kebab and Kheyra Dinner. \$20 per person. St. James Charles Mosesian Cultural & Youth Center Keljik Hall, 465 Mount Auburn St., 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 — The 109th Anniversary Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide will take place at the Massachusetts State House in Boston starting at 10:30 a.m. Keynote address will be delivered by the recently confirmed Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Justice Gabrielle Wolohojian.

APRIL 20 — Armenian Trauma and Healing in Contemporary Fiction, Saturday, 2:30 p.m., Watertown Free Public Library, 123 Main Street, Watertown. Aida Zilelian, author of *All the Ways We Lied*, and Nancy Agabian, author of *The Fear of Large and Small Nations*, will read from and discuss their new novels that center on Armenian American intimacies concerning family, relationships, and immigration. Both novels deal with intergenerational trauma through echoes of the 1915 Armenian Genocide; to commemorate April 24 (Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day), the authors will also discuss how and why their fiction facilitates healing. Registration is required and free: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/armenian-trauma-and-healing-in-contemporary-fiction-tickets-825743901237?aff=oddtcreator>

APRIL 21 — The 109th Anniversary Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide will take place at the Armenian Heritage Park in Boston, starting at 4 p.m. The commemoration will include a musical performance by Angelina Nazarian.

APRIL 28 — Nora Armani performs in "Mercedes and Zarouhi" play translated into English, cosponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Bos-

ton 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 Baikar 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.

OCTOBER 25-27 — Save the date! Sanctuary consecration of the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe. Presided over by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern). 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. Details to follow. **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

NEW YORK

APRIL 27 — Genocide Prevention, upholding United Nations' Human Rights Declaration, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Fordham University at Lincoln Center, SL-11. Speakers will include Alison Dobrick, director, William Paterson University Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Aida Zilelian-Silak, author; Dr. Ani Kalayjian, president, ATOP Meaningful World; Prof. Takooshian, Fordham University and Ayda Erbal, New York University. Cosponsored by Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP) Meaningful world, ACRPC and AGBU.

RHODE ISLAND

APRIL 16 — The Armenian Martyrs' Memorial Committee is sponsoring its 24th Annual Armenian Youth Day at the Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence for children ages 7-14. The day will begin at 8:30am for registration and the program will begin at 9 a.m. It will be an educational and fun day with crafts, baking, and much more. This year will also include a visit to the Armenian Historical Association of Rhode Island (AHARI) museum. To register, email Jayne Zobian at jayneech@aol.com or Shakay Kizirian at shakay28@cox.net. Register by April 12. Lunch is provided and there is no charge for the day.

APRIL 26 — The Armenian Martyrs' Memorial Committee and Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee are co-sponsoring a performance of "Mercedes & Zaruhi" by playwright Anush Aslibekyan at Egavian Cultural Center beginning at 7:30pm. Nora Armani will perform as Zaruhi and the play will be in English. Donation \$20 (\$10 for students) - tickets available at the door.

APRIL 28 — Sunday, the 109th Anniversary of the 1915 Armenian Genocide at the Martyrs' Monument, North Burial Ground, Providence starting at 12:15pm. A service in remembrance of the Holy Martyrs will be held with the participation of clergy and deacons from Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church, Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church and the Armenian Evangelical Church. Guest speaker will be Alin K. Gregorian, editor of the Armenian Mirror-Spectator. In the event of inclement weather, the commemoration will be held in the sanctuary of the Armenian Evangelical Church located at 180 Oaklawn Avenue in Cranston, Rhode Island.

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.

'Past, Present and Future - Armenian Literature' – A Literary Event of Armenian Female Writers

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Saints Sahag and Mesrob Church will hold a cultural literary event "Past, Present and Future - Armenian Literature" with three innovative female writers - Victoria Atamian Waterman, Meghri Dervartanian and Aida Zilelian. Reporter Kim Kalunian joins them on Sunday, April 21 at 12:30 p.m. for a presentation and book discussion of the authors' recently released books.

Author of historical fiction novel *Who She Left Behind*, Victoria Atamian Waterman is a life-long Rhode Islander who grew up in a multi-lingual immigrant household with a family history tied to the Armenian Genocide. In her novel, the old neighborhoods in Providence and Warwick come to life on its pages, providing a rich portrayal of her roots and experiences.

