



A rendering of what part of the Academic City would look like (copyright gmp)

Academic City Plan Would Dramatically Change Armenian Higher Education and the Face of Yerevan

By **Aram Arkun**
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WATERTOWN — The creation of what is being called Academic City by the government of Armenia is a major plan for the reorganization of institutions of higher education and research in Armenia which will also change the face of Yerevan, if fully realized. It involves the merger of universities to form larger units, to which research institutions will be connected in academic clusters, all of which will move to a new location on the outskirts of the capital. Cours-

es will be offered free for all students there. This complex reform plan has been the topic of much discussion and controversy. The current article is an attempt to present an overview of its main components along with some of the reactions it has evinced. Interviews with Dr. Zhanna Andriasyan, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (henceforth referred to as Ministry of Education for short) since 2022; Stephan Schütz, Executive Partner, and Associate Partner Tobias Keyl at German, Marg and Partners (gmp), the German architectural firm design-

ing Academic City; robotics engineer Tigran Shahverdyan of Gituzh (“Power of Science”), an initiative of businessmen, foundations and associations supporting technology and science in Armenia; and Suren Aloyan, founding president of Dasaran Ed Tech Company (and Gituzh member), were conducted for this purpose. A number of individuals involved in education were consulted who declined to speak on the record, professedly out of concern for preserving good working relations with the Armenian government. see EDUCATION, page 3

The Secret Arms Deal That Cost Putin an Ally

By **Gabriel Gavin**

YEREVAN (Politico.eu) — Belarus delivered advanced weapons to Armenia’s arch enemy even though both countries were supposedly allies in a Russian-led international defense pact, according to leaked documents seen by POLITICO. The cache of files sheds new light on Armenia’s decision this week to announce it will be leaving the military alliance, a dramatic turn that will weaken Russian President Vladimir Putin’s authority with former Soviet nations.

Armenia is now on the verge of making a historic tilt toward the West, increasingly looking toward Europe and NATO for protection, after decades in which the former Soviet republic relied on Moscow. Armenia has been locked in a bitter conflict with Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus region, at the strategic junction between Asia and Europe, frequently boiling over into full-scale war. The decision by Belarus — a staunch ally of Russia — to supply advanced military hardware to Azerbaijan between 2018 and 2022, giving it the upper hand in a spate of wars with its long-standing rival, will have been regarded as a bitter betrayal by Armenia. Both Belarus and Armenia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a post-Soviet military alliance led by Moscow and formed in 2002. Theoretically, members are obliged to defend each other if attacked. Azerbaijan quit a precursor to the bloc in 1999. see BELARUS, page 20

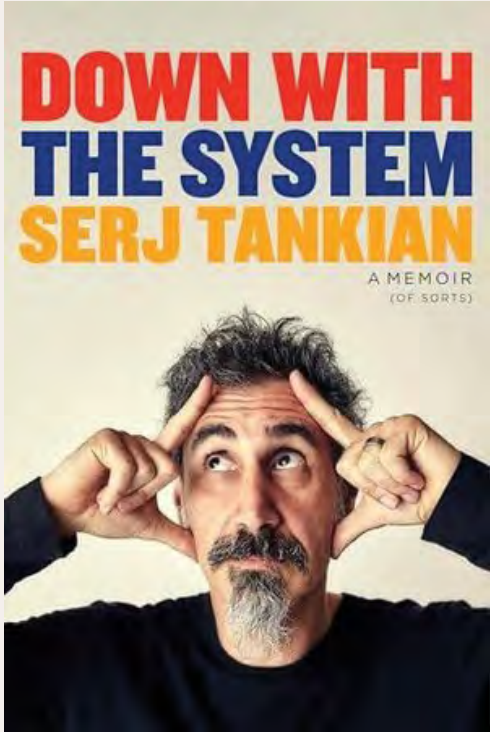
12 More Indicted Over Anti-government Protests

By **Gayane Saribekian**

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Amid strong criticism from human rights groups, Armenian authorities have brought criminal charges against 12 people in connection with June 12’s clashes in Yerevan between riot police and protesters demanding Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s resignation. Eight of them were remanded in pre-trial custody and two others were placed under house arrest by courts over the weekend. The Investigative Committee said on Monday, June 17, that one of the suspects was charged with participating in “mass disturbances.” The others are facing accusations of “hooliganism committed in a group” against police see INDICTMENTS, page 20



A protester was injured by a stun grenade thrown by riot police, Yerevan, June 12, 2024.



Serj Tankian Has Something to Say

By **Alin K. Gregorian**
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — Serj Tankian is a mass of wonderful contradictions: a screaming heavy metal singer who can croon delicate Armenian folk songs tenderly and a rock god in a genre not known for political or egalitarian stands who has made it his mission to spread the word about the Armenian Genocide as well as other horrors across the world. In a business known for its heavy toll on the artistic soul, he is a proponent of spirituality. He hangs out at Los Angeles Armenian schools AND with legendary music producer Rick Rubin. He has been incredibly successful with his band, System of a Down (SOAD) and as a solo artist, painter, soundtrack composer, record label starter and poet. He has sold around 40 million records and won awards and global acclaim. And he also sells Armenian coffee. He is a busy man. His new book, *Down with the System: A Memoir (of Sorts)*, released by Hachette Books in May, is climbing the *New York Times* bestseller list. (See accompanying review by Christopher Atamian on page 15.) see TANKIAN, page 14

INDIA
Two Armenians Become Vice-champions in U20 Chess Tournament
Page 2



BOSTON
Boston Globe’s Anush Elbakyan wins record 8th Emmy Award
Page 9



MIRROR-SPECTATOR ANNUAL SUMMER VACATION
The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will close for its annual two-week vacation in early July. The last issue before the vacation will be that of June 29. The first issue back will be that of July 20. Enjoy a safe and healthy summer.



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Pashinyan Defends Demarcation at Meeting With Border Residents

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan on Sunday, June 16, met with the residents of the border village of Shikahogh in Armenia's southern Syunik province.

Pashinyan maintained it was “necessary” to demarcate the border, and inquired about the problems and needs of the village.

“Border demarcation is necessary. As we do in Voskepar (a village in the northern Tavush province): we install barbed wire at demarcated areas, neither people nor animals can cross it,” Pashinyan said.

Pashinyan also spoke about the need to demarcate the border in the village of Nerkin Hand.

Estonian Ambassador Praises Ties with Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — National Assembly Chairman Alen Simonyan, on June 18, received the Ambassador of Estonia to Armenia Riina Kaljurand (residence in Tbilisi), who is completing her diplomatic mission in Armenia.

Simonyan thanked her for her effective work and cooperation.

“Thank you for your invaluable contribution, efforts and dedication in the development of Armenian-Estonian relations. You can always consider Armenia as a country that shares the same value system with Estonia and the EU,” said Simonyan.

Kaljurand noted that cooperation with colleagues was high during her four years of mission in Armenia. She reaffirmed Estonia's readiness to support Armenia in ongoing reforms and to strengthen relations with the EU.

“I will always stand by Armenia's side,” said Kaljurand.

Malta Ambassador Presents Credentials

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On June 18, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Paruyr Hovhannissyan received Giovanni Miceli, the newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Malta to the Republic of Armenia (residence in Valletta) on the occasion of handing over a copy of his credentials, the foreign ministry said in a readout.

According to the source, the Deputy Foreign Minister congratulated Ambassador Miceli and wished him fruitful work in new position. Deputy Minister Paruyr Hovhannissyan expressed confidence that the Ambassador will spare no effort to further develop and deepen relations between Armenia and Malta.

During the meeting, the interlocutors touched upon the range of issues related to both bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including the deepening of the Armenia-EU partnership. The expansion of cooperation in areas of mutual interest was highlighted.

Medical Report Details Use of Fish Skin Graft on Combat Burn Injuries During 2020 Karabakh War

By Lucas Karamanoukian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

A recent medical report published in the journal *Military Medicine* documents the successful use of a novel fish skin graft to treat combatants during the 2020 Karabakh War. Dr. Foad Reda, the plastic surgeon and lead author of the report, states that the temporary burn dressings were “very much comparable to human skin” in temporizing combat burn injuries.

According to the study authors, the fish skin grafts were provided on an emergen-

ferred for higher level-of-care to hospitals in the Republic of Armenia. The fish-derived skin grafts were used to help cover exposed wounds and temporize wound coverage prior to definitive reconstructive surgery.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War represented an unprovoked attack on the sovereignty of the Artsakh Republic and the Republic of Armenia by Azerbaijan. With disregard to the peaceful civilian population in Artsakh, Azerbaijan launched an unprecedented military advancement using lethal drone attacks on civilian and military

ferocity of the attacks with white phosphorus agents simply overwhelmed the trauma infrastructure.”

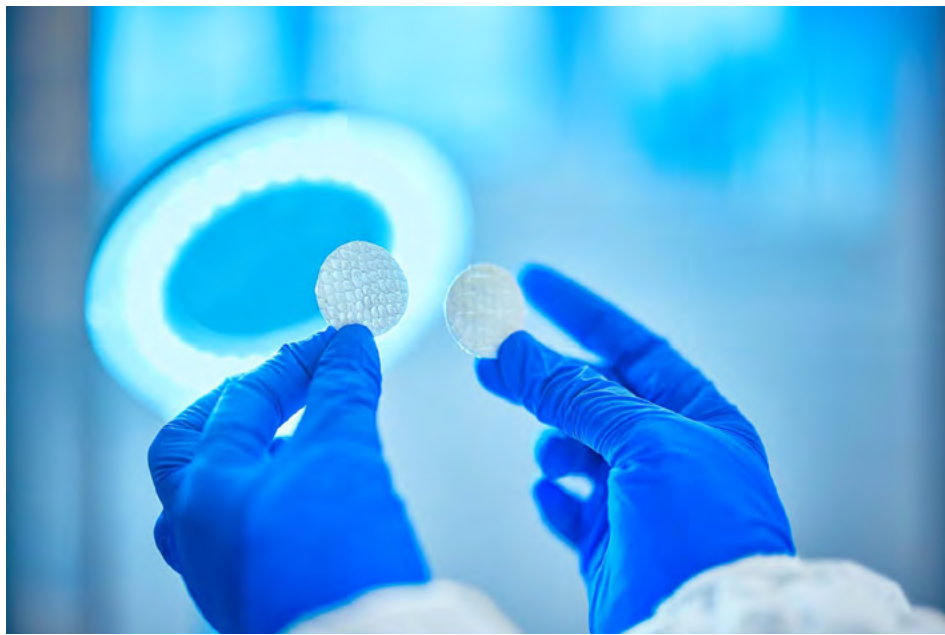
Among the three cases presented by the authors, one soldier was documented to have sustained a full body burn caused by white phosphorus exposure. Evidence collected after de-escalation of the conflict pointed to the indiscriminate use of white phosphorous compounds by Azerbaijan, a chemical compound that can produce debilitating and fatal chemical burns.

Burn injuries were a significant concern during the 2020 Karabakh War, resulting from chemical, thermal, and explosive damage to the skin. Plastic surgeon Dr. Gayane Mkhitarian, a reconstructive microsurgeon in Armenia, notes that “white phosphorus burns accounted for a large number of casualties in both inpatient and outpatient medical wards in Armenia.”

“Fish skin grafts represent a new burn injury resource for deployment in war zones that lack the obligatory requirements of human-derived or pig-skin substitutes,” notes Artsakh plastic surgeon Dr. Igor Zakharyan. Dr. Zakharyan remained Chief of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Central Republic Hospital in Stepanakert throughout the 2020 war.

The use of temporary fish skin grafts in Armenia during the war represents a novel technique for temporary coverage of burn combat injuries. The deployment of the fish skin graft proved effective in stabilizing patients with significant burn injuries until complete reconstruction was scheduled. This technique helps control infection rates in patients waiting for future reconstruction, especially when there is a continuous inflow of combatant injuries.

Based on the observations noted with fish skin graft on combat injuries in Armenia during the 2020 Karabakh War, the authors of the medical report foresee the use of this novel burn wound skin graft among field hospitals in conflict zones throughout the world.



The Kerecis graft material made from fish skins

cy basis by Kerecis, an Icelandic company that originally patented the acellular burn dressing. In conjunction with the Armenian government, Kerecis further deployed two physicians (Dr. Hilmar Kjartans and Dr. Steven Jefferey) to deliver and train Armenian surgeons on the use of the fish skin graft.

The authors described the use of fish skin grafts on three Armenian combatants that were injured as a result of either blast or explosion injuries in Artsakh and trans-

infrastructure along the entire contact-line.

The ensuing casualties among the Armenian military and civilian population overwhelmed the military field triage units and hospital systems in Artsakh and Armenia.

“In our visits to Artsakh Republic, we found the reconstructive surgeons and trauma units at Stepanakert Hospital to be well-equipped, trained, and extremely capable,” noted US surgeons Drs. Raffy Karamanoukian and Hratch Karamanoukian. “The unfortunate part was that the

Two Armenians Become Vice-champions Of World in U20 Chess Tournament

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — With no defeats, Mariam Mkrtchyan ended up winning the silver medal in the World Chess Championship that was taking place in India in the first two weeks of June. On June 13, the chess masters played their final round of the games.

One of Armenia's top chess players, Mkrtchyan defeated India's Rakshit Ravi. This was her 8th victory at the tournament; in the other three games, she tied. However, India's Divya Deshmukh gained nine victories, including on June 16 a somewhat expected success against Bulgaria's Beloslava Krasteva. As a result, Miriam became the vice-champion of the world, and Divya won the gold. ChessBase India's YouTube channel covered the awarding ceremony that included videos of Mkrtchyan.

The Open Tournament, a pinnacle of men's chess championship, saw two Armenians in promising positions before the final round: Mamikon Gharibian was leading, closely followed by a talented chess play-



The U20 winners (Courtesy of Chessbase India)

er from Kazakhstan, Nogerbek Kazybek. Emin Ohanyan was in the third position. Despite a setback in the final round, where Gharibian lost to Nogerbek and dropped to the fourth place, Ohanyan's strategic moves and quick thinking propelled him to the second place. In a swift 40-moves game against a player from the Philippines, Oha-

nyan seized his opponent's queen, leading to the latter's resignation. Only tie-breaks prevented Ohanyan from claiming the gold, as both he and the Kazak player had amassed the same number of 8.5 points. Rudik Makarian of Russia secured the 8th position, while Armenia's Arsen Davytan finished 36th.



ARMENIA

Academic City Plan Would Dramatically Change Armenian Higher Education and the Face of Yerevan

EDUCATION, from page 1

The motivation for the aforementioned reforms is the crisis being experienced by higher education and research in Armenia. According to a recent report by the Armenian Center for Socio-economic Studies (ACSES), the number of university students has declined 21 percent between 2013 and 2023 (from 100,854 to 79,513), while the rate of inclusion in higher education increased from 42% to 60%, leading to less selectivity. Despite increases in gov-



Minister Zhanna Andreasyan speaking about the master plan of Academic City at the Matenadaran in Yerevan on April 12, 2024 (photo courtesy Academic City Armenia Facebook site)

ernment spending on education in recent years, the number of scholars and researchers in Armenia are also on the decrease while Armenia’s universities generally are not highly ranked in international comparisons.

Andreasyan declared that discussions about reforming Armenia’s institutions of higher learning have been taking place for at least over a decade, even during prior regimes, including concerning combining institutions of higher learning to create larger universities, and with advice from international organizations.

The current plan for Academic City was first presented in 2021 by the government as a general idea, and then much more developed in the state plan for the strengthening of education until 2030. This plan was confirmed by the Armenian National Assembly at the end of 2022. Things became more concrete in 2023: in March, the government established an action plan with deadlines and concrete tasks to be done per year; in April, the Academic City Foundation was established to carry out this plan; in mid-October, the government cabinet approved the concept or vision of the Academic City; and a week later, a contract was signed with gmp for the design. This year, a preliminary draft of the master plan for the city was unveiled to the public at the end of January, and a more worked out version will be ready next month.

The government foresees the work to be done in three stages: the planning or designing stage, which began in October 2023 and will finish in September 2025, construction, from 2025 to the end of 2029, and then initial use with one or two clusters of academic institutions from 2030.

Educational and Administrative Issues

Andreasyan said that one issue the Academic City project addresses was the existence of some 60 institutions of higher learning in Armenia, which she said was too many considering the student population, while many were not providing education up to international standards. This large number also means paying for a large number of educational administrators or bureaucrats. Instead, the government plans to merge many of the state universities and institutions into up to 8 large institutions.

