

## EU Council Approves 10 Million Euros in Military Aid to Armenia

BRUSSELS — On July 22, the European Union Council, in a first, adopted an assistance measure under the European Peace Facility (EPF) in support of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia worth 10 million euros (\$10.8 million).

For the first time, the EU has decided to support Armenia from the European Peace Facility. The aim of this assistance measure is to enhance the logistical capacities of the Armenian Armed Forces, and to contribute to improved protection of civilians in crises and emergencies. It also aims to enhance the resilience of Armenia and accelerate interoperability of its Armed Forces in case of possible future participation of the country in international military missions and operations, including those deployed by the EU. Concretely, the adopted assistance measure will allow the provision of a fully-fledged deployable tent camp for a battalion-sized unit.

“Security is an increasingly important element of our bilateral relations with Armenia. This European Peace Facility measure will further contribute to the resilience of the country. We have a mutual interest to further scale up our dialogue on foreign and security policy, also looking into Armenia’s future participation in EU-led missions and operations,” said Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

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## Armenia, Azerbaijan Accuse Each Other of Rejecting Meeting at UK Summit

By Felix Light and Nailia Bagirova

TBILISI/BAKU (Reuters) — Armenia and Azerbaijan on Thursday, July 18, accused each other of blocking a proposed UK-mediated meeting between their leaders, the latest bump in the road on an on-and-off peace process aimed at ending their more than three decade-long conflict.

Both Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev were in the United Kingdom for a summit of the European Political Community at Blenheim Palace, near Oxford.

Hikmet Hajiyev, foreign policy adviser to President Aliyev, told Reuters that Armenia had rejected a proposal for the two leaders to attend a meeting to be mediated by the British.

He said: “We regard Pashinyan’s refusal to meet in London as its intention to retreat from the peace agenda.”

Armenia’s Foreign Ministry said in a

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## Russia Rages over US Military Exercise in Armenia

By Ani Avetisyan

An ongoing joint military exercise involving a comparatively small number of American and Armenian troops at a base in the Yerevan suburbs has caused a paroxysm of rage in the Kremlin.

The 11-day joint exercise, dubbed Eagle Partner, will run through July 24 and is intended to boost the “interoperability between the US and Armenia during peacekeeping and stability operations,” according to a report distributed by the US European Command.

It isn’t the number of troops involved that have Russian officials in a tizzy, its more about the timing and symbolism of the joint exercise. It is a tangible measure of the progress made by Armenia in its geopolitical pivot away from Russia towards the West following Yerevan’s loss of Nagorno-Karabakh.

“You [US and Armenian troops] are at the forefront of an important and growing relationship and partnership, and our nations thank you for your personal commitment toward ensuring peace, security, and prosperity,” US Ambassador to Armenia Kristina Kvien said in remarks made at Eagle Partner’s opening ceremony on July 15.

In parallel with the exercise, Armenian media outlet Hetq reported that a resident adviser from the Pentagon will be attached to Armenia’s Ministry of Defense. The adviser’s duties and responsibilities haven’t been publicly disclosed. In addition, the US and Armenia are exploring cooperation on the



construction of a new nuclear power plant in Armenia. Currently, Russia has a stranglehold on atomic power generation at the Metsamor facility, which has 12 years remaining in its life cycle.

In the history of Soviet/Russian di-

plomacy, the level of vitriol contained in an official statement has often been in inverse proportion to Moscow’s ability to influence its preferred outcome. In the case of Armenia’s rapid embrace of

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## Presidential Speechwriter Ken Khachigian Reflects on a Storied Career in Memoirs

By Aram Arkun  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Presidential speechwriter Ken Khachigian, often called the “lion of California GOP [Republican] politics,” after many decades of involvement in American politics at the highest levels, at the age of 79 has finally come out with his memoirs, aptly titled *Behind Closed Doors: In the Room with Reagan & Nixon* (Post Hill Press). Armenian readers will be particularly interested to find out there that one of the most renowned speeches of President Ronald Reagan, on which Khachigian worked, is anchored in the Armenian experience.