Aida Zilelian's novel, *All the Ways We Lied*, is a contemporary story based on a family of American-Armenians set in Queens, NY. Her novel touch-

es upon issues of cultural identity, sisterhood and the lasting effects of loss and grief. She is a first-generation American-Armenian educator, writer and storyteller.

Armenian children's book author Meghri Dervartanian was born and raised in America. Her first children's book *Հայրսն Հայ* (Hbard Hye/ Proud Armenian) was published in 2020 and her second book *Դեպի Արարատ Լեռ* (Tebi Ararat Ler/ Towards Mt. Ararat) in 2023. She recently published two new books called *Կոմիդաս Վարդապետ* (Gomidas Vartabed) and *Վհուղը եւ իր Աւելը* (Vhooghuh yev ir Avele, The Witch and Her Broom).

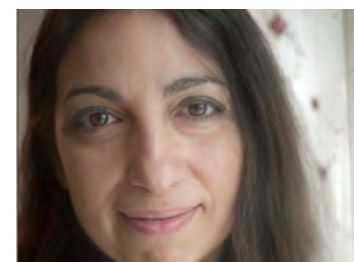
Kalunian is a reporter and co-anchor of 12 News Now at 4 and 5:30. A native Rhode Islander, Kalunian joined the 12 News team in November 2015. Before arriving at WPRI, Kim worked as the drive-time news anchor on WPRO radio and as a staff reporter at her hometown newspaper, *The Warwick Beacon*.



Victoria Atamian Waterman



Meghri Dervartanian



Aida Zilelian



Kim Kalunian

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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Why Is Armenia on the Intel Community's List of Potential Threats to US Interests?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community of February 5, 2024 was recently published by the US state agencies. The report gives a clear understanding of how the US intelligence community sees the current state of affairs, which countries are deemed to be geopolitical rivals of the US, and regional issues that have the potential of having an impact on a global scale as well as functional and transnational challenges, e.g. proliferation, emerging technology, climate change. Terrorism, etc. The following article will focus on analyzing the parts of the report dedicated to US geopolitical rivals, the current state of international relations, as well as Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.

The report indicates that the United States is facing an "increasingly fragile global order." This comes as no surprise because since the end of the Cold War, which concluded with the United States becoming the only superpower, a lot has changed, and increasingly more countries are challenging the United States. The main geopolitical rivals of the United States as of today remain Russia and China, along with other countries such as Iran and North Korea. Some non-state actors also remain a threat to what the report calls "US primacy within the international system." This geopolitical confrontation is presented as a "larger competition between democratic and authoritarian forms of government," where the United States is the champion of democracy.

The main geopolitical rivals of the USA are Russia and China. The report discusses in detail which areas and what kind of actions are threatening US security. First comes China, which is "undercutting US influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system." There are some main projects of geopolitical importance that aim to increase China's influence, namely the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Security Initiative. These are projects that China has been working on for years.

However, in terms of economic development China's economy will slow in the upcoming years because of "structural barriers and Beijing's unwillingness to take aggressive stimulus measures to boost economic growth." Apart from that, China is seeking to become a science and technology superpower, and using that for economic, political, and military gain. Science and technology is one of the heated areas of confrontation between China and the USA.

In terms of military influence, the US intelligence community considers that Beijing will be working to make the People's Liberation Army a world-class military by 2049, though its effectiveness is questionable owing to the lack of recent warfighting experience. With all these being said, China is ready to work in reducing tension with Washington whenever it's beneficial.

The second geopolitical rival for US supremacy is Russia. The US intelligence community considers it to pose a serious threat to the US in a wide range of areas despite the enormous damage caused by the Ukrainian war. A major challenge for the US and its partners is Russia's strengthening ties with China, Iran and North Korea, including Russia's economic engagement with Beijing, which can provide protection from potential sanctions.

The US intelligence community considers that although Russia does not want to engage in a direct conflict with the US and NATO, it will "continue asymmetric activity below what it calculates to be the threshold of military conflict globally." Russia will modernize its nuclear weapon capabilities, since that is viewed as

a deterrence and ultimate guarantor. Last but not least, the US intelligence community considers that Russia probably will attempt to affect the elections of 2024, because elections are deemed as an opportunity for influence.