She said, “Our approach is to consolidate our resources, human resources, infrastructure, and financial, so that our institutions of higher learning compete not just with themselves – as in my opinion, in the contemporary world this would be a bit meaningless – but on an international level be competitive with institutions of higher education of other countries.... In that sense, we have a very important goal: that at least four appear in the list of ratings of the top 500 world [higher education] institutions.” These are lists like the Times Educational Rating or the Shanghai Ranking.

A second issue according to Andreasyan is that “with

us, higher education and research are not connected to one another, or are little connected...Contemporary higher education without research cannot be considered valuable.” To encourage research further, she said that the state has in recent years substantially increased its funding, with a 200 percent increase compared to the budget in 2018. Perhaps for this reason, she related, starting in 2022 there was an increase in researchers or scholars in Armenia, not a decrease as in the past. Much of the state funding is for grants for collaborative projects.

A third matter, connected primarily to institutions involved in technology, is how to connect research to practical results for the economy. Andreasyan said, “One of the chief issues that we are trying to solve for technological universities is the commercialization of knowledge.”

A fourth related concern is, she said, the aging of current scholars and researchers. New young scholars must be produced to ensure continuity of research and education. The union of research institutes and universities in Academic City can help attract new students and elevate the level of scholarship and research, with modern laboratories and an appropriate environment for student life. She said that if Armenian higher education is competitive internationally it would attract students from other countries as well as Armenians in all fields of study. Moreover, she said, having

the infrastructure in one place, where both education and research take place, will be more productive for the state in terms of expenses.

To help increase the quality of education and the number of students, student dormitories, areas for lecturers and researchers, and a modern infrastructure will be created. She said, “By higher education, we also understand a student experience.” Today, she said, there are universities in Armenia “where the students open the doors and practically find themselves in a market.” In Academic City, there will be places for student entertainment, libraries, parks and places for studying.

Location

Andreasyan said that the original city plan for Yerevan by architect Aleksandr Tamanyan envisioned a suitable environment for universities and other such institutions in the heart of the city, but that the growth of Yerevan no longer allowed the realization of his ideas. The desire to create a more suitable environment for learning with modern facilities led to the plan of creating a new city for universities and scholarship.

Initially in 2022, the government announced that Academic City would be built in the area of Ashtarak, which is 13 km. northwest of Yerevan in Aragatsotn Province. However, it was decided in 2023 to move the location closer to Yerevan. Currently it is planned to be built adjacent to the 17th district of Yerevan and on the site of the HayFilm Studio, northwest of the city’s center. An-

dreasyan explained that the reason for the change is that only 80 hectares of land was available next to Ashtarak, whereas the current space is much larger, 680 hectares. She said, “What is important is that the great majority of this territory consists of state and municipal land, not private, so we will not have any issues with initiating anything on these properties.”

This location also will be easier in terms of accessibility from Yerevan. At present, there is a railway freight line that goes to this location, but the government plans to turn it also into a commuter line, which after improvements will reach Academic City from the capital in roughly 20 minutes. A north-south highway passes through this location, and Andreasyan said that several major roads will be added to allow easy entry into Yerevan. There is the possibility in the future for an extension of the metro to Academic City.

Nearby areas of Yerevan are also rapidly developing, she said. A little bit to the south of the Academic City, one of the largest new quarters of Yerevan, the Defanse Housing quarter (the name is evidently based on the La Défense business district immediately to the west of Paris, France) is currently being built by a private company, potentially for up to 45,000 residents. Andreasyan noted that the Armenian government also has a plan to move government buildings for various ministries out of the center of Yerevan, and the Ajapnyak District is being considered as a suitable location. Andreasyan said, “When experts came from German to study Yerevan’s urban development, it became clear that great changes are taking place and the area in which the Academic City will be located is going to become very important from the point of view of Yerevan too, in terms of urban development.”

When asked what would happen to universities in other parts of Armenia or whether any other “academic cities” could be constructed, Andreasyan replied that there will only be one Academic City. Education in the provinces at present, she said, is in a disorderly state, as some people attend institutions of higher education there whereas the education they require could be given at a different level. A reorganization is necessary after further study.

One thing was clear to Andreasyan: “We want to greatly strengthen vocational education in all provinces, which we think should be present in all provinces and places of large population. This is certainly in our plans.” The currently operating provincial universities and other institutions of higher education will continue to operate until further discussion, she said.

Combining of Universities and the Role of the Academy of Sciences

Andreasyan said that there would be six primary clusters created in which individual universities and institutions would be united: medical, officer or military (including emergency or crisis training), technological (including agrarian as well as high tech), arts, classical (fundamental knowledge), and educational or pedagogical. She gave as

continued on next page



Rendering of a bird’s eye view of Academic City (copyright gmp)



ARMENIA

Academic City Plan Would Dramatically Change Armenian Higher Education

from previous page

an example of a model for the arts, University of the Arts London, which is a union of six colleges, each retaining its uniqueness, into one university benefiting from co-operating under one umbrella. Andreasyan said, “I think that we will go in a similar direction, so that each of our institutions of higher learning will preserve the uniqueness and specifics of its educational programs, but also be able to take advantage of all the possibilities of working together, and also think about educational plans which demand joint work.”

Furthermore, each Armenian cluster is going to have at least one international partner. The University of the Arts is one, while for the technology cluster, it is the Technical University of Munich, which is composed of a matrix of 7 schools and 5 integrative research institutes.

Consultations have been ongoing with some American universities too, such as the California Institute of Technology, and organizations such as the Armenian Society of Fellows, which Andreasyan said had made very good proposals concerning the concept of Academic City, especially about technological issues. Andreasyan said, “We are ready to include all those who have ability and resources in this sphere, and express definite interest, in our discussions with great happiness.”

The role of the Armenian Academy of Sciences will also change, as it no longer is connected to the broader network that existed in Soviet times. Its institutes are not primarily teaching bodies like the universities. Andreasyan said, “We believe we will continue to have the Academy as an expert milieu, which provides very important advice on all kinds of different issues, but in a financial and administrative sense, I believe they will be united with the institutions of higher education and administratively will become a part of those integrated structures. We will not have the need for the financial and administrative functions of the Academy, but definitely we will need the expert opinion of the Academy, and the Academy will be also a place for the careers and work of academics.”

Andreasyan to a degree viewed it as like think tanks or research institutions in the West where distinguished emeritus professors, scholars and experts continued to work on the progress and dissemination of knowledge and provide consultation.

Input is being sought from the institutions involved in these changes. In July 2023, the Ministry of Education announced that as part of the process of combining and thus enlarging institutions of higher learning, as well as the uniting of scientific research organizations, it invited all institutions of higher learning and scientific research organizations to present its own ideas on this process by February 15, 2024. Andreasyan said that proposals were received from 12 state institutions of higher learning and 36 organizations.

The ministry then created working groups including all state institutions of higher learning and research organizations to further discuss the process. She said, “This means that we imagine that this work from the beginning will be participatory, transparent and cooperative. Everybody accepts that we have very serious issues in our higher education and we need fundamental change. Now we are going to find together the most correct ways to do this.”

Teaching and Staff

Andreasyan said that “the content of educational programs is completely in the realm of academic autonomy of the institutions of higher learning.” The government’s most important tool to affect change is to require a range of standards as part of its educational plan, but, she emphasized, “the contents [of curricula] and the pedagogical approaches are the realm of the institutions of higher learning, and I find it is wrong if the government regulates that field. I think that this is the most direct matter of academic autonomy, to have freedom to choose methods, to choose the ways, to secure the results that are necessary.”

Similarly as far as the qualifications of the teaching staff are concerned, Andreasyan said, “I especially stress

that certification will be done in the institutions of higher learning. The state will not intervene at all. The institutions of higher learning will decide whether these people can ensure the result which they as institutions of higher learning desire in a professional sense.”

Change has already begun internally. Andreasyan said, “I am very happy that many institutions of higher learning, seeing the goal that they must appear in the ranks of the [international] rating systems, already have taken active steps to raise their level of educational quality, make structural changes, and reexamine the list of their specializations. I believe they evaluate their lecturers internally, and of course this is a very important process which we only encourage.”



Prime Minister Pashinyan, Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister Arayik Harutyunyan, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Vahram Dumanyan, head of the Cadastre Committee Suren Tovmasyan visit the Institute for Physical research of the National Academy of Sciences in Ashtarak in September 2022 to discuss the plan for Academic City in Ashtarak (photo primeminister.am)

When the unification of universities and institutions take place, Andreasyan said retraining and assistance will be made available to faculty.

Private and International Universities

In a March 16, 2024 speech, Prime Minister Pashinyan declared that in the long term, no institutions of higher learning should remain in Yerevan, and all such institutions, whether state, foreign or private, should only operate in the Academic City.

Andreasyan explained that Pashinyan meant that if such institutions need new buildings, they can henceforth only be built in Academic City and not in Yerevan. Secondly, eventually such an enticing and advantageous environment will be created in Academic City that institutions according to their own desire will wish to move there to benefit from the new structures.

She said that, for example, the government has already spoken with the American University of Armenia (AUA) and the French University in Armenia (UFAR) about this, and that this rule about no new buildings in Yerevan applies to them. A new working commission with representatives of international or foreign state universities is being formed, she said, in order to find solutions which neither harm the activities of these institutions nor turn this important state plan problematical.

Rector of the Armenian-Russian (Slavonakan) University Edvard Sandoyan declared in a May 12 interview on ILurer.am that the situation has not been discussed yet with the Russian side, but the idea seemed promising. However, he felt his university, which taught many different subjects, would only benefit from joining the technology cluster in the Academic City. In the same interview, a statement from the American University of Armenia (AUA) was presented which conveyed its willingness to establish a presence in Academic City but similarly stressed that “moving all of AUA’s operations to the Academic City is neither desirable nor possible. We believe that the decision to continue to build and grow in Yerevan on [the] one hand, and establish a presence in the Academic City on the other hand, should not be dichotomous or coerced in any way.”

Who Will Live There and How?

Few students from poor families at present receive higher education in Armenia. Andreasyan declared that the government considers higher education an important tool to overcoming poverty. Consequently, no students at

the Academic City will have to pay for courses, she said. Students whose families are in the provinces will not have to pay for dormitories either.

The final approach for student support concerning living expenses such as cafeterias or dormitories is still being finalized, but Andreasyan said that there is one principle already accepted, “that no good student should remain without education due to social or financial reasons. Whoever does not have the means will have the possibility of receiving full assistance.”

Other students with means will, however, be charged as psychological motivation. Andreasyan noted, “Unfortunately, there is such a thing that when a person pays nothing, it seems he does not value it. What is most important is to find the correct schema for motivation, so that education is both attainable and also valued.”

Andreasyan said that arrangements will be made for living quarters for lecturers at the Academic City but the decision of where to live will be left to individual lecturers. She said that some may prefer to commute from homes in Yerevan, since it will not be that difficult.

She said that it has already been announced that the salaries of lecturers will also be significantly increased, at least doubling. Lecturers will also have the possibility of receiving further financial assistance in the case of need. This presumably will mean make life easier for those who had to work several jobs in Yerevan to support their families.

Gmp’s Master Plan

The government chose Gerkan, Marg and Partners to develop the master plan for Academic City. It will be assisted by the National Architectural Construction University of Armenia. Andreasyan said that gmp is one of the most respected organizations in its field, and there is no organization with similar experience in Armenia. They have the experience of combining different cultural contexts in various parts of the world. She said that they were chosen also in part because they have the right of authorship or copyright to certain projects, such as a multifunctional concert hall.

Gmp has done very largescale projects, such as the design of the high-tech Chengdu Future City in southwest China, Lingang New City, a satellite harbor city for Shanghai, Zhanjiang Science City (also near Shanghai), as well as academic projects, such as the Shenzhen School of Medicine, which is the size of one of the Armenian clusters.

Andreasyan added that gmp was given a contract only for the development of the main design because the government had not already defined the conditions and contents of Academic City sufficiently to create a competition. After the preparation of the full master plan, all remaining work will be conducted through competitions, she said.

Stephan Schütz related how the initial connection with his company occurred: “The beginning was that the Prime Minister [Nikol Pashinyan] visited a concert hall [in February 2023] which we completed in Munich. He was struck by this concert hall because it was completely different, compared to many others. It is a modular concert hall.” Pashinyan asked the Armenian ambassador in Berlin to contact the architect and meet with him. Afterwards, Pashinyan himself met with Schütz and told him that the Armenian concert hall was to be built in an academic city. Keyl added that Pashinyan later told him that he was impressed about how the concert hall also worked to inspire community activity, as a library and a site for small workshops.

Schütz found out that there was no master plan for this city and proposed to visit the site near Yerevan.

After the visit, they all agreed that “the first step is to develop a major understanding of what is to be built there, what is the Academic City, and what is the future of higher education [in Armenia].” Before developing a master plan, many workshops were held and the gmp representatives asked a lot of questions in order to learn more about local conditions. Gmp invited Armenian government representatives to come to Germany to look at existing academic cities or university campuses there.

The Armenian government summarized all its potential demands in terms of the number of studies, faculties, and special buildings (these include a national stadium).

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Stephan Schütz (photo courtesy gmp)



ARMENIA



A meeting of the rectors or leaders of international institutions of higher education with Minister Zhanna Andreasyan and her staff to discuss Academic City in March 2024 (photo Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport)

from previous page

It wanted, as did gmp, a place which, Schütz said, would be a vision of life in an academic way.

Keyl pointed out that the process of developing the vision for a master plan and understanding who need to be involved in the process in order to obtain their support was quite different than how academic cities were created in Qatar, Dubai and many other places. There, a master plan was designed that might technically work perfectly but not reflect the interests of the people who would use the site. To bring all the disparate universities and institutes together to generate cooperation it is necessary first to discuss with the people working in them. He added that there also must be a certain flexibility for future development, as the process in Armenia could last from 10 to 30 years and nobody can know what changes will take place during this period.

Schütz said that his firm was considering what sort of architectural language to create for the whole complex, as it should not just be a campus that could be built in Germany or the US but should show an Armenian character.

Timeline

In practice, Keyl related, gmp defined a timeline with major steps and workshops with stakeholders focusing on specific topics. One workshop, for example, included a select group of some 15 students from different universities majoring in different fields, discussing what they would like in a modern university city, and a separate workshop with professors. There were also larger presentations before groups of several hundred, to which all faculty were invited.

Polling of larger numbers was not done because it was generally too technically demanding, Keyl said, but once a limited poll with a select group of participants was done concerning goals of sustainability. Parallel to the various meetings with stakeholders, discussions continued with the Ministry of Education and even the prime minister.

The Armenian government has encouraged the gmp architects, Keyl said, to give public speeches explaining what they are doing, to seek such interactions and make the process as transparent as possible.

Aside from academic planning, there is much city planning, laws and regulations that must be determined. After the completion of the initial master plan or vision plan, complete with drawings, it will take between half a year to one year to recheck many factors and rework the plan by integrating traffic, infrastructure, landscape design, and sustainability design, Schütz said. Only then can the following phase of planning be conducted, which will concern individual plots and building plans for clusters or individual buildings. This will take one to one and a half years, he continued.

Early next year the preparation of roads and the site will begin that will eventually allow the architectural construction, Keyl said. Meanwhile, Schütz said, a lot of other preparatory work is already proceeding concerning electricity, water, and other infrastructure.

Schütz said that the actual construction will be done through other companies, but gmp hopes to design and

plan at least some of the major buildings, though this will be determined through competitions, and other planners will also be involved in the process.

The concept plan accepted by the government last October envisions four clusters moving to Academic City in the first phase, followed by the classical and medical clusters later. By 2030, Schütz said, the expectation is to have at least one cluster built, which will include the performing arts center with a concert hall, together with all necessary infrastructure, including the railway station, roads, and landscaping. He said that this is realistic to accomplish in 6 years, whereas the concert hall in Munich took only three years, because it had infrastructure already.

In a presentation at the Matenadaran (which incidentally is not included as part of Academic City) on April 12, 2024 to representatives of institutions of higher education and the press, Keyl said that he hoped the first institutional of higher learning can move to the Academic City in 5-7 years, while the completion of Academic City could take 30-50 years.

Meanwhile, a draft of a new law on higher education and science is being prepared through the Ministry of Education which will include a section on the Academic City project and its functioning. The draft of this law will be shared with the state institutions of higher learning and wide swathes of the public, Andreasyan said. Once passed by the National Assembly, it would regulate the Academic City but until then, the state will continue its current financing of the institutions of higher learning and research.

Budget

Andreasyan said that the cost for the Academic City project will be quite large. She said that for the next year, up to \$3 billion was budgeted by the state for the Academic City, which is primarily for design and planning work. The 2025-27 state budget proposal already includes these initial expenses.