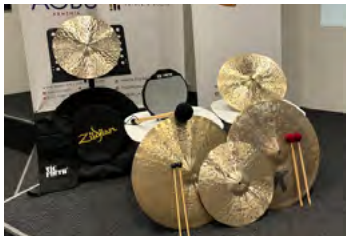
Chapter 20 of the book, “Crisis at Home,” discusses the controversy faced by the president after accepting an invitation by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II by speaking at a German cemetery, where it turned out dozens of members of the infamous Waffen SS combat divisions were buried. To help quell severe criticism, Reagan scheduled a visit to the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and Khachigian was called in from

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Ex-Senior Prosecutor And His Family Summoned to Prosecutor's Office

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Former Armenian Prosecutor General Aghvan Hovsepyan and his family members have been summoned to the Department for Confiscation of Property of Illicit Origin at the Prosecutor General's Office to familiarize themselves with the investigation materials and present their positions on it, Hetq reported on July 23.

Aghvan Hovsepyan, his wife Astghik Hovsepyan, sons Narek, Armen and Misak, as well as daughter-in-law Marina Nushikyan have been asked to appear before the Prosecutor's Office on July 25.

A summons has also been issued to Omira LLC, a company registered in the Czech Republic and affiliated with the Hovsepyan family.

According to the report, Omira LLC owns 99.9 percent of Telia Mining LLC. The owner of its 0.1 percent shares is Nora Barseghyan, a member of the Hovsepyan family, who has also been summoned to the Prosecutor's Office.

### FlyOne Resuming Direct Yerevan-Dubai flights

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — FlyOne Armenia will be resuming direct flights on the Yerevan - Dubai - Yerevan route from October 27, the company said on social media on Friday, July 19.

Flights from Zvartnots International Airport to Dubai International Airport will be operated once a week on Sundays.

### Azeri Troops Must Leave Armenian Border Areas, Ex-ombudsman Insists

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijani servicemen remain stationed in close proximity to Armenia's border villages and inside some parts of Armenian territory, says Arman Tatoyan, a former ombudsman who currently runs the Tatoyan Foundation for Law and Justice.

In a video posted on social media on Tuesday, July 23, he insisted on the withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from the areas to ensure security of Armenian border residents.

"Over time Azerbaijan has developed various methods of inflicting torture and sufferings on the Armenian society. I'm referring to the attacks on Gegharkunik, Syunik and Vayots Dzor Provinces on September 12-13, 2022," the ex-ombudsman said.

"I'd like to emphasize that this situation is obviously orchestrated and sponsored by the Azerbaijani authorities. Otherwise, why hasn't anyone been held to account for their actions? Hence, I consistently assert that the Azerbaijani soldiers, who are likely the same individuals responsible for those atrocities, are currently stationed near our borders and have even invaded Armenian territory," he stated.

# Zildjian Donates World-Renowned Instruments to Armenia

By Araks Kasyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — The Zildjian Company, with a history spanning over 400 years, partnered with Triple A Audio, an Armenian musical technology company, to donate world-renowned musical instruments known for their exceptional quality to Armenia. The official ceremony took place on July 19.

The significant donation includes more than 20 Zildjian cymbals, along with numerous drumsticks, percussion mallets and accessories from Zildjian, Vic Firth and Balter, the last of which were acquired by Zildjian in 2010 and 2018 respectively. These musical instruments and accessories were donated to Yerevan State Conservatory, Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theater, National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia, and Armenian State Jazz Orchestra.

Gevorg Mnatsakanyan, co-founder and chief operating officer of Triple A Audio, expressed his gratitude to the Zildjian Company during the event's opening speech. Established in 2023, Triple A Audio specializes in professional-grade music production software, virtual studio technology (VST) instruments, and remote record-



The Zildjian Company, with a history spanning over 400 years, donated world-renowned musical instruments to Armenia (photo Araks Kasyan)

ing services for film, television, and video game composers. The company's other co-founders include System of a Down

rock star Serj Tankian and American composer and producer Olajide Paris.