On a regional scale, Iran is being considered as one of the major threats to US interests on several fronts. First and foremost, the topical issue between the US and Iran is Gaza. In the report, Iran is posed as a remaining threat to Israel and US allies. The United States is specifically concerned that Iran will continue arming and aiding its allies as well as backing Hamas to threaten the United States. However, they are sure that Iran will remain careful to avoid a direct conflict with either Israel or the United States.

Another major concern about Iran is its nuclear arsenal. Though Iran currently does not conduct major nuclear weapons development activities needed to produce testable nuclear devices, Tehran has reiterated since 2020 that it is no longer bound by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action's restrictions. It has embarked on activities that would significantly expand its nuclear program and better enable it to manufacture nuclear devices if it decides to get one.

Iran's rapprochement with Russia is another cause for concern the US considers that Iran will continue to further its ambitions by trying to bolster ties with Moscow. Moreover, during 2023 it has already expanded its diplomatic influence by boosting its relations with Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

Iran is also meddling in US elections. Specifically in the 2020 US elections, Iranian hackers obtained or attempted to obtain information about US voters, sent voters intimidating emails, and spread disinformation about the elections. According to the report, Iranian cyber actors have developed new sets of technologies, combining cyber and influence capabilities. Their new capabilities might potentially be used during the 2024 US election period.

The other regional threat to US interests is North Korea. The leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, will continue to develop its nuclear and conventional military capabilities and that is a security threat for the West and its allies. On top of that, the North Korean leader is striving for deeper cooperation with the US's geopolitical rivals, such as Russia and China, to further strengthen its financial benefits, diplomatic and defense cooperation.

The US intelligence community report also analyzed some regional and localized conflicts because of the potential of regional spillover and ultimately the world. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is among the list of such regional conflicts. According to the report there is a threat of the conflict escalation between Armenia and Azerbaijan taking into account the following factors: the absence of a bilateral peace treaty, the proximity of the military forces, no mechanism to enforce a ceasefire, and Azerbaijan's willingness to use military force to advance its goals in negotiations with Armenia.

The report refers to the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenians in the context of Russian-Armenian relations, stating that the reason for that was Russia's involvement in war with Ukraine. This led to Russian unwillingness to expend the resources and political capital to prevent Azerbaijan from reacquiring Nagorno-Karabakh. This in turn eventually led to Armenia seeking alternative partners to Russia.

(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.)

I Wonder...

By Harry N. Mazadoorian

Worshipping in the sanctuary of the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection in New Britain, Conn., always evokes feelings of comfort and security for me. I am encapsulated in warmth, reflection and safety.

My thoughts, however, sometimes turn to a time almost 110 years ago, in a little remembered village named Ichme in the former Ottoman province of Kharpert. There, I imagine my grandfather, Garabed, also being in the local Armenian Church, that one named St. Nicholas or Soorp Nigoghos.

But I imagine for him not the sanctuary of peace and security that I enjoy: rather I

think of just the opposite.

I think of a horrible time when the sanctity and safety of the church was shattered, on the eve of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 when more than one and one half million ethnic Armenians ultimately perished at the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

My late father, who was only 10 years old at the time, remembered my grandfather and other elders from Ichme and neighboring villages being rounded up and cruelly imprisoned in their own church, crammed in like sardines, denied contact with their families and uncertain of their own fate.

What went through my grandfather's mind as he witnessed his hallowed church desecrated and turned into a prison for its parishioners and others.

I wonder.

He had been an avid reader of an Ar-

menian-language newspaper which came from Istanbul and knew that a tumultuous time was approaching. Of late, there had been a change in the demeanor and action of the Turkish gendarmes and military toward the Armenians; a dark cloud appeared to loom over all the local villages. Suddenly, the newspaper stopped coming.

The Armenian elderly villagers were isolated and watched. They were told that they were going to be sent to another town to perform labor for the Turkish army for as they were too old to be officially conscripted. But somehow they sensed a sadder fate for themselves. Did they think that the unthinkable was about to happen? Did my grandfather believe that this would be the end of the Armenian race and its cherished Christian Church? Would the

continued on next page



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Pashinyan is a Greater Threat To Armenia's Security Than Artsakh's Government-in-Exile

We all know the disasters that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan brought upon Armenia in addition to losing

Artsakh due to his incompetence.