Afterwards, construction works will be put up for competitive bidding, and depending on the winning bids, the budget for the next stage of construction will be formulated. As noted above, all construction will not begin at the same time, but will be done in a phased manner.

When asked how much the work conducted until 2030 would cost, Schütz merely said that it is too early to provide such information, since only after the plans have been set can cost estimates be made.

The total cost of Academic City till completion has not been estimated publicly by the government, and concerns have been raised about whether the state can afford it. One argument made in the media against the Academic City project is this undoubtedly great and still largely unknown cost when Armenia has many other urgent needs, such as bolstering its defense or helping Artsakh refugees. Andreasyan responded that while these are indeed important matters for which the government is making great efforts, "It is also important for our country to have an agenda of progress, and at no time diverge from that agenda of progress." She gave the example of rais-

ing educational standards during the period of the Covid pandemic and the 2020 Artsakh war, during which time the children from Artsakh were all being educated in Armenia. She added, "Let us not forget also that in reality, the significance of the system of education, the meaning of scientific research, is also the key to the defense of the country and the solution to social issues of the country."

Keyl remarked that the move should be viewed as an investment in the future of Armenia. Secondly, the original locations of the universities in the center of Yerevan will either be sold for profit or operated by the Ministry of Education in a way to generate income. While in the first few years the scale of this will not compare to expenses, eventually it will grow and pay it all back within one or two generations' time, Keyl said.

Andreasyan said that there would be separate plans created for the management of the buildings and property in the center of Yerevan, and the revenues received from that will be used for higher education and Academic City.

There are also talks with the European Union and other institutions concerning possible financial support for Academic City, Schütz added.

Aloyan said he thought there should be more public discussion of the great cost of Academic City. Since ultimately it would be a major component of the state budget that Armenian citizens would be responsible for, he said that even non-specialists in education and research should have a voice in decision-making.

Aloyan wondered what might happen to Academic City if the current government changed and a new regime decided against continuing the project. He said that in this light, the current prohibition on expansion in Yerevan proper of higher educational institutes, would not be logical. Furthermore, even if Academic City progresses as projected, institutions would be at the earliest able to move to Academic City by the end of 2029, so this prohibition would leave a five-year gap in their progress.

Conservatory

There has been an outcry among artists against moving the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan to Academic City from its current location, where it contributes to the cultural life of the capital city and benefits from close proximity to the National Opera and Ballet Theater, Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall with the National Philharmonic Orchestra, and various other institutions and schools of



Tobias Keyl, at left of podium, with Sargis Hayotsyan, president of the Committee on Higher Education and Science of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport at the Matenadaran, April 12, 2024 (photo Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport)

music. Both lecturers and students participate in the work of these other institutions, thus obtaining real world experience and also additional pay. Its alumni have achieved success in globally prestigious institutions like the Metropolitan Opera of New York, La Scala, etc., and some of them have spoken out against the move. In March, 2024, a petition signed by 6,290 people, including many conservatory staff and lecturers, was presented to the Ministry of Education opposing the uniting of the Conservatory with any other institution of higher learning, or leaving its building and moving to Academic City.

continued on next page



ARMENIA

from previous page

Andreasyan responded that as transportation to Academic City from Yerevan will be made accessible and more convenient, ties with cultural establishments remaining in the center of Yerevan could continue. Moreover, during the work of the first phase in Academic City, as part of the arts cluster a modern multifunctional concert hall which can be used for opera and other musical performances will turn Academic City into a cultural center into its own right. The national stadium which will also be built there will also serve as a concert hall.

Keyl pointed out that as part of the arts cluster, the conservatory would benefit from connections to others such as stage designers, and informal spaces and a suitable environment for students. Schütz said that while the current conservatory offers a classical education for musicians and others connected to music, the new facilities will also allow for experimental performances in its multifunctional spaces.

Research Concerns

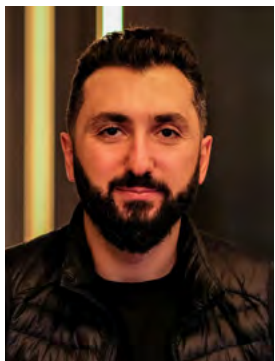
Shahverdyan of Gituzh raised some concerns about the process of merging research institutions into universities. He noted that the National Academy research system of institutes that Armenian inherited from the Soviet system should not automatically be considered outdated and to be dismantled, as countries like the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic through reforms have made similar systems effective and efficient. One advantage of the extra layer of management between the funding government and the performers of research and development provided by the Academy system is that this provides a buffer from the political cycle and thus allows for longer-term planning, Shahverdyan said.

At the same time, he continued, “It is not like we are against merging some of the research capabilities of the institutes into universities. The problem is that this needs to be discussed on a case-by-case basis. You need to check which institutes or parts of institutes it may make sense to merge into universities.”

A second related problem is the status of these research institutes after the merger. He said that generally the government says they must be integrated *into* – not *with* – the universities, which implies that they would later no longer enjoy an equivalent status.

Aloyan said that he was apprehensive that academic research and science might be put at the service of education in the current schema of Academic City, which could lessen its independence and value.

Shahverdyan wondered how Armenia’s research and development competitiveness and capacity would be affected by the mergers. Public



Tigran Shahverdyan

universities in general focus on basic research as opposed to applied R&D, especially that serving national needs, which Armenia has immediate need of, yet, Shahverdyan said, there is no worked-out plan for the latter. In fact, he noted that the government unlike other countries facing an intense security environment budgets a very small portion of its expenditures

for R&D, and on top of that, last year it only spent 2/3 of this small amount. Additionally in 2024, state budget applied R&D allocations are 8 times less than the allocations for basic research. Issues like seismic or food security risk mitigation are not being covered, and even if Academic City ends up encouraging applied R&D, it will take a very long time before that is operational.

Under the current circumstances, Shahverdyan said that the Academic City plan does not have the support of a very large part of the stakeholders in the research institutes and some are afraid to express their opinions openly. He concluded, “For 70 years or even more, the research system in Armenia developed this way. To completely change it, you should be planning very wisely what you are going to get as you might just destroy it and make things worse.”

Academic City Alternatives and Objections

If successful, Academic City would have an immense positive impact not just on Armenian education and research but on many other aspects of life in Armenia. It is a very complex and ambitious project with many, many moving parts covering a timeline of many decades till completion, which has not been fully defined except in outline. Consequently, aside from research, financing and timing concerns, many other questions have been raised



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other officials ride the train to the site of Academic City on April 12, 2024 (photo primeminister.am)

in public discussions and the media.

When asked why not start Academic City by establishing a new state institution of higher learning there first, Andreasyan repeated that there are already too many such institutions in Armenia, so this would not have been a very productive decision. She said, “I think we must be very realistic. Are our resources sufficient to, for example, organize a quality education in five places for jurists, chemists or teachers as a state? Or should we unite what we have, our human resources, infrastructure and possibilities, and do it in one place as a state, and do it with such quality and at such a level that our higher education be comparable to the quality of the education of the best institutions of higher education?”

She said that many students leave Armenia to study abroad in search of a more competitive and higher quality education and environment. She said that she did not want Armenian institutions to turn into places where people study only because they do not have the possibility to study elsewhere. The Academic City project would help stop the brain drain Armenia faces. She added, “I understand that all changes take place with difficulty, especially in the educational system, which is very conservative, but we are in a situation where not carrying out those changes is much more dangerous and destructive.”

Schütz declared that there is a worldwide trend to build such campuses outside of city centers. He said that it was in order to be able to have a flexible way for further development in the future. The Technical University of Munich, for example, has a prime location in Munich but its building dated from the 1800s and there was no possibility of incorporating modern scientific instruments. It also has a system of small classrooms, like existing universities in Yerevan, while modern teaching requires large auditoriums and flexible spaces for interactive workshops and labs. Of course, he added, new ways of teaching must accompany new facilities.

When asked about the need to develop the Armenian provinces, Keyl said that it would be difficult to move to a location too distant from Yerevan since the major universities and their staff are all in the capital along with the airport and infrastructure. Furthermore, to allow for a productive interaction with the economy, the universities cannot be isolated in a remote area.

The danger of enemy attacks wiping out a large proportion of Armenia’s intellectuals through one blow at Academic City has been suggested by some as one reason not to build it. Shahverdyan of Gituzh, for example, felt that at the least a risk assessment needed to be conducted, especially considering that Academic City will include a military or officer training academic cluster, according to the government plan. Andreasyan responded: “I cannot accept this as serious. For example, with that same logic, why keep all our manuscripts in the Matenadaran? Why keep all paintings in the National Gallery of Armenia?...I think we are speaking about progress. We must undertake our steps with that logic. If we are continually saying that we must live with a bunker mentality, then honestly, I do not understand what progress we can imagine.”

Suspensions have repeatedly been raised in Armenian



Map of Academic City with campus, university, opera house, theater, concert hall, stadium, etc. (copyright gmp)

social media and the press of potential corruption in both the forthcoming contracting process for building and the disposition of the old buildings and real estate of the universities in Yerevan. Andreasyan dismissed them as “ridiculous.” She stressed that the current government’s policy is focused on a free economy, towards which recent studies confirm progress.

Some have expressed fears on social media that moving students out of Yerevan will make the city less vibrant or inhibit their involvement in politics. Andreasyan said that opponents should make up their minds, as they had different criticisms when Ashtarak was the proposed location of Academic City. At present, she said, the trip to reach Yerevan’s center from Academic City will take approximately as long as today going there from another neighborhood like Masiv or Nubarashen, where university students live, so living at Academic City would not change their ability to be involved in events at Yerevan’s center. She added the government had no intent to influence the students’ political consciousness, but in fact the meeting places and environment in Academic City may actually provide students more opportunity to freely discuss politics with friends and take political positions than they had before.

On the one hand, some have criticized the government because its plan for Academic City and the concurrent institutional changes was not sufficiently well thought out, and things were constantly being changed. On the other hand, others raised concerns that the opinions of stakeholders still have not been heard or incorporated into predetermined decision-making. Andreasyan stated: “As far as the substance is concerned, that is completely in the realm of discussion; that is, as to what the Academic City must be, what must be included in it, what programs, with what logic must different institutions of higher education be united and work also with the research institutes.”

For now, she said, only some basic things have been finalized: the decision to build Academic City, its location, and the process of implementation after the development of the final design. She concluded, “It is also clear that we will enlarge our institutions of higher learning, but how to enlarge them, by what logic, and how they will be governed and work together is all subject to discussion. These are not small matters. The solutions are being examined and I think that this is the most important part.”



INTERNATIONAL

Civil Society Groups in Germany Raise Their Voices against Azerbaijan Hosting COP29

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Although there are five months to go before the scheduled opening of the UN climate summit COP29 in Baku, November 11 to 22, human rights groups in Germany have been mobilizing to demand that the Berlin government act to release political prisoners held in the Azerbaijani capital.

As reported in the daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* on June 13, a coalition of Armenian and German groups have issued a call for protest: “The Central Council of Armenians in Germany (ZAD), the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP), the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), and the Working Group Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA) urgently appeal to the German government and all delegates at COP29 to strongly advocate for the immediate release of all Armenian prisoners in Baku in the run-up to the climate conference.”

In Bonn, from June 3-13, a UN Climate Change preparatory conference for the COP29 took place, with an estimated 6,000 delegates from nations invited to Baku in November. Demonstrators from the ZAD gathered there on June 3 and 7 to protest against Azerbaijani dictator Ilham Aliyev’s “genocidal and fossil energy dictatorship!” Organizers raised banners and posters demanding the release of the political prisoners, as well as prisoners of war, showing their photos and calling out their names.

Defend Armenia’s Sovereignty

In addition to protesting the illegal detention of Armenians from Artsakh, represen-

tatives of the organizations have sounded the alarm about continuing threats against the Republic of Armenia. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* quoted ISHR spokesman Valerio Krüger, who said, “The danger for Armenia is existential,” pointing to the fact that the “Aliyev-Erdogan alliance denies the 1915 Armenian genocide even today.” He added that “Azerbaijani schoolchildren are being indoctrinated about the ‘barbaric Armenian enemies’ ... With the blockade of the Lachin corridor that began in late 2022, the Aliyev regime aimed at starving and driving out the Armenians, many of whom were arrested during the final military aggression, and are still being detained.”

For his part, ZAD chairman Jonathan Spangenberg told the newspaper, “That such an important climate conference is taking place in a country like Azerbaijan is tragic enough. However, Germany does have the opportunity to intervene strongly for the release of all Armenian prisoners in Baku in the run-up to COP29.” Not only does it have the opportunity, but also a “historical responsibility regarding the Armenian genocide,” he added.

Rundschau journalist Erkan Pehlivan also asked members of the Bundestag (Parliament), and reported the views of two whose parties, the SPD and Green Party, are coalition members of the current federal government. Social Democrat Frank Schwabe, who is also Commissioner for Freedom of Religion and Belief of the Federal Government, has been in the forefront of political opposition to the Azerbaijani dictatorship, speaking out on cases of Baku’s manipulation of elections and bribing

European parliament members, not only as election “observers” but also as lobbyists for the Azerbaijani regime.

In response to the journalist’s questions, Schwabe stated, “The development is dramatic. The number of political prisoners quadrupled last year to over 300. Hundreds are also out of the country and continue to be harassed there by Aliyev’s henchmen. This is one of the reasons why Azerbaijan’s delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been suspended.” He went on to say, “In the spirit of a human rights-oriented foreign policy, Germany will of course take a critical look at the human rights situation in Azerbaijan and will also hold appropriate events before and during the climate conference. I have no doubt about that.”

Max Lucks, a member of the Bundestag from the Green Party, urged the government to take a tougher approach. “We need to do some straight talking with Azerbaijan, and not keep quiet to protect our new energy partnerships. I say this because Azerbaijan has been able to detain Armenians only because we have often been too soft in the past. That is carte blanche for a regime that views freedom as a threat and repression as the solution to its own problems,” Lucks told the *Rundschau*. And in its repression of journalists, he characterized the numerous arrests as “not only part of everyday politics for several decades, but also part of the DNA of the Azerbaijani regime.” He said he considers such arrests as “a message to us: the imprisoned journalists were also interlocutors of the Council of Europe in the past. So, they are well known in human rights work,” Lucks said.

Vardanyan’s Family, Legal Team File Appeal with UN Rapporteur on Torture

GENEVA — On June 13, the international legal team for Ruben Vardanyan, a political prisoner detained in Azerbaijan, filed an urgent appeal with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, imploring her to condemn the torture and ill-treatment that the Azerbaijan Government has perpetrated against him.

Vardanyan is an influential Armenian business leader, social entrepreneur, and philanthropist who also briefly served as Nagorno-Karabakh’s Minister of State.

On September 27, 2023, in the wake of Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing of 120,000 Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, he was arrested as he attempted, together with the remaining civilian population, to cross the border into Armenia through the Lachin corridor. That same day, he was remanded to pretrial detention and he has been detained on baseless alleged criminal charges ever since.

In a continuation of Azerbaijan’s campaign of ethnic cleansing, his detention was soon followed by the arrest of other Nagorno-Karabakh leaders.

Disturbingly, Vardanyan’s family and international counsel learned that during his hunger strike in April 2024, Ruben was placed in a punishment cell, denied access to drinking water, deprived of sleep, forced to hold stress positions, denied access to his lawyer, and held in incommunicado detention.

Jared Genser, international counsel to Vardanyan said: “Ruben Vardanyan is an inspiring humanitarian and philanthropist who has been advocating for the human rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh for many years. It is extremely revealing that Azerbaijan views him as a threat that

must be silenced through arbitrary detention and, more recently, torture and ill-treatment. If Azerbaijan wants to be taken seriously on the international stage — and if it wants COP29 to be the ‘COP for peace’ — then it must stop mistreating Ruben and release him and the other Nagorno-Karabakh political prisoners immediately.”

From April 5-25, Vardanyan engaged in a hunger strike to protest his politically-motivated prosecution and that of the other Armenian prisoners.

In retaliation, the authorities of the Pre-Trial Detention facility of the State Security Service, where he is currently detained, moved him to a punishment cell, which he was never allowed to leave for the duration of the hunger strike. The lights in the cell were kept on around the clock, which lead to severe sleep deprivation and exhaustion. In addition, he was forced to stand for extended periods of time and was deprived of drinking water for over two full days. Moreover, he was not allowed to bathe or change clothes; he was not given any toilet paper; he was not allowed to have any books or paper; and there were no bed sheets (so he had to sleep on a dirty mattress). Of particular concern, neither Vardanyan’s lawyer nor anyone else (including the local ombudsman) was allowed to visit him during the hunger strike and his communication with the outside world (for example, through phone calls with family) was cut off.