"We recognized the untapped potential of Armenian musicians, who, due to various circumstances rather than their own limitations, have not received the recognition they deserve," emphasized Mnatsakanyan. "This realization led us to establish Triple A Audio. We believe in the exceptional quality of Armenian musicians, capable of producing music fit for the next Hollywood film, Netflix productions, and high-quality games. Triple A Audio was founded on this vision, and today, we are dedicated to advancing Armenian musicians and positioning Armenia as a significant music hub. We are grateful that a globally renowned company like Zildjian shares our mission and has chosen to support us."

Craigie Zildjian, CEO and president of the Zildjian Company, renowned for setting unparalleled standards in the development and production of high-quality musical instruments, addressed the event participants with a welcoming video message. "In celebrating the Zildjian Company's 400th anniversary, the family wanted to pay tribute to my grandfather's Armenian heritage. Donating cymbals to the prestigious conservatory and orchestras of Armenia is something my grandfather would certainly have wanted us to do. I am sure the Armenian music community will enjoy this donation of Armenian-named cymbals now made in the US," said Zildjian.

Tankian extended his welcome to the attendees from the United States, expressing regret that he could not attend the ceremony in person. Nevertheless, he conveyed his great joy at being part of this historic event.

The donation was made possible with the support of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Anthony J. Barsamian, co-chair of the Armenian Assembly of America. In a press release, Barsamian highlighted the significant impact of the Zildjian family on global music, emphasizing that "the Armenian Assembly of America and Armenian communities worldwide express deep appreciation to the Zildjian family for their centuries-long contributions."



Craigie Zildjian, CEO and President of the Zildjian Company, addressed the event participants with a welcoming video message (photo Araks Kasyan)



Musical instruments and accessories from the Zildjian Company were donated to Yerevan State Conservatory, Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theater, National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia and Armenian State Jazz Orchestra. From left, Tsovinar Movsisyan, Acting Rector of Yerevan State Conservatory, Anna Melyan, Armenian State Symphony Orchestra Manager, Arman Mnatsakanyan, Drummer of the Armenian State Jazz Orchestra, Garegin Simonyan, Head of the Orchestra of the Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theater, Arman Padaryan, Executive Producer of the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, and Garegin Sargsyan, Director of the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia. (photo Araks Kasyan)





ARMENIA

# Unseen Armenia: *Kirants... Some of What's There*

By Hovsep Daghdigian

YEREVAN — Earlier this spring, the Armenian government, in response to Azerbaijan’s demand for border adjustments, agreed to cede some territory around the village of Kirants to Azerbaijan. Subsequently a comment from an individual minimizing the cultural value of any local sites was quoted in the press. I am unable to retrieve the exact quotation or its source.

The village of Kirants is located in northeastern Armenia close to the Azer-

sites from Kirants village. Though some on-line sources indicate a car can negotiate this road, we were advised by villagers that our rented Niva, a sturdy 4WD Russian off-road vehicle, could not. The road runs from Kirants village towards the SW, through a very damp forested hillside along the northern bank of the Karahan river (the river has multiple names). Having traveled this road on a number of occasions with experienced drivers, with vehicles similar to or clones of WWII Jeeps (called Willies), we barely made it through the deep, mud



Inside Gavit, Deghdznunti vank

potholes not filled with mud. Though access to these sites probably would not have been feasible during previous years, access to Samsoni and Deghdzniti Vanks still presented challenges to our highly skilled driver Rudik. When asked if we could get to Mahkanaberd, a fortress in the area, he declined, adding that he may cease taking visitors to these sites as it takes a lot of gasoline to navigate the obstacles, and maintenance of his customized souped-up jeep type vehicle is costly.