We can cite Pashinyan's many misguided actions and contradictory statements. Following his complete mismanagement of the military as Commander-in-Chief during the 2020 war, Pashinyan is now making sure that Armenians forget about the loss of Artsakh by wiping out its name from people's memory.

Pashinyan took no action to protect Artsakh Armenians' right to live peacefully in their millennia-old homeland. He also made no advance preparations to house the over 100,000 refugees from Artsakh, even though he knew that after the 2020 war Artsakh Armenians would eventually flee to Armenia.

To make matters worse, knowing that in future elections Artsakh Armenians will not vote for his political party, Pashinyan declared that they are not citizens of Armenia. These people for decades have had passports of the Republic of Armenia which were recognized not only by Armenia but also by foreign countries when they travelled overseas. Regrettably, thousands of Artsakh Armenians have since left Armenia for Russia to find shelter and work to be able to feed their families.

Furthermore, Pashinyan refuses to meet with any Artsakh official and opposes Artsakh Armenians holding protests in Yerevan to complain about their dire conditions in Armenia.

Here is the latest example of Pashinyan's anti-Artsakh actions. Last week, the President of Artsakh Samvel Shahramanyan gave an interview to the French *Le Figaro* newspaper in which he said that the Republic of Artsakh continues to exist despite its occupation by Azerbaijan. He also stated that there is an Artsakh government-in-exile in Yerevan where his offices are located.

Shahramanyan's words angered Pashinyan who immediately lashed back and warned that legal action will be taken against all those who talk about an Artsakh government-in-exile. Without any evidence, Pashinyan accused the Artsakh leaders of threatening Armenia's national security. Not understanding the meaning of the term 'government-in-exile,' Pashinyan said that there is only one government in Armenia and there cannot be a second govern-

ment, even though nobody was talking about creating a second government. If Pashinyan had any knowledgeable advisers, they would have informed him that there are in many countries dozens of 'governments-in-exile' which are universally accepted under international law.

In reality, the only person in Armenia who is threatening the security of Armenia is Pashinyan himself. Not only he has not defended the rights of Artsakh Armenians who are citizens of Armenia, but has also allowed Azerbaijan's military to cross Armenia's borders in 2021 and 2022. In addition, when Pres. Aliyev demanded that Armenia hand over to Azerbaijan four Armenian villages, Pashinyan warned their inhabitants that otherwise Azerbaijan will start a new war.

In his harsh reply to Shahramanyan, Pashinyan also threatened to take appropriate measures so that "foreign forces do not use certain [Artsakh] circles as a threat to the security of Armenia." It is regrettable that Pashinyan is falsely accusing Artsakh Armenians of being manipulated by foreigners.

Pashinyan's real problem is not Artsakh's government-in-exile, but the fact that Artsakh Armenians are taking steps to keep the memory of Artsakh alive, which is highly embarrassing for him, since he is the one who gave it away. We have lost Artsakh to the enemy, but we should not erase it from our memory. We have an obligation not only to remember Artsakh, but transmit the dream of returning to Artsakh to the next generation. This is critical because if future generations do not know that Artsakh is an Armenian land, when the opportunity presents itself for its liberation, they will not take advantage of it, thus losing Artsakh forever, not because of what the enemy has done, but because of our own inaction.

In the meantime, we can only regret that Armenia's Prime Minister, wittingly or unwittingly, is doing Pres. Aliyev's bidding by trying to suppress even the memory and dream of Artsakh. Furthermore, it will be shameful if Pashinyan, acting on his threats, were to order the arrest of Artsakh leaders in Armenia, thus joining Baku in holding Artsakh leaders as captives.

With each passing day, Pashinyan is intensifying his anti-Armenian actions. How long will Armenians in Armenia and the Diaspora remain silent in the face of such self-defeating actions? When will Armenians wake up from their slumber, say 'enough is enough' and find a new competent leader to lead the nation out of this quagmire? Contrary to Pashinyan's contention, Artsakh is not a closed issue. Armenians should not continue to sit with their arms folded and watch Armenia gradually disappear because of the misdeeds of one man!