This treatment — intended to punish Ruben for engaging in a hunger strike, and also for his political service in and advocacy for Nagorno-Karabakh — violates Azerbaijan’s obligations under the Convention Against Torture, as well as The United

Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

Unfortunately, Vardanyan’s mistreatment comes as no surprise — Azerbaijan has a well-documented history of torturing political prisoners generally and ethnic Armenian detainees specifically.

Given his ethnicity, his status as a former high-level official in the Government of Nagorno-Karabakh, his outspoken criticism of Azerbaijan’s treatment of Nagorno-Karabakh and its people, and his detention at the hands of the State Security Service (which is notorious for the torture of ethnic Armenians), he is at imminent risk of further torture and ill-treatment.

Ruben’s son, David Vardanyan, said: “We were shocked to learn of the horrors that my father has had to endure. It is terrifying to think of what is being done to other less prominent prisoners in Azerbaijan who have not received the international support that my father has. For the sake of all the current political prisoners in Azerbaijan — whether Armenian, Azerbaijani, or any other nationality — this inhumane treatment of prisoners must be stopped. We urge the UN to hold the Azerbaijan Government accountable and to help protect my father’s life.”

Numerous human rights organizations, national governments, and international bodies have called for Azerbaijan to release Ruben and the other Nagorno-Karabakh political prisoners.

Most recently, on June 11, U.S. Sen. Ed Markey called for the prisoners’ release on the Senate floor, specifically noting and condemning Vardanyan’s recent mistreatment.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran, Russia discuss Caucasus Developments

TEHRAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Iran’s Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani and Igor Khovaev, Russia’s special representative for the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, have reviewed the developments in the Caucasus region, IRNA reported.

The two diplomats met in Tehran on Sunday, June 16, which took place as part of a visit to Tehran by the Russian envoy.

According to the report, the Iranian official referred to the “common stances” of Iran and Russia on different regional and international issues, urging the need for further cooperation of the two countries on the Caucasus region which he said is of special significant to the interests and national security of Iran and Russia.

He briefed the Russian diplomat on Iran’s policy regarding the Caucasus developments as it seeks a peaceful settlement to the regional issues, warning that the alien powers have increased their intervention in this region.

He called for further consultations between Tehran and Moscow on the Caucasus issue, emphasizing the need for both countries to make maximum use of regional mechanisms such as 3+3 format.

Khovaev said that his country has made every effort to restore peace in this region. He stressed that Iran and Russia have to keep their “close interactions to fight against the interventions of foreign players” in the region.

Armenia, Ukraine Hold Political Consultations

KYIV (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On June 17 political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Ukraine were held in Kyiv, the Armenian side said in a statement.

The delegations were represented by Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Mnatsakan Safaryan and Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine Yevhen Perebiynis.

During the consultations, a range of issues on bilateral political agenda was touched upon along with prospects for further enhancing the cooperation.

The sides exchanged views on the issues of mutual interest related to international and regional agenda.

The Ukrainian side was provided with detailed information about the situation in the region due to the aggression of Azerbaijan and the occupation of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia as well as on the efforts of the Armenia aimed at normalization of relations.

Safaryan informed the Ukrainian delegation about the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative presented by the government of Armenia which is based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, reciprocity and equality and is aimed at ensuring stability and economic development in the region.



Community News

Armenian Bar Assoc. Celebrates Appointment Of Wolohojian to Massachusetts’ Highest Court

BOSTON — The Armenian Bar Association is overjoyed with the recent appointment of its long-time member, Justice Gabrielle Wolohojian, to the Supreme Judicial Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Supreme Judicial Court is the Commonwealth’s highest appellate court and is comprised of a chief justice and six associate justices. In front of a capacity audience of friends, family, and colleagues, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey delivered a ceremonial administration of the oath of office in the Great Hall of the John Adams Courthouse in Boston.

Wolohojian’s June 10 oath ceremony, which was attended by Armenian Bar leaders from around the country including members of the Executive Committee, marked a significant milestone as Wolohojian becomes the first Armenian-American woman to serve on the state’s, indeed on any state’s, highest court. This momentous occasion highlighted Justice Wolohojian’s exceptional legal career and underscored the significance of representation of Armenian-Americans in the judiciary. Wolohojian used her full name—Gabrielle Repsimé Wolohojian—as she swore the three requisite oaths.

Justice Wolohojian brings a wealth of experience and a sustained commitment to justice to the Supreme Judicial Court. Her distinguished career, marked by her 16-year tenure on the Massachusetts Appeals Court and her extensive contributions to legal scholarship and public service, exemplifies the dedication and excellence in which the Armenian community takes pride. Her appointment is a testament to her unwavering commitment to the rule of law and her passion for upholding justice for all.

In her acceptance remarks, Justice Wolohojian offered the following glimpse into the roots of her inspiration and humility: “Like all Armenian-Americans, my deepest debt of gratitude is owed to my family, not only to those who are present, but to those who are not, and particularly to our grandparents and great-grandparents, whose journeys of survival and sacrifice after the Armenian Genocide laid the foundation for the generations who followed them. Although involuntarily scattered across the globe, that first generation managed to take root in new countries. And here we are as lawyers, 110 years later, with an obligation to pay that debt forward through public service and pro bono work.”

In celebrating this landmark achievement, the Armenian Bar Association also reflects on the enduring legacies of Justice Armand Arabian and Justice Marvin Baxter, who previously paved the way for

see APPOINTMENT, page 12



Fr. Mardiros Chevian, dean, addressing clergy, board of directors, faculty, students, alumni, and family members of the graduate. (Jebejian Images)

Commencement Ceremony Takes Place at St. Nersess Seminary

ARMONK, N.Y. — The 2024 St. Nersess Seminary Graduation ceremonies took place on Friday, May 17.

One student was from the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, Deacon Garen Hamamjian.

For the first time, officiating at the graduation were both Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese and President of the St. Nersess Board of Directors, and Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese and Vice President of the Board of Directors.

Fr. Mardiros Chevian, dean, opened the graduation program by welcoming the guests and introducing the graduate. “Hovnan *Srpazan*, we are handing back to you a fine graduate and future priest. Deacon Garen is a shining star,” commented Chevian.

Deacon Adam Bullock, representing the St. Nersess Alumni Association, welcomed Deacon Garen as a new alumnus, exclaiming, “he knows how to relate to people and wears his faith on his sleeve. I am proud to have served with you; with God’s grace you will succeed.”

Speaking to the graduate as a remaining student was Karo Boyadzhyan, who emphasized how he has known Deacon Garen for the past six years and was encouraged to serve in the Western Diocese and follow in his footsteps because of Deacon Garen’s support. “You have a passion of helping other seminarians and minister to those who need it,” shared Karo.

Next Deacon Yervant Kutchukian, Spiritual Director and representing the faculty, addressed the graduate. “Deacon Garen, I will liken you to a sequoia seed which needs to be planted just right for it to germinate and flourish. You have already been cultivated... you came with gifts to the seminary and over the last four years we have watched you grow,” shared Deacon Yervant.

Dr. Ionut-Alexandru Tudorie, Academic Dean at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, spoke to the graduate, conveying his love and congratulations for completing his education over the past four years. “I am happy to share this special moment with you.”

Chevian next recognized the faculty in attendance from St. Nersess, including Fr. Karekin Kasparian, Fr. Daniel Karadjian, Fr. Arshen Aivazian, Dr. Roberta Ervine, Dr. Ani Shahinian, Dr. Jesse Arlen, Maestro Khoren Mekanejian, Deacon Yervant Kutchukian, and Andrew Kayaian.

see COMMENCEMENT, page 9



2024 St. Nersess Graduate with seminary faculty and Primates (Jebejian Images)

NASA Welcomes Armenia as 43rd Artemis Accords Signatory

WASHINGTON — NASA Administrator Bill Nelson welcomed Armenia as the newest nation to sign the Artemis Accords on June 12 during a ceremony with the U.S. State Department at NASA Headquarters in Washington. Armenia joins 42 other countries in a commitment to advancing principles for the safe, transparent, and responsible exploration of the moon, Mars and beyond.

“NASA is proud to welcome Armenia to the Artemis Accords as we expand the peaceful exploration of space,” said Nelson. “Today’s signing builds on an important foundation. Armenia long has looked to the heavens and helped humanity understand them. As the 10th nation this year to sign the Artemis Accords, we are proving that exploration unites nations like few other things can. We will continue to expand humanity’s reach in the cosmos — together.”

Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, Minister of High-Tech Industry, signed the Artemis Accords on behalf of Armenia. Lilit Makunts, ambassador of Armenia to the US and Jennifer R. Littlejohn, acting assistant secretary, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, Department of State, also participated in the event.

“By signing these accords, Armenia joins a community of nations dedicated to advancing the frontiers of human knowledge and capability in space,” said Hayrapetyan. “Our involvement will not only enhance our technological capabilities, but also inspire a new generation of Armenians to dream big, to innovate and to explore the world and universe.”

The United States and seven other nations were the first to sign the Artemis Accords in 2020, which identified an early set of principles promoting the beneficial use of space for humanity. The accords are grounded in the Outer Space Treaty and other agreements including the Registration Convention, the Rescue and Return Agreement, as well as best practices and norms of responsible behavior that NASA and its partners have supported, including the public release of scientific data. More countries are expected to sign the Artemis Accords in the months and years to come.

The commitments of the Artemis Accords, and efforts by the signatories to advance implementation of these principles, support NASA’s Artemis campaign with its partners, as well as for the success of the safe and sustainable exploration activities of the other accords signatories.

For more information about the Artemis Accords, visit: <https://www.nasa.gov/artemis-accords/>



COMMUNITY NEWS

Commencement Ceremony at St. Nersess Seminary

COMMENCEMENT, from page 8

He also recognized and thanked the board members in attendance for their support of the seminary, as they had just met for its fiscal and academic year-end meeting prior to the graduation, before introducing Richard Papalian, who serves as the treasurer.

“On behalf of the Board, and Karnig Durgarian, chairperson, congratulations! Deacon Garen, you are well equipped to go on your journey, and we are here for you to support you,” said Papalian.

Surprising the graduate with some sentiments was Nareg Kasian, his cousin from California. “This degree differs from your other degrees in terms of service and spir-

Before presenting the diploma, Archbishop Derderian shared his observations about Hamamjian. “This fine gentleman, standing in front of us, gifted with many talents and virtues, was a young boy when he made his strides at St. Leon Cathedral as an altar boy. Today, we celebrate his faithfulness, steadfastness and perseverance. Despite facing numerous challenges, Garen remained focused and persevered until the end. His achievement is a tribute to the blessed memory of his late mother, beloved Ani Kelejian Hamamjian, who instilled the love for God and His holy church in the heart of his son.”

“We are proud and happy to have four seminarians from the Western Diocese. We are excited for the prospective candidates who will eventually follow in the footsteps of their brothers by joining the seminary in the near future,” continued the archbishop.

Concluding the graduation was Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan who offered his personal reflections. “This commencement is just the beginning of your journey and the lives you will touch and transform,” he shared. “Lead others to Jesus Christ, in the rich Armenian tradition, and

go to those in need, with courage and in faith by using your lessons at St. Nersess Seminary. God is always helping you!”

Following the program, Hamamjian’s family, who had traveled from California, and all the guests moved to a festive tent set up outside the Arsen Keleshian dining hall to enjoy dinner. During the meal, guests were invited to share their best wishes to Deacon Garen, including his sister, Tsolet Hamamjian.

The following day, May 18, the graduation took place at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. Bishop Parsamyan was present along with several orthodox hierarchs.



Deacon Garen Hamamjian with Abp. Hovnan Derderian and Bp. Mesrop Parsamyan (Jebejian Images)

ity. May God continue to give you strength.”

Hamamjian shared his sentiments about his seminary journey. “Coming to St. Nersess was one of the best decisions I have ever made. We are asked as seminarians to identify our strengths and weaknesses and work on them. Mentally, I thank Dr. Roberta Ervine as a teacher and Deacon Yervant as my spiritual director; Spiritually, I thank Hovnan Srpazan for guiding me over the past 10 years and Mesrop Srpazan for being my 2nd *Arachnort*; and physically, I thank Fr. Mardiros for keeping me moving over the past four years,” added Hamamjian.



Boston Globe’s Anush Elbakyan Wins Record 8th Emmy Award

BOSTON — The *Boston Globe*’s Anush Elbakyan received a record 8th Emmy Award earlier in June.

She received the award for “The untold story of the Charles and Carol Stuart shooting.” The murder of the pregnant Carol Stuart, by her husband, Charles, took place in Boston in 1989. The injured Charles, responsible for the murder, blamed a black assailant.

Elbakyan is an Emmy award-winning producer and multimedia journalist. Elbakyan is the Senior Video Editor and the Video Director for the Boston Globe. Elbakyan oversees the production and distribution of the Globe’s original video content, while also managing video business operations and leading the digital video strategy. Elbakyan manages a team of video producers and coordinates the daily video news operation. She launched and served as executive producer for the political digital video series “Ground Game,” “Live Political Happy Hour” and the food series “Smart Cooks.”



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COMMUNITY NEWS

COAF Board Member and Acclaimed Actor Joe Manganiello Takes Pilgrimage to Armenia

YEREVAN/LOS ANGELES — Actor, producer, director, author and reality competition host Joe Manganiello recently embarked upon a deeply personal and transformative journey to his ancestral homeland of Armenia, with the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF).

Manganiello, who is now a board member of COAF, received the Humanitarian Award at the organization’s 20th anniversary gala in New York last year.

Manganiello’s decision to embark upon the pilgrimage was born out of profound introspection and a desire to deepen his sense of identity. While delving into the rich tapestry of his Armenian ancestry, he sought to weave the threads of the past into the fabric of his present.

Manganiello has publicly shared his family’s story as a way to help heal generational trauma and validate the atrocities that took place against the Armenians in 1915. A survivor of the Armenian Genocide, his maternal great-grandmother, Terviz “Rose” Darakjian, gave birth to Joe’s grandmother, Sirarpi, in a refugee camp.

The intensely personal journey gave Manganiello a



Joe Manganiello with the young children visiting the COAF Smart Center



Joe Manganiello and Caitlin O'Connor (and Bubbles) tour the Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan

chance to walk in his ancestors’ footsteps, visit the places that shaped his family history, and connect with the culture, traditions, and people integral to his identity.

Along with his girlfriend, Caitlin O’Connor, and pet dog, Bubbles, Manganiello toured Armenia for 10 days in May.

After touring Yerevan’s Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, Manganiello planted a tree at the Tsitser-

nakaberd Memorial complex in honor of Terviz and Sirarpi, not only to commemorate his great-grandmother and grandmother as victims and survivors but also to symbolize life, renewal, and the enduring human spirit.

Among the trip’s highlights was a visit to the state-of-the-art COAF Smart Center in the Lori region of Armenia. At one of COAF’s Child and Family Centers in Armavir, *continued on next page*


IN CELEBRATION OF
OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY,
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Since its founding in 1973, the Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF) has been committed to the long-term investment planning of hundreds of endowment and investment funds established by churches and parishioners alike—what we call “investing as a community.” We are proud to have grown the funds we manage to nearly \$150 million while providing an annual source of income to beneficiaries, including parishes and various church organizations and programs, for the past 50 years.

As we mark our golden anniversary, we express our sincere gratitude to all the organizations and individuals who have entrusted ACEF with their funds throughout the years. We look forward to continuing our mission and helping ensure the longevity and strength of our Armenian community for years to come!

Learn more at ACEFINVEST.ORG or call 212.686.0710.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page
Manganiello joined children in a finger-painting activity and learned about the many services provided to rural families. He attended dinner at Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan’s private residence, and met with Zareh Sinanyan, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs.

Manganiello, who is an Emmy winning voice actor, holds a BFA in acting from Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama. He can most recently be seen as the host of NBC’s brand-new hit series “Deal or No Deal Island,” which was just renewed for a second season.

Last year, he starred opposite Uma Thurman and Samuel L. Jackson in the feature film “The Kill Room,” and he is currently putting the finishing touches on the “Official 50 Year History of Dungeons & Dragons” documentary series he directed and produced for eOne and Wizards of the Coast/Hasbro.