Kirants Monastery (Կիրանց Վանք) is about 13 kilometers west of Kirants village, though this is no easy 13 kilometers. The monastery dates to the 13th c and includes two gavits, a dining hall, two other churches, a cemetery, living quarters and the infrastructure necessary to support a monastic community. Much of this is now in ruins or overgrown with vegetation. Kirants’ architectural style derived from early medieval domed basilicas such as Odzun, Gayane, and others. Unlike most other churches in Armenia, however, this church is constructed of fired brick and plaster rather than the traditional tuffa stone. Colored tiles face the outside of the church while the inside is, or was, covered with murals and frescos, now mostly faded. Because the Byzantines and Georgians had significant influence in this region, the church was originally constructed as an Armenian Chalcedonian church. About a century later, as this influence weakened, the monastery reverted to the Armenian Apostolic church. The drum upon which the dome rests is hexagonal on the outside but cylindrical on the inside.

Legend has it that the church was constructed by a young mason who wished to impress his master, the wealthy father of a young woman he was interested in. When completed, the master was invited to critique the mason’s work. He could find no fault; all he could criticize was that the mason used “too much lime” (kir antskatsnel

– Կիր Անցկաւոցնէլ) and hence the name “Kirants.”

Srvegh, a church with similar construction near Aygehovit village in Tavush marz, was built around the same time. Kirants’ architecture in general had a large effect on subsequent church construction.

Arakelots Monastery (Առաքելոց Վանք -Monastery of the Apostles) is about 3 kilometers from the village of Kirants, along the same road leading to Kirants Monastery. Surrounded by vegetation, the monastery is not clearly visible from the road. Climbing over a slight rise, a tall fortification wall becomes immediately visible. The church was constructed in the 13th c though some sources cite the 12-13th c. Historically this area contained a number of settlements, a small church, a chapel, a caravansary and other structures. The second church of the complex was built in the 14th c. This was a highly traveled region with trade routes passing through.

Deghdznuti Vank (Դեղձնուտի վանք) construction started in 1258 and was completed in 1274 by Archimandrite Arakel from Tarson city in Cilicia. There are two churches, and a gavit where Archimandrite Arakel’s tombstone lies. The Gavit’s dome is supported by intersecting arches, a common architectural construct. The church had intricate stone carvings, including remnants of khachkars carved by master stone-



First glimpse of Deghdznuti vank

baijan border. Originally named Getashen, in 1967 the village was named after the Kirants monastery. Kirants village is about a 2 ½ hour drive from Yerevan over good roads. Nearby, in the forested mountains, are monasteries and defensive structures that, according to many sources, have not been adequately studied. Maps show a tertiary road accessing some of these

filled potholes. One driver of a 1942 Jeep clone predicted that in another two years the road would be impassable. Ironically, clearly written signs in English and Armenian posted along this road direct the traveler to the major sites in this area.

The last visit was in the summer of 2023 during a very hot, dry spell, believing that the road to these sites would be dry, and the

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The EU in a statement said it is committed to enhancing the comprehensive political and economic partnership with Armenia, based on the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, and to further strengthening our relations in all their dimensions. This includes intensifying dialogue and cooperation in the area of foreign and security policy, also encompassing the common security and defense policy (CSDP).

The European Peace Facility was established in March 2021 for the financing of actions under the common foreign and security policy to prevent conflicts, preserve peace and strengthen international security and stability. In particular, the European Peace Facility allows the EU to finance actions designed to strengthen the capacities of third States and regional and international organizations relating to military and defense matters.

Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan in a statement expressed his gratitude to the European Union.

“This partnership effort, grounds in mutual trust and shared interests between Armenia and the EU, aims to strengthen Armenia’s defense capabilities,” Minister Papikyan said in a post on the platform formerly known as Twitter (now X).

“I am confident that this initiative will give a new charge to closer cooperation with our partner EU member countries in both bilateral and multilateral formats,” he added.