Finally, it would be shameful if Shahramanyan and other Artsakh officials were to be forced by Pashinyan to leave Armenia and relocate their government-in-exile to a foreign country.

from previous page

bright flame of Armenian Christianity — adopted as a religion by Armenia in 301 AD, the very first nation to do so — be extinguished in the murderous days lying ahead?

Despite the signs of impending disaster, could my grandfather ever have imagined the incredible scope of the atrocities which were to come? That the region would be known as "The Slaughterhouse Province" following the descriptions of US Consul Leslie Davis who referred to "what is probably the most terrible tragedy that has ever befallen any people in the history of the world?"

Did my grandfather know that he would never see his wife or children again? Did he think that they too would soon be rounded up? Was he heartbroken when his son tried to visit him in the church but was denied access and was only able to converse by shouting over the din. Did they realize that this was the last time they would ever hear each other's voice?

I wonder if my grandfather and his fellow prisoners, outnumbered, disarmed and deceived, realized, after their protests, resistance and a short-lived escape by several of them, that they would soon be marched — roped together in groups of 10 — to the nearby Arpa Talatsee Valley before dawn, where they would be executed by machine gun fire?

Did he ever imagine in spite of the killings which were to follow and which would eventually bring forth a new word — genocide — that his son, my father, Nigoghos, through his resourcefulness, courage, and the kindness of others, would escape, survive a perilous trip through the desert? That he would find his way to a Danish orphanage in Aleppo only to be found by his father's friends and the benevolence of other former villagers and come to America?

Could my grandfather ever have imag-

ined that not only would the Armenian Church survive the Genocide but thrive and prosper throughout a far-flung Diaspora?

In his darkest hours, could my grandfather Garabed have imagined that he would have a grandson, Garabed, my late brother, who would become an ordained deacon in

the Armenian Church in America?

I wonder

Did he fear that he and his fellow villagers would be forgotten and erased from human memory? Was there a way for him to believe that in a century he and the others who had perished would be elevated to

martyrdom by the Armenian Church?

Could he have thought, during that bleak time, that the Armenian culture and religion would not perish but rather that his martyrdom and sacrifice and that of the countless others who gave their lives, would ultimately inspire future Armenians to cherish their heritage, culture and religion with a zeal and passion never possibly imagined?

Could he have imagined, after all of the countless words spoken in condemnation of that horrible time, that genocide would continue over and over again in the coming decades: even that future ethnic Armenians would continue to experience genocide and ethnic cleansing in a region called Artsakh some 109 years later.

And would he have despaired to think that today as in 1915, the world would continue to look on impassively, ignoring the barbarity and savagery, without taking meaningful action to stop the atrocities and desecration?

But most of all, could he have realized and would he have been proud that future generations of Armenians would gather all over the world in April each year to commemorate that tragic time more than one hundred years ago? That they would urge and plead with people of all nations to respect the sanctity of human life and the need to forever remember the inhumanity and shame of genocide.

In those dark and forlorn days, did my grandfather and the other Martyrs know that they would always inspire their descendants and never be forgotten?

I wonder.

(Harry Mazadoorian is a retired attorney, arbitrator and mediator. He is the son of Armenian Genocide survivors, the late Yegsa and Nigoghos Mazadoorian. Three of his grandparents perished in the Genocide. He wrote this article based upon a family history compiled by his late brother Deacon Garabed, Charles, Mazadoorian.)



Soorp Nigoghos Church in Ichme



Holy Week Events at St. John Church of Milwaukee

By David Lührssen

MILWAUKEE — The Milwaukee Armenian community began its celebration of Holy Week on Sunday, March 24, with the Opening of the Doors (Turun-Patsek), marking the end of the Lenten closed curtain season in the church sanctuary. Following the Palm Sunday liturgy, parishioners gathered in the church hall for St. John's annual Palm Sunday brunch, a fundraiser prepared by Sunday School teachers and parents.

For the first time in memory, St. John observed the full Holy Week schedule, including the Commemoration of the Ten Maidens on Tuesday, March 26. Ten young girls from the community took part in the evening service. As Rev. Guregh Hambarzumyan explained in his short homily, the ancient rite is a unique treasure of the Armenian Church commemorating Jesus' parable of the five wise and the five foolish bridesmaids; the wise women came with oil in their lamps, the oil symbolizing the Holy Spirit and the love and mercy enacted in their lives that prepared them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The Commemoration of the Ten Maidens occurs during

Holy Week to remind the faithful that only the bridesmaids who showed love and mercy were ready to meet the parable's bridegroom, meaning Jesus.