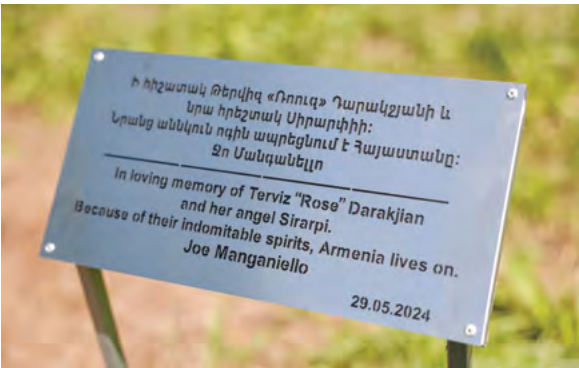
As an actor, Manganiello is probably best known for his roles as the werewolf Alcide Herveaux on HBO’s “True Blood,” as Big Dick Richie in Steven Soderbergh’s “Magic Mike” and “Magic Mike XXL,” as Pee Wee Herman’s best friend in “Pee Wee’s Big Holiday,” and as super-villain “Deathstroke” in Zack Snyder’s “Justice League.” He occasionally returns to his roots on stage, the last time being a Yale Repertory production of “A Streetcar Named Desire,” in which he played Stanley Kowalski. He will next be seen opposite Vince Vaughn, Susan Sarandon, and Lorraine Bracco in the comedy film “Nonnas,” set to be released later this year.

He financed, produced & directed the award-winning documentary “La Bare,” and produced “Bottom of the 9th,” “Shoplifters of the World” and “Archenemy.”

Aside from his film work, Manganiello has worked over the years as a paid consultant for Dungeons & Dragons which led to him being recruited to write and develop their New York bestselling series of novels, *Dragonlance* for TV/streaming as a showrunner.



From left, Zareh Sinanyan, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, Joe Manganiello and Haig Boyadjian, COAF’s vice president of development



The plaque at the museum near the tree that Manganiello planted



Joe Manganiello and his girlfriend, Caitlin O'Connor, and little Bubbles, at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute



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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☐ other _____

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Your donation is tax deductible.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Senate Armed Services Committee Supports Increasing US-Armenia Security Ties

WASHINGTON — On June 13, the US Senate Armed Services Committee voted to encourage the Department of Defense to strengthen engagement with Armenia including through “bilateral training opportunities and other security cooperation activities.” This is the first time a congressional Armed Services Committee has specifically called for increasing security cooperation between the U.S. and Armenia.

The language calling for increasing US-Armenia security ties is part of the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA now heads to the

Senate floor for consideration.

“We thank the Senate Armed Services Committee for expressing bipartisan support to increase security cooperation between the U.S. and Armenia,” said Global ARM President Timothy Jemal. “Increasing security ties between the U.S. and Armenia is a top priority for Global ARM at a time when the country’s existence is at stake. I am pleased our advocacy efforts are showing results.”

The NDAA authorizes funding levels and provides authorities for the U.S. military and other critical defense priorities, en-

suring America’s forces have the training, equipment, and resources they need to carry out their missions. An Executive Summary of the NDAA can be seen here: NDAA Executive Summary.

In November 2023, Global ARM expanded its DC advocacy by retaining the lobbying firms of McKeon Group and Plurus Strategies. McKeon and Plurus have focused their lobbying efforts on Congress, the Executive Branch and think tanks with influence over US foreign policy. Both lobbying groups have significant bipartisan ties in Washington.

Armenian Bar Assoc. Celebrates Appointment Of Wolohojian to Massachusetts’ Court

APPOINTMENT, from page 8

Armenian-Americans in the judiciary with their historic appointments to the California Supreme Court. Justice Arabian, appointed in 1990, and Justice Baxter, appointed in 1991, both served with distinction and left an indelible mark on California’s legal landscape.

“The appointment of Justice Gabrielle Wolohojian to the Supreme Judicial Court is a proud moment for the Armenian-American community and a testament to her exceptional legal acumen and dedication,” said Armenian Bar Association Chairwoman, Lucy Varpetian.



Armenian Bar Board Member Souren Israelyan, Massachusetts Bar Association Former President Marsha Kazarosian, Former United States Attorney for the Northern District of New York Richard S. Hartunian, Melanie Hagopian, Governor Maura Healey, Associate Justice Gabrielle R. Wolohojian, Chairwoman Lucy Varpetian, Immediate Past Chairwoman Taline Sahakian, Past Chairwoman Sonya Nersessian

MSO Celebrates Graduation of 18 New Correction Officers

MEDFORD, Mass. — The Middlesex Sheriff’s Office (MSO) welcomed 18 new correction officers during a ceremony held June 6 at Tufts University.

The graduation ceremony for the 50th Basic Training Academy (BTA) featured a keynote address by Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian as well as powerful remarks by Medford Police Chief Jack Buckley and Tufts University Executive Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police Yolanda Smith.

“For 332 years, members of the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office have played a vital role in ensuring public safety,” said Sheriff Koutoujian. “While the challenges we face evolve, our mission remains the same: to keep those in our care safe, and prepare them to return to their families – and our communities – ready to be productive and engaged citizens. I have no doubt that these 18 new officers will ensure we carry out that mission with dignity, pride, and professionalism.”

The new class of officers features nine (9) individuals with familial law enforcement connections; five (5) with post-secondary degrees; and four (4) with military experience. In addition, seven (7) of the new officers are bilingual (Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Chinese, French and Vietnamese).

The ceremony followed a rigorous 13-and-a half week academy during which recruits underwent extensive training. The academy included both classroom and hands on work, as well as the mastering of policies, procedures, and skills needed to maintain safety and security.

The training focused on topics such as implicit bias, Mental Health First Aid, Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), de-escalation and communication, first responder training, suicide prevention, and defensive tactics. In addition, all 18 recruits spent time working with veteran members of the MSO team during their on-the-job training at the Middlesex Jail & House of Correction.

The June 6 graduation was the 16th held during Koutoujian’s tenure and the fourth since February 2023.

To learn more about the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office and current career opportunities, visit middlesex-sheriff.org/hr.



Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian (front row, fifth from left) stands with graduates of the 50th Basic Training Academy, and members of the command and training academy staff following graduation on Thursday, June 6.



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Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter

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Arts & Culture

Director Alexander Payne Named Head Of Golden Apricot Film Festival Jury

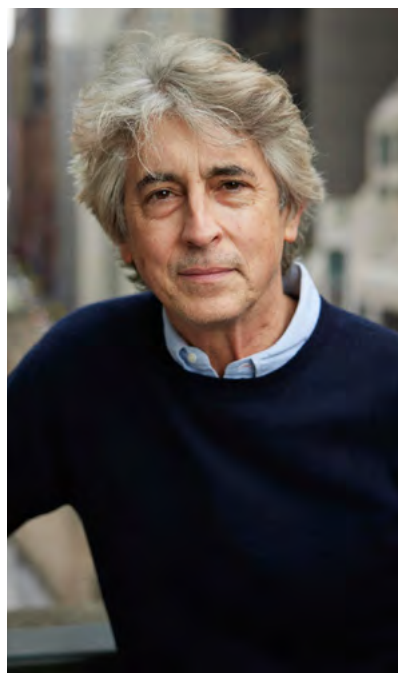
YEREVAN — The Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival has unveiled the jury for this year's International Full-length Competition.

The jury president is two-time Academy Award winner Alexander Payne. He has directed 8 feature films, which have been nominated for a total of 24 Oscars, including 4 for Best Picture and 3 for Best Director.

The jury members include Peter Scarlet, Alexandria Bombach, Krikor Beledian and Jaime Martin Noguera.

Peter Scarlet is an American film critic, who was a longtime Director General of Europe's most famous film archive - the French Cinematheque, the Executive Director of the Tribeca IFF and the Artistic Director of San Francisco IFF.

Alexandria Bombach is an award-winning cinematographer, editor and director, known for her



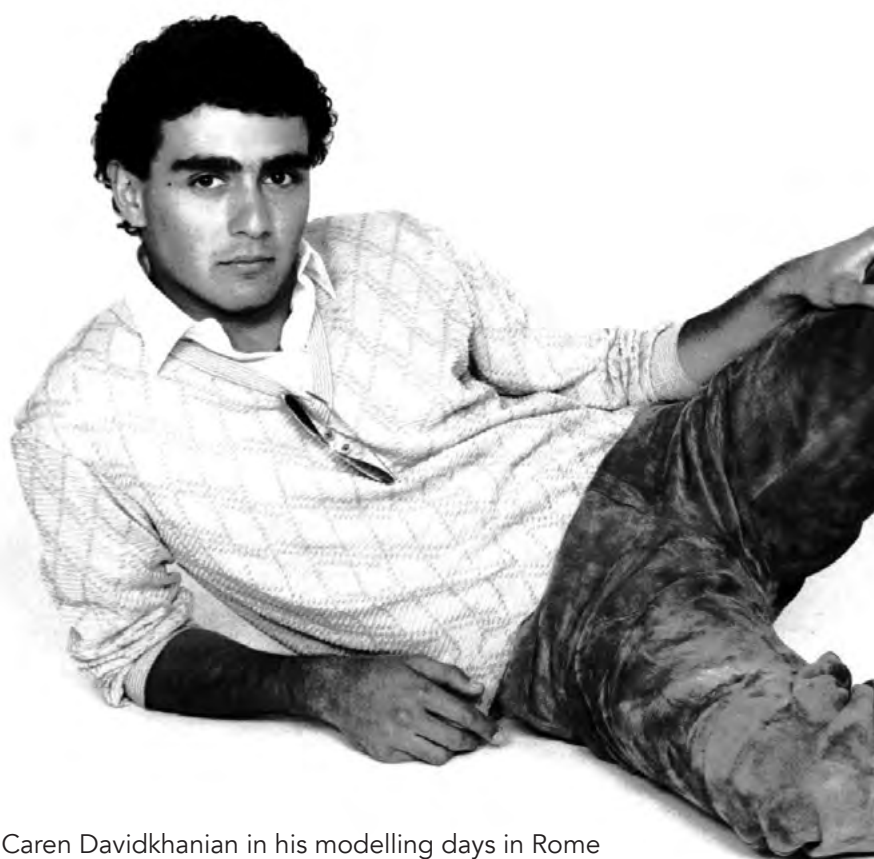
Director Alexander Payne

documentaries depicting lives and destinies in conflict-ridden parts of the world.

Krikor Beledian is widely regarded as the most important figure of contemporary Western Armenian literature and has authored more than 30 volumes of works, published all around the world.

Jaime Martin Noguera is a cultural manager, who was the director of the Benalmádena International Short Film and Alternative Cinema Festival from 1998 to 2011 and the creator of the Marbella Film Festival.

The 21st Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival will take place on July 7-14.



Caren Davidkhanian in his modelling days in Rome

Caren Davidkhanian

The Journalist Descendent of Great Iranian-Armenians

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/DENVER — Caren Davidkhanian was born in Iran, to Sarkis and Lily Davidkhanian (née Massehian). His grandfather and father were founders and owners of Iran's first dry ice factory, Daga Gas Company. Caren studied at the American University of Rome and was a journalist for 25 years in Italy, writing extensively about various subjects from fashion and food and wine to film and politics. He also has years of experience in teaching languages.

Dear Caren, as a researcher of Armenian Diaspora's history and individuals, I am always particularly interested in heirs of famous families and their activities, so I would like to talk with you the path you crossed.

Thanks for your interest. I am not a career person. I just enjoy the good life, which I don't necessarily associate with careers. Work to me is just a way to pay the bills while having fun.

Yes, I agree... Davidkhanian is a famous family in the history of Iranian Armenians. Particularly, the name of general, philanthropist, and professor Martiros Khan Davidkhanian (1843-1905) is quite known. He was the Chief of Staff of the Persian Cossack Brigade, and the Commander of the Royal Guard of the Qajar Court.

I was born into a storied Armenian-Iranian family. My earliest known ancestor from my father's family was from Karbi in Armenia and had a private army and fought for Karim Khan Zand in the 1700s against the Ottomans in what is today Iraq. The Persians lost the war and the only exit route was southeast to Shiraz. They settled there and then the next generation moved to Isfahan and became one of the most prominent families there. Bushehr, on the Persian Gulf, is another beautiful place to which I have deep family ties through my father's mother's family.

Besides my great-uncle Martiros Khan Davidkhanian, whom you already see DAVIDKHANIAN, page 16



Caren Davidkhanian's great grandfather, General Sarkis Khan Davidkhanian, with his wife Minouchka Galustian, who was related to the Enikolopians of Tiflis. On her lap, Caren's grandfather Mookooch (Megerditch Khan Davidkhanian).

Armenia Issues Collector Gold Aznavour Coins On His Centennial

YEREVAN — On May 20, 2024, the Central Bank of Armenia put into circulation a gold collector coin dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Charles Aznavour's birth.

Prominent French-Armenian singer, songwriter, film actor, writer, and public figure Charles Aznavour was born in Paris to an Armenian immigrant family that escaped the Armenian Genocide.

From a young age he had a strong interest in art. He began his professional career in the 1940s. In 1956 he gained universal recognition after performing at the Olympia concert hall in Paris.

During his musical career, Aznavour wrote and co-wrote more than 1,000 songs.

Aznavour starred in more than 90 films and authored a number of books.

After the devastating Spitak earthquake of 1988, Aznavour founded the Aznavour for Armenia association, and, in 2016, together with his son Nicolas Aznavour, created the Aznavour Foundation with the goal of implementing educational, social, and cultural programs.

He received numerous state awards and titles, including the French Legion of Honor (knight, officer, and commander ranks), a designation of National Hero of Armenia and the Order of Motherland. From 2009, Aznavour served as Armenia's Ambassador to Switzerland and as Armenia's Permanent Representative to the UN Office at Geneva.

Aznavour's work is a unique interweaving of poetry, music, and acting. Around 200 million Aznavour CDs have been sold to date. One of Yerevan's squares is named after Aznavour, and a monument to him has been erected in Gyumri.

Obverse: monument to Charles Aznavour in Gyumri (sculptor: S. Petrosyan, architect: A. Tarkhanyan, 2002).

Reverse: portrait of Charles Aznavour, the number 100 in the form of stylized musical notes, piano keys and microphone.



Designers: Vardan Vardanyan (obverse), Karen Melikyan (reverse). The coin is minted at the Mint of Poland.

Technical specifications: Face value 10 000 drams; Meetal/fineness gold 9990; Weight 8,6 g; Diameter 22,0 mm; Quality proof; Edge ribbed; Quantity of issue 500 pcs; Year of issue 2024.

Numismatists, collectors and all interested persons can buy the Armenian collector coins in the sales salon "Numismatist" which is in the building of the Central Bank of Armenia and is open for everyone.

ARTS & CULTURE

Serj Tankian Has Something to Say

TANKIAN, from page 1

Asked who the target audience for the book is, he replied, “The target audience is anyone who can read. I wrote the book because someone asked me if I would do it. And I will likely write more. I’ve previously released two poetry books as well.”

In a recent email interview, Tankian, 56, offered some insight into his fertile mind, while suggesting that despite being firmly rooted in the physical plane, he has his head in the spiritual realm.

Stardom in Two Worlds

Tankian is unique in not just identifying as an American rock star. He is very much an Armenian, both active in courting recognition for the Armenian Genocide by the US government, as well as offering support to Armenia.

When asked how it feels to straddle the two worlds of Armenian versus global stardom, he shook said, “Neither is worth anything. I just work.”

Tankian is such a part of the cultural zeitgeist that he contributed a song to the soundtrack of the hugely popular HBO series, “Game of Thrones.” The song, *The Rains of Castamere*, he said, was written “by my good friend composer Ramin Djawadi who asked me to sing on it.”

In many online interviews, this singer of very loud music, often expresses that he is a fan of silence, during which he can tap into his spirituality. He said, “I’m a quiet person generally. As an artist I give what the music requires. If it’s loud and rebellious I become that: if it’s soft and loving, then that.”



Members of System of a Down, from left, John Dolmayan, Daron Malakian, Shavo Odadjian and Serj Tankian

Tankian is loath to name any favorite songs, either with SOAD or solo. He replied, with tongue firmly in cheek, “I don’t have favorite songs nor ice cream flavors.” The same goes for artists. “I listen to many artists in many genres. Mostly composers recently though I’ll still listen to songs once in a while,” he replied.

As part of SOAD, with bandmates Daron Malakian on guitar, Shavo Odadjian on bass and John Dolmayan on drums, he released five studio albums, and selling over 40 million albums worldwide. The group received a Grammy Award in 2006 for the song B.Y.O.B.

As a solo artist, he has released multiple albums in a variety of genres, beginning with 2007’s chart-topping hard rock album “Elect The Dead.” He has released other works, including “Imperfect Harmonies” in 2010, followed by “Harakiri” in 2012. He has explored different genres, including jazz (“Jazz-Iz Christ” in 2013, and the 2021 instrumentals “Cinematique Series: Illuminate” and “Cinematique Series: Violent Violins.”)

One place Tankian fans can hear his music is on Netflix; he composed the soundtrack for “Hitler and the Nazis: Evil on Trial,” a docuseries by his friend, Joe Berlinger, tracking Hitler’s rise through



the Nuremberg Trials, which was released in June. He had previously scored Berlinger’s Netflix series “Crime Scene – The Texas Killing Fields” as well as composing for the second season of Zac Efron’s wellness and travel series, “Down To Earth.”