Broken tombstone of Deghdznunti founder Archimandrite Arakel on gavit floor

masons Petros and Kahak (1274). Deghdznut is considered an exemplary example of Armenian medieval architecture. The name “Deghdznoot” may refer to “peach” (deghdz -դեղձ) as peach orchards abounded in this area.

Samsoni Vank (Սամսոնավանք) is 6 kilometers beyond Deghdznuti vank, though sources indicate this site may be more accessible via the village of Yenokavan, which is in the hills adjacent to Ijevan. Remains consist of a highly eroded domed church, a shrine, plus another small church. The Berdakar medieval fortress is supposedly nearby.





INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan Tells Germany It Wants Armenia’s Constitution Changed

BERLIN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has again declared that his country will only sign a peace agreement with Armenia if the latter changes its Constitution.

Aliyev made the remarks at a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on the sidelines of the 4th European Political Community Summit in England on Thursday, July 18.

According to reports from Azerbaijani media, Aliyev spoke about the “success” that the sides have achieved in the field of delimitation and demarcation of borders and the coordination of documents related to the delimitation process.

Aliyev maintained that Azerbaijan supports the peace agenda, the early signing of a peace treaty and the peace process. However, he claimed, the Constitution of Armenia has to be changed to “end territorial claims against Azerbaijan on a constitutional basis.”

Armenia Beats Azerbaijan in FIBA U20 EuroBasket Game

GDYNIA, Poland (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenian men’s basketball team defeated the team from Azerbaijan 71:61 at a Division B game of FIBA U20 EuroBasket 2024 on July 21.

The highest scoring player was Yura Melikyan leading the way with 15 points, 21 rebounds and 1 assist. Earlier, the Armenia U16 basketball team took third place in Division C of the European Championship, defeating Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan Invites Armenia to COP29 Summit

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijan has invited Armenia to the COP29 climate summit, a senior Azerbaijani official said on Sunday, July 21.

Hikmet Hajiyev, foreign policy adviser to Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev, told reporters an invitation had been extended to the country, The National reported.

The climate talks take place in Azerbaijan’s capital, Baku, from November 11 to 22.

“I’m saying ... this for the first time to international media,” Hajiyev said at the 2nd Global Media Forum in Shushi.

“The [COP29 president-designate Mukhtar Babayev] ... has sent a letter of invitation to the minister of foreign affairs of Armenia. We have sent a formal invitation.”

Hajiyev said sending this letter when the countries did not have formal diplomatic relations shows the “good will” of Azerbaijan and its “inclusive approach.”

Hajiyev said COP was a global endeavor and the crucial talks went beyond “beyond Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

Aliyev Voices Another Demand to Armenia

By Artak Khulian

BAKU (RFE/RL) — Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has again described much of modern-day Armenia as “western Azerbaijan” and said Yerevan must ensure the safe return of ethnic Azerbaijanis who had fled it in the late 1980s.

“We are waiting for a clear statement from the Armenian authorities about how the inhabitants of Western Azerbaijan expelled from the current territory of Armenia or their descendants can return to their historical lands, visit or live in those territories. Especially given that according to our reliable information, 90 percent of the villages where Azerbaijanis lived are now empty,” he told a “media forum” held in the Nagorno-Karabakh town of Shusha (Shushi) over the weekend.

Aliyev has long described Yerevan and other parts of Armenia as “historical Azerbaijani lands.” He has pledged to ensure the eventual repatriation of ethnic Azerbaijanis who lived there in Soviet times. Aliyev and other Azerbaijani officials have said nothing about the repatriation of at least 200,000 ethnic Armenians who lived in Baku and other parts of Soviet Azerbaijan, excluding Karabakh, until 1988.

Karabakh’s entire ethnic Armenian population was displaced less than a year ago as a result of an Azerbaijani military offensive that restored Baku’s control over the region.

Aliyev again claimed on Saturday that the Karabakh Armenians were not forced to flee their homes.