On Thursday, March 28, as in previous



Rev. Guregh Hambarzumyan and other participants in the Washing of the Feet ceremony

years, Rev. Hambarzumyan conducted the Washing of the Feet. Twelve boys came forward to the altar to have their feet washed in a rite, observed by Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, that re-

enacts an event from the first Holy Week when Jesus, the Son of God, went to his knees and washed the feet of his disciples. As Der Guregh said in remarks afterward, it was not only a gesture of humility from

God Himself, but a reminder that an essential aspect of Christianity is service—to God and each other. Following the Washing of the Feet, the Vigil (Khavarium), commemorating Jesus's betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, was conducted with Rev. Fr. Sahag Kashian assisting.

The Rite of Burial (Gark Taghman) was performed on Holy Friday, March 29, with the Tomb of Christ (Kerezman) covered in flowers, representing life. On the evening of Saturday, March 30, the Prophesies were read, followed by Badarak.

The ceremonies of Holy Week are meant to remind the faithful of the final days of Jesus and His death on the Cross before his Resurrection on the first Easter Sunday. The Resurrection was commemorated with Easter Badarak performed by Der Guregh on Sunday, March 31, with St. John's former pastor, Rev. Fr. Nareg Keutelian, conducting the choir.

In his sermon, Hambarzumyan quoted from an article on the restoration of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, a project that involved repairing the building's cracked facade and also entirely updating the hidden systems heating and cooling the structure. Dirty stained-glass windows through which sunlight struggled to penetrate were cleaned, allowing light to fill the church once again. Der Guregh compared the work of Jesus in the lives of believers to that renovation. Through the example of his life and sacrifice, humans can be restored to our original likeness with God and are given the possibility of partaking in a New Creation.

Afterward, the St. John community gathered in the culture hall for an Easter lunch prepared by members of the congregation.

TCA Greater New York to Host Serouj Kradjian and Band in Concert

CONCERT, from page 1

Hailing from Canada, with roots in Beirut, Lebanon, Kradjian has composed and arranged over a hundred works that have been performed by symphonies around the world. His educational and musical pursuits have taken him from Vienna, Austria, to Toronto, Canada, to Hanover, Germany.

"My musical influences, from flamenco to Armenian folk music, Rachmaninoff and Liszt to Argentinian tango, Aznavour to Fairouz, Joni Mitchell to Freddie Mercury's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and my original compositions, are evident in this program, so there is something for everyone," said Kradjian.


Having performed around the world for diverse audiences, Kradjian highlights the "level of connection" he makes with his audiences, particularly the strong and rapid one he forges with Armenians.


"When I performed in Yerevan last year, I felt it happening the minute I played the first notes," he said. "Every piece I played thereafter, there was an outpouring of different emotions from the audience; honest, sincere and full of love. This is what it feels like, playing for an Armenian audience."

Kradjian, whose earliest musical influences included Armenian folk music, as well as the songs of Fairouz, Mozart and Liszt, enjoyed improvising in different styles as a child, which coincided with piano lessons, and ultimately "played a role in fusing different musical genres."

"Our Committee is delighted to host Serouj Kradjian and his band, who will no doubt perform a memorable concert filled with an international flavor of music, with a foundation in our Armenian culture," said Hilda Hartounian, Chair of the Tekeyan Cultural Association's Greater New York chapter. "We look forward to welcoming our Armenian American community to this unforgettable evening."

The concert will be held on Saturday, April 20, at 7:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:45 p.m.) at Bergen Community College's Ciccone Theatre, 400 Paramus Rd, Paramus, NJ 07652. Tickets are available here: bit.ly/TCAGNY_Serouj






The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America

Under the auspices of
His Eminence
Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate

"Zvartnots" Cultural Committee
Invites you to



Title:
**What Follows Recognition?
Possibilities of an Armenian Restitution Movement**

Presented by:
Dr. Taner Akçam

Date/Time:
Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

Location:
**Western Diocese of the Armenian Church
3325 N. Glenoaks Blvd., Burbank, CA 91504**

**Free Admission
Coffee & Refreshments**