When asked to compare writing songs for a record versus a soundtrack, Tankian responded, “Composing for visual media is an altogether different experience than songwriting. The trick is to find ways to be creative within the given criteria and limitations. TV is also different than film, which is different than a musical etc. They all present ways to be inspired by another artistic medium than your own.”

For him, there is no set formula on how a song comes to be.

“If you have a full vision of a song, it may be easier to go at it alone even if you hire other musicians to complete your vision. If the idea requires collaborators then you work in that direction. I usually write music first before lyrics as the intuitive medium created its own thematic stories and the words come,” he explained.

Poetry remains a huge love for him — he writes it (he has released two volumes, *Cool Gardens* and *Glaring Through Oblivion*) and devours it too.

When asked to name some of his favorite poets, he noted Edgar Allen Poe, T.S. Elliott, Jim Morrison, Charles Bukowski, Daniel Varoujan and Siamanto, among others. He often speaks about his love for 13th-century Persian Sufi poet Rumi. Rumi to him simply means “love.” In fact, he and his wife, Angela Madatyan, love the poet so much they named their son after him.

When asked how he manages to release albums, write soundtracks, pen books and more, he offers a verbal shrug: “I’m an artist. It’s my job.”

Tankian as a solo artist has collaborated frequently with singers from Armenia. One such collaboration is the band Serat with percussionist Arto Tunçboyacıyan. When asked why he is interested in bringing the spotlight to artists such as Tunçboyacıyan who will not be able to get exposure to audiences in the West, he replied, “Because I value our culture and think we have a lot

to offer the world with it as we have in the past.”

Social Justice

Tankian has been singular in his vocal support for social justice, championing causes near to his heart, including the recognition of various genocides as well as human rights.

One of the first vehicles for Tankian’s message to a general audience was the 2006 documentary “Screamers,” by filmmaker Carla Garapedian, who showed the members of SOAD, all descendants of Genocide survivors, share their family histories, along with academics, and talk about genocides in general, including the horrors of Darfur.

SOAD famously had tables at their concerts where they disseminated information about the Armenian Genocide. “It’s a part of who we are as an Armenian-American band. Music can be a wonderful tool for teaching and learning. We all had grandparents who were survivors of the genocide so it’s part of our personal as well as National story,” he noted.

This activism eventually led to Tankian, as a solo artist, joining Tom Morello, another rock legend who was the guitarist with Rage against the Machine and later Audioslave, to form Axis of Justice. “AOJ was a non-profit Tom and I created years back to serve as a platform for our mutual activism with a myriad of causes. In the process we have raised funds and have contributed to many worthy causes and events,” he explained.

Tankian admits that the genocide, and the generational trauma left in its wake, have shaped him. “Definitely. Genocide and the trauma of it and its lack of recognition is a uniquely dark experience for our people,” he said.

On top of the Genocide, the Tankian family went through more horrors in Lebanon, during the Civil War. And those dark days, again, left their mark on the young Serj, who moved with his family to Los Angeles when he was 7, without knowing a word of English.

“When you hear bombs falling as a child you remember that random fear and will never want another child to experience that,” he wrote. “Not knowing English coming to US made me a bit of an outsider which I now cherish.”

The combination of these experiences have led Tankian to focus on what he frequently talks about in interviews, “the intersection of justice and spirituality.”

When asked what that means to him, he explained, “Paraphrasing the words of the

Dalai Lama, [it means] to follow a path of injustice is spiritual death. The spirit world is and was always there. I became more conscious of it as my life became more overwhelming and stressful. It’s transcendental meditation by the way. It also coincided with my thirst for knowledge about our combined indigenous past.”

He extends that sentiment to performing, suggesting he loses himself on stage. “The stage is a state beyond time and space at certain intervals,” he said.

One of the former bandmates of Morello in Audioslave was vocalist Chris Cornell, who became a close friend of Tankian. Cornell had contributed a song to the soundtrack of the 2017 film, “The Promise,” about the Armenian Genocide, starring Christian Bale and Oscar Isaac. Tragically, the same year, Cornell committed suicide.

“It was devastating. He was a musical and vocal influence and a friend with creative energy and love beaming from him. I miss him dearly,” Tankian said.

Advocacy in Armenia

Tankian has produced and scored the documentaries “I Am Not Alone” about the Velvet Revolution and the rise of Nikol Pashinyan, as well as “Truth To Power,” and produced “Invisible Republic” about the devastation in Artsakh, over the last five years.

As for the Velvet Revolution, he said, “The 2018 revolution changed Armenia’s trajectory to a more egalitarian and democratic society whose fruits we have not been able to enjoy due to Azerbaijan’s attacks, invasions and ethnic cleansing. We cannot look back but can only look forward. Armenia will only see peace via military parity or near parity with Azerbaijan. The current government has done a great job with our economic growth but poorly with direct negotiations with Azerbaijan. Giving up on international justice for Artsakh will be the gravest mistake for them or any government as it is a silent weapon for all Armenians and must be unquestionably pursued.”

The devastating loss of the Karabakh war in 2020 was hard for him, as it was for Armenians around the world.

“I had an extremely painful disc slippage two days after we lost the war from what I presume is a mental and emotional meltdown that took me years to recover from. Nonetheless I kept on fighting for my people as I do daily no matter who likes me or hates me. I have a job to do, we all do. And we must put aside our differences and do it together. Everything else seems petty and provincial,” he noted.

What’s Next

Not one to rest on his laurels, Tankian, who along with his family spends part of the year in New Zealand, plans to stay busy.

His EP, “Foundations,” will be released on September 7. The single *AF Day* was recently released.

He added that he is working on scoring another documentary Netflix series which will be released next year. In addition, this year will see the release of an album of covers.

Tankian has already launched a line of Armenian coffee online, Kavut, with a portion of profits set aside to go to TUMO in Armenia, which gives free tech and creative design education to teens. Non-musical efforts including working on a tequila coffee liquor with a company, “and more.”

Down with the System is available everywhere.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Down with the System

Heavy Metal Prophet Serj Tankian Rocks It out in New Book

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The LORD your God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers-it is to him you shall listen.

-Deuteronomy 18:15

“(SOAD was as) unlikely a chart-topper as had ever existed in modern music history: a band of Armenian-Americans playing a practically unclassifiable clash of wildly aggressive metal riffs, unconventional tempo-twisting rhythms, and Armenian folk melodies, with me alternately growling, screaming, and crooning lyrics that could pivot from avant-garde silliness to raging socio-political rants in the space of a single line...it’s not easy listening.” (ST, Down with the System)

Slim and goateed with a soft-spoken tone of voice and bearing a message of peace, in person Serj Tankian appears both devilish and Christ-like. His recent book, *Down with the System*, confirms the prophetic elements that underscore many of his lyrics as the lead singer and songwriter of System of a Down.

Though old timers may find some of his songs akin to speaking in tongues, his overarching message is one of love and mutual understanding. Subtitled *A memoir (of sorts)*, the current account starts off relating his childhood in Beirut through the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War that brought his family to Los Angeles in the late 1970s.

Tankian writes touchingly of trying to assimilate into American culture and the love he felt for his father — a footwear designer of talent who ended up consumed by a legal battle with a former business partner. Tankian spent countless hours as a teenager translating court documents for him when he might otherwise have been enjoying college. Tankian also started a successful software business before devoting himself full-time to music. These details paint a fascinating, fully human and three-dimensional portrait of an artist that many would only otherwise know through his music.

Tankian deftly weaves in the story of System of a Down, the band, so that fans of SOAD will also be satisfied by book’s end. There are intriguing and juicy details about fellow band members Daron Malakian and Shavo Odadjian (guitar and bass guitar), John Dolmayan and Ontronik Khatchaturian (acoustic drums). Though Tankian sometimes clashed with Dolmayan and Malakian, he goes to pains with every incident described to tell the other band member’s side of the story as he knows it. Although I always enjoyed and supported SOAD, I was never a groupie, so I cannot evaluate how accurate Tankian’s narratives are, but the fact that he goes out of his way to show two sides to every tale, is revealing of his personality.

Tankian and fellow band members follow in a long tradition of rock prophets that includes Jim Morrison of the Doors, down through Leonard Cohen and Morrissey of the Smiths — though Tankian’s actual message surprisingly enough may come closer to ’60s folk singers such as Peter

Seeger and Peter, Paul and Mary.

In albums such as “Toxicity” and “Mezmerize” and songs such as *Chop Suey*, *P.L.U.C.K.* and *Holy Mountains*, SOAD attacks everything from genocide denial to the American military industrial complex and general human violence and toxic behavior, all with uncommon directness and bravery.

At a recent book signing at Brooklyn’s Powerhouse Books, Tankian engaged in conversation with comedian Eric Boghossian. After discussing *Down with the System*, Tankian chided Boghossian: “I want to talk about Armenia now.” Boghossian responded: “Yeah?” Tankian countered: “Yes, absolutely.” For the mostly lay audience, the ensuing half hour provided a relaxed introduction to Hayastan’s ancient history down through the Genocide and the recent wars over Artsakh.

Pride in his culture overlays most of the discussion in the book. The fact that Tankian and Odadjian both attended the Rose and Alex Pilibos Armenian School and are fluent Armenian speakers, is also a rousing endorsement of Armenian education.

On the topic of Armenian Genocide recognition, Tankian writes: “There are always people who naively say we should focus more on the present and the future than the past. However, as I learned more about not just the history of the Armenian Genocide but also the history of war throughout human civilization, a new realization dawned on me: if we as humans do not acknowledge and account for our shared history, we will be doomed to repeat it ad nauseum. And that’s why recognition of the Armenian Genocide is so essential.”

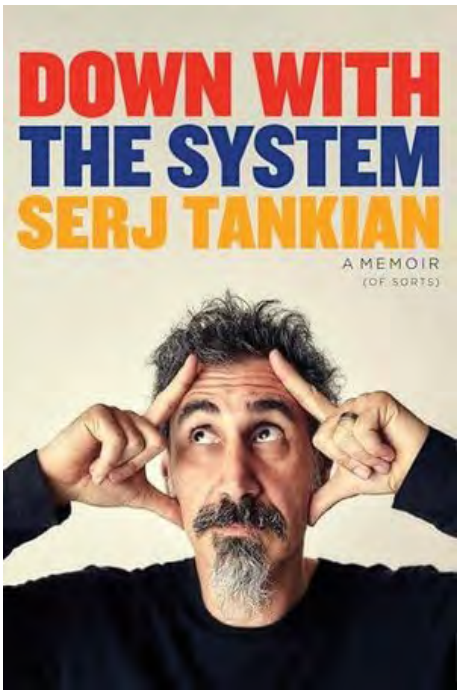
Tankian also gives readers a short background and overview of the filming of Carla Garabedian’s 2007 documentary, “Screamers,” which helped to push the Genocide recognition agenda forward.

For those who are expecting a strictly rock historical accounting of the band, *Down with The System* may disappoint at first, but it is in fact that rarest of things: a book about a metal band that goes beyond the merely musical to reveal a musician’s inner soul. The book is also a plebiscite for peace and understanding at all levels and a call to arms for Americans, Armenians and Armenian-Americans equally.

Tankian makes it clear that we are all jointly responsible for the catastrophes that befall humans globally. If we do not speak out on issues ranging from genocide to global warming to America’s constant recourse to proxy wars across the globe, or on issues of poverty at home, then we encourage these ills to continue unabated.

Along with Rage Against the Machine’s Tom Morello, Tankian founded Axis of Justice, an organization which fights against inequality on all levels, from the macro to the micro, the global to the local.

Here Tankian discusses how he helped to raise awareness about the problem of homelessness in America: “In Santa Monica, the city council had passed a law making it illegal to distribute food to the homeless. We brought a group there to give out box lunches to homeless people, in defiance of the law, and invited the press out to chronicle it.



Later on, when the grocery workers union went on strike in Los Angeles, we organized a benefit concert for them.”

Tankian also doles out valuable advice

to creative souls of all types: follow your dream but be honest and realistic as well. On the issue of how to deal with the often-complicated process of artistic creation and representation, Tankian avers: “The importance of having the guts to say ‘yes’ to things that turn you on is matched only by the impact of learning how to say ‘no’ to the things that don’t. A lot of this comes from an artist’s own vulnerabilities and not wanting to hear ‘no’ for an answer...You are surrounded by people whose job it is to flatter you and treat you like a delicate genius. The ‘yes-men’ see to it as their mission to make sure you never have to endure an uncomfortable situation or an awkward moment.”

Taken to heart, this perfectly reasonable but often unheeded advice could save many a heartache and artistic disappointment. So down with the system, indeed: down with war, hypocrisy and inequality. Everyone should run out and read this engaging straightforward book, written in a breezy and appealing style. But caveat lector: Tankian shoots from the hip and his gun is loaded.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JULY 10 — TEA & TRANQUILITY Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. 4 p.m. Meet & Greet, Enjoy refreshing Citrus Spritzer & Luscious Italian Cookies, hosted by Modern Pastry. At 4:30 p.m. BIG JOE, the storyteller, performance for all ages. Join us! RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org Joe in Subject Line.

AUGUST 7 — TEA & TRANQUILITY Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. 4 p.m. Meet Armina Manoukian, co-owner, House of Lavash who will share her experiences and the art of making Gata, a luscious Armenian sweet for all to taste & enjoy with refreshing ice tea. Join us! RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org. Gata in Subject Line.

AUGUST 11 — Saints Vartanantz Annual Church Picnic, 12 Noon – 5:00 p.m., Music – Food – Dancing featuring the Jason Naroian Ensemble. 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford, MA.

AUGUST 18 — UNDER THE AUGUST MOON Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. 7:30 p.m. Festive evening meeting & greeting while enjoying the Black Sea Salsa Combo, refreshing Citrus Spritzers & dancing on the Moonlit Labyrinth. Join us! RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org. August in Subject Line.

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.

MICHIGAN

JULY 20 — Save the date! Armenia Fest 16! At the Royal Oak Farmers Market. Celebrate 16 years of getting together and showcasing our rich Armenian heritage with music, vendors, food and dance! Friday, 5 to 10 p.m. The Royal Oak Farmer’s Market will once again be transformed to a wonderful “little Yerevan” with vendors selling Armenian food, folk goods, jewelry and desserts; live band “The Armenia Fest Allstars” with celebrated musicians under the direction of Vaughn Masropian; Hamazkayin Arax Dance Troupe, and a vast array of Armenian taste treats. Special fun in mind for the little ones with Mr. Mouse and his balloon magic and face painting. Armenian food rovided by original Armenia Fest caterer, Gary Reizian and his crew from Uptown Catering. Don’t miss our annual Choereg Contest! To set up a stall, contact Vendor Chair, Noreen Masropian at nmas@comcast.net. Reserve your space now. \$60 for a Vendor table. To date our Fest has donated \$70K+ to these worthwhile endeavors.

NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 15 — Parish Council members and friends of St. Paul Armenian Church, Syracuse, will host its Annual Shish Kebab Picnic. Great food, games, prizes, etc., on scenic, sheltered, private grounds at Ryder Park. Serving starts at 1 p.m. The entire community is invited.

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.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Lula kabab (All photos courtesy <https://dawnlajeunesse.com/>)

Armenian Lula Kebab and the 9th Street Church: Memories from Author Dawn Essegian Lajeunesse

TROY, N.Y. — “Growing up in Troy with an Armenian father and a non-Armenian mother, boiled chicken and pilaf was a staple meal in our home,” writes author Dawn Essegian Lajeunesse. “My exposure to the world of Armenian food, cooking and cuisine really began at the annual church dinners and smorgasbords held at the United Armenian Calvary Congregational Church on 9th Street. At these dinners, buttery Armenian pilaf was served with shish kebab and a fresh green salad. Juicy lula kebab was made with lamb, and to this day, I can still remember its distinctive smell and flavor every time I entered the church hall. Lula kebab (or lulu kabob or lule) is a key component in many Armenian diets. The recipe is usually a blend of ground lamb or beef (or all lamb in many cases), onions, seasonings and fresh herbs. It is cooked on skewers and often served with pilaf.”