He voiced his latest demand to Yerevan amid ongoing discussions of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. The Azerbaijani leader again made the signing of the treaty conditional on a change of Armenia’s constitution which he says contains territorial claims to Azerbaijan.

Aliyev reaffirmed this condition in late April after forcing Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to hand over four disputed border areas to Azerbaijan. Armenian opposition leaders strongly condemned that unilateral concession, saying that Pashinyan’s appeasement policy will only encourage Baku to make other demands to the Armenian side, rather than bring peace.

Under the terms of the controversial land transfer announced in April, the two sides were due to adopt by July 1 joint “regulations” for the delimitation of the other sections of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Pashinyan and his political allies claimed at the time that this will lay the groundwork for Azerbaijan’s recognition of Armenia’s territorial integrity.

However, no such regulations have been agreed upon so far. Some Pashinyan allies have echoed opposition claims that Baku remains reluctant to recognize Armenia’s borders and hopes to clinch even more concessions from Yerevan.

Azerbaijan’s ‘Cultural Erasure’ in Nagorno-Karabakh: Le Figaro

PARIS (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The thousand-year-old heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh is in danger, an article published on Le Figaro newspaper says, referencing a recent report from the European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ).

The report, titled “The Systematic Erasure of Armenian Christian Heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh,” details the “cultural erasure” carried out by Baku in Karabakh — now under its control — by destroying churches, removing crosses and vandalizing cemeteries.

It seeks to bring attention to the “malicious destruction and revisionism of Armenian Christian heritage, evaluate the international response to date, and provide recommendations to combat the cultural erasure occurring in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

The article in Le Figaro goes to list some of the most prominent losses of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Nagorno-Karabakh. Among them, the 18th-century Church of Saint Sargis in Hadrut, destroyed in 2022, its land cleared to erect a new building. On April 4, 2024, the Church of Saint John the Baptist in Shushi, damaged

by Azerbaijani bombs in 2020, was razed. Built in 1847, the “green chapel” was completely wiped off the map, according to the NGO Caucasus Heritage Watch, which relies in particular on images provided by Cornell University.

Another form of erasure is the replacement of churches with Muslim places of worship. Surb Hambardzum Church in Berdzor, which the Azerbaijan’s “Public Organization for the Protection of Monuments” suggested be transformed into a mosque in 2022, was, no doubt for this purpose, demolished.

Some churches have been specifically deprived of their Christian emblems. The Shushi Cathedral, according to images posted on Azerbaijani social media, had its angels removed from its portal, its domes and its cross. In the Surb Sargis church in a small village built in the 13th century, the Azerbaijani government, under the pretext of “renovation” work, destroyed religious symbols. Two historic polished stone slabs, decorated with Christian artwork and medieval Armenian inscriptions, were broken, ECLJ reports. According to local sources,

the St. John the Mother of God Cathedral, built and consecrated in 2019, was also vandalized by Azerbaijanis. The cross that overlooked the Vankasar church in Tigranakert, dating from the 7th century, was also removed.

Concerns about the preservation of cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh are made all the more urgent by the Azerbaijani government’s history of systemically destroying indigenous Armenian heritage — acts of both warfare and historical revisionism. The Azerbaijani government has secretly destroyed a striking number of cultural and religious artifacts in the late 20th century. Within Nakhichevan alone, a historically Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani forces destroyed at least 89 medieval churches, 5,840 khachkars (Armenian cross stones) and 22,000 historical tombstones between 1997 and 2006.

Estonia Hails Recent EU Decision on Armenia as ‘Historic’

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna has hailed the EU’s decision to start visa liberalization talks and provide 10 million euros (\$11 million) in non-lethal military aid to Armenia as “historic”.

“Historic decision today is Brussels as EU agreed to start both the visa liberalization dialogue & EPF support for Armenia,” Tsahkna said in a post on the platform formerly known as Twitter on July 23. “This is an important milestone towards peace & democracy in the region. Estonia fully supports this step.”