Food editor and baking instructor Andrew Janjigian writes, “While Armenian grilled meats — or khorovats, which just means ‘grilled’ in Armenian—are most associated with the skewered chunks of meats called shish kebab, Armenians are equally enamored with ground or minced meat patties or on short wooden skewers on the grill. These grilled, spiced ground meat kebabs go by a few different names, depending upon how they are formed and grilled (the meat mixture and seasonings are essentially the same, whatever the shape). Lula or lule kebabs — lule means ‘rolled’—are formed into sausage-shaped logs (skewered or freeform) or into long, flat patties by pressing them onto special flat, sword-like skewers. But in New England, where I grew up, Armenians instead make ‘losh’ kebab, which are round, freeform patties exactly like hamburgers, except with more zing to them.”*

“Our church dinners often drew over 500 attendees at each event. Long buffet tables were laden with homemade Armenian appetizers (mezze), main dishes, desserts, breads, and sweet pastries (including paklava, gata, and bourma). Our gifted church ladies who were all excellent cooks often began cooking the week before, putting in full workdays while donating their time and efforts. Their extensive prep work was done entirely by hand – no food processors or modern devices were used in those days. ‘They really pulverize the vegetables,’ was the explanation always given. Everything had to be perfect for these church dinners,” adds Dawn.

“As the week progressed, the church ladies and men’s group worked together to create a cookbook’s worth of outstanding foods and desserts, including the



Author Dawn Essegian Lajeunesse

mixing of the lula kebab ingredients on Friday, so it could marinate overnight before being wrapped on individual serving sticks. On Friday, the preparation of the church hall began, with the men coming forward to prepare the steam tables and arrange the dining tables and chairs. On Saturday morning, the meat was wrapped on sticks and handed off to the men who would handle the grilling. A devoted church member owned a large meat market in our town, and he often donated the lamb for these events. It was traditional for these men to cook the meat selections on the afternoon of the event, so all was fresh when served.

“Our church began as a Presbyterian Armenian Church — about half the original congregation was Congregational and the other half Presbyterian, but only the Presbyterian hierarchy offered financial assistance. Within a few years (1910), about half the congregation, led by the Congregationalists — including my grandfather and his brother — broke away from the Presbyterians and started their own church, holding services in a borrowed space until building the church I knew in 1916. The tragedy of the Armenian Genocide pulled the Troy Protestant Armenians together to support the survivors as they arrived in waves. The two Protestant churches came together again, and their first official service together was held in 1919. The original church ceased services and the building was turned into a parsonage. The new name of the combined church, United Armenian Calvary Congregational Church (UACCC), reflected the joining together to honor those masses of Armenian men, women, and children who were lost at the hands of the Ottomans. A stained glass window in the church balcony honored and remembered those who were lost.”

“In 2019, I began writing about these Armenian immigrants who settled in Troy in the late 19th century, and who founded the church where I spent my childhood and early adulthood. Sadly, the church held its last regular service in 2011, and sat vacant and neglected for nine years. But my obsession — combined with the support of many interested members — led us to a final closure service in 2020 before a land developer converted the church building to apartments. Most of my blog posts have focused on what I’ve experienced on my way to writing an historical fiction about these early Armenians and the Evangelical Protestant church they built. At the closure of the last service, attendees gathered at the altar for a group photo followed by a COVID-friendly reception. A history table dating back to the earliest days and photos reminded all of the experiences and spiritual strength the church provided its members for over 114 years. Our church was converted to apartments the following year. The familiar internal church structure is gone, but the exterior looks pretty much the same – in the end, the beloved United Armenian Calvary Congregational Church remains in its members’ hearts forever,” adds Dawn.

“These dinners and the original lula kebab recipe died with the dedicated church ladies and loyal members who worked each year to make these events so successful. For the recipe below, I researched a similar recipe in *The Art of Armenian Cooking* (1971) by Rose Baboian. My recipe is based on my memories of the wonderful foods and tastes from our church. Making these lula kebab requires individual skewers for serving, unlike chunk meat shish which can be threaded onto long metal skewers. The traditional way to eat this dish is on the sticks, so they cannot be fragile enough to splinter and risk injury. Finding substantial shish sticks that didn’t break under the weight of the meat proved to be a challenge. A cousin found the substantial sticks available online. Look for sticks that are close to 1/4 inch in diameter.”

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 pounds lean ground lamb, beef, pork or bison (Dawn uses lamb for this recipe)
- 4 tablespoons flour or oatmeal (or some of each)
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- 4 tablespoons finely chopped onions
- 1/2-1 teaspoon allspice
- 1/4-1/2 teaspoon Aleppo pepper
- 1/2-1 teaspoon garlic (ground or fresh, finely chopped)
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1-2 teaspoons salt

Note: Dawn adds 3-4 tablespoons (or more) of finely chopped red and green pepper and chopped parsley to stretch the meat and add more color and texture. Serves 4-6.

PREPARATION:

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and refrigerate overnight or at least 6 hours.

Bring meat to room temperature and wrap on butcher sticks (about 1/4 inch in diameter and 6-8 inches long is best). Cook over charcoal (best), on a gas grill, or in the oven, turning until kebabs are browned on all sides. Serve with Armenian rice or bulgur pilaf.

“My last three novels, *THE EYES HAVE IT*, *IN HER MOTHER’S SHOES* and *STAR CATCHING*, are available in e-book format through Amazon and other formats by request here or on my website. *AUTUMN COLORS* was my first novel and is still available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble in multiple formats. My work-in-progress is a historical fiction about the Armenians who settled in Troy, NY in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” To order, go to Amazon and search Dawn Lajeunesse. For her blog, go to JustWriteIt.live

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The men’s group prepare the grill with screens to ensure nothing fell into the fire



ARTS & CULTURE

The Journalist Descendent of Great Iranian-Armenians

DAVIDKHANIAN, from page 13 mentioned, among my ancestors there were also brigadier generals, generals, a finance minister, a royal architect, a court doctor, royal translators and teachers in Iran's first polytechnic school in the 1800s. My great-grandfather was General Sarkis Khan Davidkhanian, also in the Persian Cossack Brigade. My grandfather, Megerditch Khan, was the governor of Khorramshahr (Muhammarah) and military governor of Dezful on the cusp of the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties. He was the one who arrested Sheikh Khazal Bin Jabir, the emir of Muhammarah and overlord of the Muhaisin tribal confederation and Sheik of Sheiks of the Banu Ka'ab, who was trying to set up an independent emirate in southwest Iran in the 1920s. Soon after that, my grandfather was put in charge of the personal security of Reza Khan, who at the time was Minister of War and just a couple of years away from becoming Reza Shah the Great, founder and first Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty. That position didn't last long. Travel plans were arranged for Reza Khan to visit the holy Shiite shrines in Iraq and his close advisers convinced him that it wasn't wise to visit the shrines with a Christian in tow.

From my mother's side, we are related to Hovannes Khan Massehian (1864–1931), renowned Iranian diplomat and brilliant translator of Shakespeare into Armenian. He was the Persian Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James and Berlin before he became Persia's first Ambassador to Japan. He fell ill in the Gobi Desert and died in the city of Harbin. His father, Agha Dzeruni, was the Chief Jeweler of the Persian Court and was the creator of the bejeweled globe that is one of the main attractions of Iran's magnificent crown jewels collection. Recent DNA tests with the Armenian DNA Project also showed that my mother carries some Bagratuni genes, although I am sure there are thousands and thousands of others who can claim the same.

And how did an Iranian Armenian become an Italian journalist?

I became a journalist accidentally. Ever since I was little, my fixation was architecture, but the revolution in Iran upset my plans, or rather it was I who let it upset my plans. I was very young and having lived through the revolution in Iran I just wanted to have some fun. I had already dabbled in modeling, participating in Italian pop singers Rita Pavone and Teddy Reno's annual competition that would take place in each of Italy's 20 regions from which the best unknown actors, actresses, models, singers, etc. would be picked and then all the regional winners in each category would meet for the final event in Milan, where the national winners would be elected.

In that year, I was elected the winner from Lazio (the region where Rome is) but didn't win the final selection in Milan. Then, while still at the American University of Rome, I read David Niven's autobiography where he tells the story of how after WWII, he had figured that if he became a journalist, he could make some pocket money and get into the best parties in town! I was in my early 20s and wanted to do the same, so I went to the local English-language daily, the once-glorious but now long-gone *Daily American*, and offered to do a free monthly fashion supplement for them. They agreed and within a few months of working there offered me a full-time paid job as the supplements and specials editor.

Lots of fun stories to tell there as I had access to the best Rome had to offer in the very early years of the Italian fashion boom. Those parties opened the door for me to live the tail end of the *Dolce Vita*,



Caren Davidkhanian

mixing and mingling with people I would otherwise probably not have had a chance to meet, from major Italian fashion names to fun characters like renowned inventor and Nobel laureate Guglielmo Marconi's daughter, princess Elettra Marconi to Wanda Toscanini, Arturo Toscanini's daughter and Vladimir Horowitz's wife, to Valentino, to Sorelle Fontana of the 1950s Italian fashion fame, to Gore Vidal, to photographer Roloff Benny, and to countless descendants of historical Italian families, and others.

Benny was a phenomenal Canadian photographer who, invited by Empress Farah, had visited Iran many times over the span of a couple of years right before the revolution. The result of those visits were two magnificent books — *Persia, A Bridge Of Turquoise* and *Iran, Elements of Destiny* — that came out in the year of the revolution and quickly became highly sought-after by Iranian émigrés. I met Benny at a party at a friend's palazzo in Rome. As soon as he heard that I was Iranian, he took me into a private room, closed the door, sat down and we practically spent the rest of the evening reminiscing about Iran. He raved about the beauty of the country and about the legendary hospitality he had received from the queen as well as from ordinary Iranians during his travels throughout the country.

At the time, I had started compiling a weekly page for the newspaper with listings of arts, music, and cultural events in the city. I asked him if I could use some of his photos in the layout and he enthusiastically agreed to it, inviting me to go to his place the following week to choose whatever photos I wanted from his archive. Unfortunately, he died a week later of a heart attack in his bathtub, and I got to use only one of his photos — the sublime interior of the dome of the Shaikh Lotfollah mosque in Isfahan — on my page that week.

A few years later I moved on to writing about wine and food and travel (several trade guidebooks, some co-authored) including a section of one of the earliest editions of *Time Out, Florence and Tuscany* and the Italian Touring Club's guide to Rome, and then about Italian movie business for *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. Then I started my own publication, Italy's first fax-delivered newsletter — *The Italian Press Digest* — where I would explain the day's most important Italian political events in English for the use of the foreign embassies in Rome. After that, I got into writing editorials and commentaries on Middle Eastern, and particularly Iranian, politics for a small but very influential

Italian newspaper, *Il Riformista*, and became an occasional commentator on Italian TV and the Vatican Radio.

I assume your articles on Iran were important for raising awareness on Iranian issues in Italian society.

I can recall an unsigned editorial I wrote for *Il Riformista* in 2003. That was the year of a wave of student protests in Iran and the invasion of Iraq. In my editorial, I accused the Italian left and the feminists of double standards and complacency with the Ayatollahs when it came to women's rights and political freedom in Iran. The editorial sparked the biggest break in relations between Iran and Italy when within hours of its publication, it had the second highest authority in Italy (the president of the Senate) and virtually the entire political class (party secretaries, members of parliament, etc.) make declarations in support of the student protests against the Islamic Republic. It led to the most unprecedented event in the history of the Italian Republic where all major political figures, from communist to neo-fascist, participated side by side at a demonstration in Rome's Campo de' Fiori by the name of "Siamo tutti iraniani" (we are all Iranians) in support of the Iranian student opposition and against the Ayatollahs. At that time Italy was Iran's biggest trade partner, but all commercial activities between the two countries came to a halt for a few weeks as Iran protested Italy's "interference" in its domestic affairs.

lic Salesiana University of Rome where I prepared Spanish-speaking students to take the Italian proficiency exam that was required for admittance to the university. I have also taught English, including at the Italian Ministry of Finance's Superior School of Economy and Finance and, believe it or not, one of Rome's main jails where I had to teach a group of extremely unruly prison guards, male and female. They were so crazy and uncontrollable that I often forgot that they were actual prison guards, not prisoners! Teaching languages is truly fascinating as it opens the door to meeting people from all walks of life that would be otherwise hard to meet.

And now you live in the United States...

Yes, I came here to be close to my family. I love it here in Denver as I love the mountains, the skiing and the easy access to horse country. I stopped working as a journalist when I came here but write for pleasure mostly nowadays. Last year, I helped my best friend from college with a successful online movie business magazine he has started by the name of *The Verdict* as its features editor but had to put it on hold for family reasons.

For a long time, I have been thinking about writing a series of very short stories. In fact, writing about my travels in Iran in the mid-90s is one thing I have wanted to do for a long time. For six years, starting in 1996, I would go back to visit my parents



Caren Davidkhanian's great-grandfather, General Sarkis Khan Davidkhanian. The painting was commissioned by Megerditch Khan Davidkhanian to a famous painter of New Julfa, Sumbat Ter Kiureghian, in 1975 (Vank Museum in Isfahan).

Shortly after that I became the first foreign citizen (I was still an Iranian citizen at the time) to be allowed to join Italy's Ordine dei giornalisti italiani. The Italian Parliament had to issue a specific approval for that to happen legally.

As many Diaspora Armenians, you are a polyglot, going easily from one language to the other.

Yes, I love languages. I have also taught languages, English and Italian, on and off for four decades. I speak five languages fluently, Armenian being possibly my weakest, and am currently learning Iraqi Arabic, particularly the dialect of southern Iraq, which is the same as the one spoken by Iranian Arabs in the adjacent region of southwestern Iran where my father was born. I have also done translations on and off all my life, particularly in the wine and food sector. I have taught Italian at the Catho-

every summer and spend five or six weeks there, including a couple of weeks of travel to the most remote areas of the country using hired cabs and very rundown local buses with no previous plans as to where to spend the night. I had in mind to see remote and very little-known archaeological sites. One was a 10th-century standalone minaret in an isolated valley at a bullet's reach from the border with Afghanistan. I got to the closest village, some 20 miles away from the site. The villagers told me that the area was very unsafe and infested with smugglers. So, I turned around and left. Those trips provided me with some of the most unforgettable experiences of my life.

Being fascinated by Iran, it will be very interesting to read about your travels. Thanks for your answers, Caren, and good luck with your endeavors!



THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
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SINCE 1932



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COMMENTARY

CSTO: Six Years of Discussions, Zero Real Action

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent days, the most discussed topic in Armenia remains Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s statements directed towards the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the president of Belarus. There have been multiple reports in the Armenian media about strained relations between the prime minister of Armenia and the president of Belarus, since the change in power in Armenia in 2018. Belarus has openly shown its friendly ties with Azerbaijan, which it views as more significant strategically and economically rather than Armenia. From 2018, CSTO was an important political and foreign political topic in Armenia.

First of all, Armenia initiated a campaign against the CSTO when it withdrew its representative, three-star General Yuri Khachaturov, citing a criminal case against him in Armenia as the reason for his return to Yerevan. Although Khachaturov returned, the case did not progress, and he promptly relinquished his position as the general secretary to the Belarusian representative according to the charter of the organization. This move was considered a significant blow to the authority of the CSTO, especially since Khachaturov had not been convicted.

A few days ago, Pashinyan declared that Armenia will cease all participation in events in Belarus and no Armenian official will visit Belarus as long as Aleksander Lukashenko is president. This decision was made in response to Lukashenko’s statement confirming his support for Azerbaijan during the 2020 war and his belief in the latter’s victory. Armenia reacted by recalling its ambassador from Minsk, prompting Belarus to reciprocate and refrain from commenting on the “emotional statements made by the Armenian prime minister.”

The prime minister of Armenia has once again announced his consideration of leaving the CSTO, despite the Armenian Foreign Ministry stating the day before that Armenia has no such intention. It is important to note that a member state of the CSTO must provide written notice of its intention to withdraw from organization at least 6 month in advance, with for-

mal withdrawal possible only after 6 months. As for now, no letter has been submitted to the organization. The charter of the organization does not outline a mechanism for removing states from the CSTO, leaving the decision to the member state itself. Again, Armenia has not submitted any formal letter yet.

Armenia’s boycott of Belarus may impact its participation in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), as Belarus is set to chair the organization next year. This could result in Armenian representatives abstaining from EAEU sessions, potentially affecting decision-making as this organization operates on consensus. Of course, it is possible that Armenian representatives may join the online session to prevent a complete breakdown in communication. Therefore, the boycott itself does not necessarily imply that Armenia will obstruct the efforts of EAEU or CSTO, at least during Belarus’ presidency.

It’s worth remembering that in March 2024, Armenian leaders held talks with Belarusian opposition figure Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, a politician, presidential candidate in Belarus, and prominent symbol of Belarussian opposition who fled the country following disputed

presidential elections. This meeting triggered discontent in Belarus, yet Minsk did not respond aggressively. President Lukashenko views the elections as an effort to foment revolution in Belarus, a potential threat thwarted with significant backing from Russia.

As for the situation surrounding the CSTO since Pashinyan’s rise to power, it remains somewhat ambiguous, as Armenia has repeatedly threatened to leave the organization over the past six years, without taking any substantial actions in this regard.

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

ARMENIA’S BOYCOTT OF BELARUS MAY IMPACT ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION (EAEU), AS BELARUS IS SET TO CHAIR THE ORGANIZATION NEXT YEAR.

Pashinyan: ‘We Will Leave’ Russia-Led Security Pact

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan appears to have confirmed that Armenia plans to leave the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), after being heckled by an opposition MP.

At a questions and answers session in parliament on Wednesday, June 12, Pashinyan said Armenia was yet to decide when exactly they leave, but that there was “no other way.”

The comments came after Pashinyan again accused CSTO members of helping Azerbaijan in its attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Tadevos Avetisyan, an MP from the opposition Armenia Alliance, had questioned if the government asked themselves what the state of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh would be if they were not in power. Pashinyan responded that they did, and were acting according to the answer they came up with.

He said he had told the opposition that the existence of Armenian statehood was in danger. Asked who the culprit was, Pashinyan put the blame on his predecessor, Serzh Sargsyan’s government for relying on ties with Russia and the CSTO.

“The culprits are those who formed some sort of ‘bubble alliance,’ whose members turned out to, instead of fulfilling their contractual obligations, go and plan a war against us with Azerbaijan,” he said.

An MP is then reported to have shouted “then leave it [the CSTO]!,” to which Pashinyan hit back: “we will leave.”

“Are you trying to scare [us] with that?” he asked. “We will decide when to leave. According to you, what should the next step be? Do you think we will go back? There is no other way.”

“Let me tell you where we are going, and I will even say that we have almost arrived,” Pashinyan said.

“We are going to the real Armenia, a sovereign, safe, peaceful, state with demarcated borders. Don’t worry, we won’t go back. We’re just not telling you too early, so that your mood doesn’t drop suddenly.”

In an apparent attempt to walk back Pashinyan’s comments, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan claimed that Pashinyan had not said Armenia would leave the CSTO.

“The Armenian Prime Minister did not say that we are leaving the CSTO. He said we will decide when we leave, we will decide, but we will not go back,” Mirzoyan said.

“This is what he said, no less, of course, and no more. If anyone claims that the Armenian PM said that Armenia is leaving the CSTO, they are wrong and this is very easy to prove.”

Armenia’s relations with Russia and the CSTO have been in freefall since the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020.

Many in Armenia have become increasingly frustrated with the country’s traditional security partners, after both Russia and the CSTO failed to send assistance during Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia in 2021 and 2022.

Azerbaijan is not a member of the CSTO, and members are treaty-bound to intervene when one of their own is attacked.

After Azerbaijan took new positions within Armenia in 2022, the CSTO offered only to send a ‘fact-finding mission’, declining even to lay the blame on Azerbaijan. This came in contrast to several Western countries that called on Azerbaijan to withdraw its troops.

Earlier this week, Russia’s foreign ministry criticized Armenia for declining to pay its contributions to the CSTO.

(This article originally appeared on the website OC-Media on June 12.)



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

The Regime that Rules Armenia Has Crossed All Red Lines: Must Be Disposed of ASAP

I am deeply disappointed and saddened by the events that took place in Armenia last week: there was so much violence and blood in the streets of Yerevan and so many insane statements made by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

It was so upsetting to see Pashinyan's police throwing stun grenades and beating to a pulp peaceful men, women and children who were merely exercising their civil rights in a country falsely labeled as democratic. To hide the violence from the public, the police even assaulted a dozen members of the media and destroyed their equipment. The police used the same tactic inside the Parliament, when pro-Pashinyan members were physically assaulting the opposition. The police tried to force the journalists to stop broadcasting the Parliament members' violent behavior, but the courageous journalists, who were all female, continued to air the embarrassing brawl.

Over 100 civilians and a handful of policemen were hospitalized. One protester lost three fingers because of the stun grenades. In addition, Abraham Gasbaryan PhD, a critic of Pashinyan, was specifically targeted by the police. After his arrest, a dozen policemen attacked him viciously causing him to suffer a concussion, a deep gash in his head, and several broken ribs. Gasbaryan, an expat from Syria, is an Associate Professor, TV anchor and founding director of the Genesis Armenia think tank. These brutal actions were condemned by Amnesty International, Lemkin Institute and Armenian Bar Association of the U.S.

We now turn to Pashinyan's absurd statements in Parliament, lasting more than five hours, over a two-day period. He started by announcing that Armenia will withdraw from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), but he said he does not know when. It could be "in one month, one year or three years from now." This is what I call "a decisive leader!"

Pashinyan then went on to denounce President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus (a CSTO member), for backing Azerbaijan before and during the 2020 war. Pashinyan said that neither he nor any of his officials will visit Belarus. In line with his constantly contradictory statements, Pashinyan then turned around and said that he will reconsider his decision only after Belarus leaves the CSTO or if Pres. Lukashenko offers apologies and explanations that are understandable and acceptable to the Armenian people!

Even though Lukashenko is no angel and should be criticized for his support of Azerbaijan, Pashinyan once again proved his incompetence by making several errors:

1) Why did Pashinyan wake up all of sudden in 2024 to the fact that Belarus supported Azerbaijan, when this has been public knowledge since before 2020?

2) Russia, the leader of CSTO, has supplied Azerbaijan around \$5 billion of

military hardware for the 2020 war. Why is Pashinyan not announcing that he will never visit Russia as long as Putin is President?

3) Even though Israel is not a CSTO member, why is Pashinyan not criticizing that country and pledging not to have anything to do with it, since Israel has supplied Azerbaijan billions of dollars of advanced drones and other sophisticated weapons with which thousands of Armenian soldiers were injured or killed?

4) While Pashinyan is refusing to go to Belarus, he gladly went to Ankara for the inauguration ceremony of Pres. Erdogan and shook his hand congratulating him! Turkey not only supplied deadly Bayraktar drones and transferred thousands of Jihadist terrorists to Azerbaijan to fight against Artsakh, but more significantly, directed the 2020 war. Shouldn't Pashinyan have refused to go to Turkey, instead of cozying up to Erdogan and normalizing relations with an unrepentant genocidal country that is still helping to kill Armenians?

5) Why did Pashinyan not announce that he will stop all trade with Belarus, Russia, Turkey and Israel because of their support for Azerbaijan? Why is it business as usual with countries that are arming your enemy to kill your citizens?

Pashinyan went on to say from the podium of the Parliament the most insulting and vicious lies about the Catholicos, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, Artsakh Armenians and the opposition. Such behavior is inappropriate for the prime minister of a country!

Pashinyan then confessed that it was his biggest failure that he had not given Artsakh to Azerbaijan when he first came to power: "And, yes, I admitted yesterday that it was my greatest mistake and my greatest failure that I did not do it in 2018." This is the same man that proclaimed while visiting Artsakh in 2019: "Artsakh is Armenia. Period." He then turned around in 2023 and said the exact opposite: "Artsakh is part of Azerbaijan." No wonder Pashinyan's critics think that something is wrong with him.

Pashinyan went on to say that Armenia should have "lowered the bar" of the Artsakh settlement in order to comply with the international consensus on this issue. He forgot that his job was to defend Armenia's interests, not to comply with other countries' wishes. Illogically, he tried to explain why it was wrong to start bargaining from your highest demand. He then said that he had discovered a document from 1996, but claimed that hardly anyone knew about it since there was no internet back then. In reality, the internet was invented in 1971. He read the OSCE Chairman's criticism of Armenia, but failed to read Armenia's objections to it. He falsely claimed that "the clerical-feudal elite of Armenia" had fooled the people, even though he himself was trying to deceive the public.

Pashinyan and his supporters should know that sooner or later they will be prosecuted for their multiple violations of Armenian laws. He and his police should be tried by the European Court of Human Rights and International Criminal Court. All of the illegal agreements Pashinyan signed with Azerbaijan will be considered null and void and reversed by the next nationalistic government.

Armenia, France Sign Another Arms Deal

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — France will sell CAESAR self-propelled howitzers to Armenia in another arms deal between the two countries announced by French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu on Tuesday, June 18.

Lecornu made the announcement on the X social media platform the day after holding what he described as a "warm and productive meeting" in Paris with his Armenian counterpart Suren Papikyan. He said the contract for the acquisition of the howitzers was signed during the talks.

Lecornu did not specify how many such systems Armenia will buy and at what cost. He said only that the contract marks a "new important milestone" in French-Armenian military ties.

"We continue to strengthen our defense relationship with Armenia," wrote Lecornu.

The Armenian Defense Ministry reported on Monday that one of Papikyan's deputies, Karen Brutyan, and a top executive of KNDS France, the manufacturer of CAESAR systems, signed an "agreement on military-technical cooperation." It gave no details of the deal signed in the presence of the two ministers.

In a separate statement, the ministry said without elaborating that Papikyan and Lecornu reached "new understandings" on French-Armenian military cooperation.

Paris pledged last fall to sell weapons

and provide other military assistance to Armenia as part of a broader deepening of bilateral relations cemented by the existence of an influential Armenian community in France. Those weapons include sophisticated radars, short-range air-defense systems, armored personnel carriers and night-vision equipment. Some of that hardware was delivered to Armenia by the time Lecornu visited the South Caucasus country in February.

Yerevan's contract with KNDS may well be the most significant of the French-Armenian arms deals signed to date.

With a firing range of more than 40 kilometers, CAESAR is one of the most advanced artillery systems of its kind in the world. France as well as Denmark have gifted Ukraine 49 such 155 millimeter truck-mounted systems since the 2022 Russian invasion of the country. Early this year, Kyiv bought another six French howitzers for between 3 million and 4 million euros (\$3.3-\$4.4 million) each.

France is also due to train Armenian military personnel. The French military will reportedly hold three "mountain combat training courses" for them this year. Armenia's top general and France's ground army chief of staff discussed these programs when they met in Germany last week.

During his trip to Yerevan, Lecornu emphasized the defensive character of the



French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu (right) and his Armenian counterpart Suren Papikyan preside over the signing of a new French-Armenian arms deal, Paris, June 17, 2024.

French-Armenian military cooperation condemned by Azerbaijan.

Armenia is keen to boost that cooperation amid mounting tensions with Russia, its traditional ally and until recently main

supplier of weapons and ammunition. Yerevan is increasingly looking for other arms suppliers also because of the ongoing war in Ukraine which is absorbing the bulk of Russia's military resources.



12 More Indicted Over Anti-government Protests

INDICTMENTS, from page 1
officers. The committee indicated that it may well prosecute more supporters of Archbishop Bagrat, the leader of the more than month-long anti-government protests.

The law-enforcement agency indicted the 12 men just as it freed without charge all 28 protesters who were arrested on Wednesday on a street adjacent to the Armenian parliament building heavily guarded by security forces. Thousands of Galstanyan supporters gathered there as Pashinyan answered questions from parliamentarians.

During scuffles that broke out there, security forces hurled dozens of stun grenades into the dense crowd, injuring at least 83 people who required medical aid in hospitals. According to law-enforcement authorities, 18 policemen were also hurt.

Pashinyan and his allies have unequivocally defended the police actions, claiming that the protesters tried to break through the police cordons to storm the parliament. These claims are rejected not only by Galstanyan and the Armenian opposition forces, but also by local civic organizations.

In a joint statement issued on Monday, 17 mostly Western-funded NGOs strongly condemned the police actions as “unnecessary, disproportionate and therefore illegal” and demanded a criminal investigation into them. They were especially outraged



Protestors and police square off on June 12.

by the unprecedented number of stun grenades used in the crackdown.

Natalia Nozadze, Amnesty International’s South Caucasus researcher, likewise

expressed serious concern about “the level of violence during the latest street rally in Yerevan”

“We call on the Armenian authorities to immediately and impartially investigate what happened, including allegations that the police may have used unnecessary or excessive force,” she said.

“Law enforcement officials should avoid the use of force; where this is not possible, force should only be used when it is absolutely necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate law enforcement objective, and to the minimum extent necessary,”

As of the evening of June 17, the authorities reported no criminal or internal inquiries into police officers who inflicted serious injuries not only on protesters but also a dozen journalists. Armenia’s leading media associations had suggested on Thursday, June 13, that the police deliberately targeted the reporters and cameramen who covered the protest.

Ruben Melikyan, an opposition-linked

lawyer representing one of the indicted suspects, said that the authorities are pressing politically motivated charges against protesters in order to justify the use of force. He insisted that the charges are based on policemen’s incriminating testimony that cannot be corroborated by any evidence.

“Look at the testimony of those ‘victims,’” Melikyan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “One of the policemen said, ‘I had a back pain, went to the doctor and they said everything is alright.’ Another said, ‘An empty plastic bottle hit my helmet and I felt dizzy.’”

Melikyan’s client, Tigran Saribekyan, is now under house arrest. According to the lawyer, Saribekyan threw a wooden object towards several lines of riot police after being injured in a stun grenade explosion.

The latest indictments raised to 59 the total number of Galstanyan supporters prosecuted since the beginning of the anti-government protests in late April. Twenty-nine of them are held in pre-trial detention.



Riot police officers block a street during a rally against Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan in front of the Parliament building in Yerevan, June 12, 2024.

The Secret Arms Deal That Cost Putin an Ally

BELARUS, from page 1

On Wednesday, June 12, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced his government would begin the process of withdrawing from the bloc, claiming its members were “not fulfilling their contractual obligations, but are planning a war against us with Azerbaijan.”

Now, a cache of more than a dozen letters, diplomatic notes, bills of sale and export passports seen by POLITICO shows that Belarus actively aided Azerbaijan’s armed forces between 2018 and 2022, as tensions peaked with Armenia. The services offered included modernizing older artillery equipment and providing new gear used for electronic warfare and drone systems.

The documents include letters from the Belarusian state arms export agency to its own military-industrial firms relating to orders of state-of-the-art artillery targeting equipment for Azerbaijan as well as correspondence between the two states agreeing the purchase of Groza-S counter-drone mobile warfare stations for Azerbaijan’s armed forces.

Neither the Azerbaijani nor Belarusian

governments responded to requests for comment.

“With Friends like These”

Artillery and drones were used extensively in combat between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces in recent years. This included during a 2020 war between the two sides over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which lies inside Azerbaijan’s internationally recognized borders but has been governed as an unrecognized state by its Armenian population since a brutal conflict that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. An Azerbaijani offensive last September ended the region’s de facto independence and sparked a mass exodus of its 100,000 inhabitants.

One of the diplomatic communications seen by POLITICO said that Belarusian enterprises were playing an active role “in the restoration of de-occupied territories of Azerbaijan, as well as the export of Belarusian goods and services” to the country.

Azerbaijani forces also launched incursions into the territory of the Republic of Armenia proper in September 2022, taking key strategic heights. Armenia called on

the CSTO for support at the time, but later accused the bloc of failing to honor its commitments after it offered only to send a fact-finding delegation. Since then, Pashinyan, Armenia’s leader, has struck a deal to expand an EU monitoring mission on the tense border between the two former Soviet republics and invited U.S. troops for joint training drills.

Eduard Arakelyan, a military analyst at Yerevan’s Regional Center for Democracy and Security, verified that the leaked documents pertained to hardware used by Azerbaijan in recent wars, both in Nagorno-Karabakh and against the Republic of Armenia itself.

“This equipment was used with devastating effect against Armenian troops and was provided by a country that is supposed to be an ally of Armenia,” he said. “In formal terms, it’s a complete breach of the CSTO alliance but, in practice, we’ve always known the bloc was more supportive of Azerbaijan.”

Despite on paper being an ally of Armenia, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko has previously described Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev as “our

man” and said it would be “wrong” for the CSTO to oppose him. Aliyev, for his part, said in 2022 that “we have more friends in the CSTO than Armenia.”

However, according to experts, Belarus — one of Moscow’s closest allies — was unlikely to be acting without the tacit support of the Kremlin itself. “This truly shows that with friends like Vladimir Putin, nobody needs enemies,” said Ivana Stradner, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

“It’s ridiculous to think these transfers could have taken place without Moscow’s knowledge, and that Russia couldn’t have stopped them if it wanted to,” she added. “There is no such thing as loyalty when it comes to Moscow — it’s all about preserving their own security even if it’s at the expense of their own allies.”

Belarus summoned Armenia’s ambassador to a meeting at the foreign ministry on Thursday, June 13, after Pashinyan aired his accusations the previous day. The envoy was later recalled to Yerevan, and Belarus’ ambassador returned to Minsk, as part of a severing of diplomatic relations between the two nations.