The foreign ministers of EU member states unanimously made the decision during a session of the 27-nation bloc’s top body, the European Council. In a statement, the council confirmed that the assistance will be used creating a field hospital and auxiliary facilities for a battalion-size Armenian army unit.

Azerbaijani Leader Vows to Support French Territories against ‘Colonial Rule’

By Victor Goury-Laffont

PARIS (Politico.eu) — Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev on July 21 reiterated his support for the independence of French overseas territories, describing them as being “under colonial rule.”

“The Comoros Islands, Mayotte are still under colonial rule. It has been our duty to help these countries liberate themselves from this revolting remnant from the past,” Aliyev said during a media forum in Baku on Saturday, Reuters and Azerbaijani news agency Trend reported.

The Comoros, an East African archipelago, gained independence from France in 1975, but a year later, one of the archipelago’s islands, Mayotte, voted in favor of remaining in France during a referendum organized by Paris. Comoros does not recognize French sovereignty over Mayotte

and U.N. resolutions have also affirmed the Comoros’ sovereignty over the island.

“We will support you until you are free,” Aliyev said in reference to French territories.

Relations between Paris and Baku are at a low-point as a result of France’s military and political support for the South Caucasus country’s neighbor and historic rival Armenia, and Azerbaijan’s backing of pro-independence movements in French overseas territories. Azerbaijan spearheaded the Baku Initiative Group, bringing together 14 political movements across the former French Empire in the name of decolonization.

In May, French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin said that the deadly unrest in New Caledonia, a French territory in the Pacific, was being supported by Azerbaijan, claims Baku pushed back against.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Luis Moreno Ocampo Calls on Armenians to ‘Expose All the Abuses of President Ilham Aliyev’

Luis Moreno Ocampo, the first Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), on July 22 issued an open letter to Armenians worldwide, urging them to “expose all the abuses of President Ilham Aliyev” ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku.

Below is the full text of the letter:

Armenians,

You, reborn from the ashes of the 1915 genocide, stand as a testament to resilience and the enduring human spirit. Today, you have the unique power to advocate for justice and truth on a global stage. You can expose all the abuses of President Ilham Aliyev, who has targeted his citizens in Azerbaijan and committed atrocities against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, all while hypocritically positioning his country as a leader in the global climate conversation.

The 29th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP29), set to take place in Azerbaijan this November, presents an unparalleled opportunity to shine a light on these grave injustices. Despite Azerbaijan’s branding of the event as a “COP of Peace,” Armenians will reveal the truth about Aliyev’s regime and its actions.

You, dispersed across the globe, are uniquely positioned to protect not only your own people and your land but also the broader interests of justice and environmental integrity. Your ancestors taught you resilience – ‘we lose the day we stop fighting.’ You have the ability to spearhead a global movement and engage other concerned communities addressing two of the most pressing issues of our time: climate change and genocide.

To me, the link between climate change and genocide is stark and undeniable. Both are governed by international conventions that, unfortunately, have seen inadequate enforcement. Since the adoption of the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992 and the Genocide Convention in 1948, the world has witnessed rising global temperatures and persistent threats of genocide. In 2023 alone, the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide identified ongoing risks in six instances, including Nagorno-Karabakh.

The UN Climate Convention aims to curb greenhouse gas emissions, primarily driven by fossil fuels. With over 75% of these emissions linked to fossil energy, the industry’s influence over climate policy is a critical concern. Azerbaijan, where fossil energy comprises about 90% of its export revenues, epitomizes this conflict as it prepares to host COP29. This juxtaposition underscores the urgency and the relevance of your mission.

The genocide committed by Azerbaijan against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh in 2023 exemplifies the ongoing threat. Through starvation, bombing, and instilling fear, Azerbaijan has pursued a genocidal campaign. President Aliyev’s chilling statement—“If the ethnic Armenians do not leave our lands of their own free will, we will chase them away like dogs, and we are doing that”—reflects this brutal reality. The continuous incarceration of 23 Nagorno-Karabakh people in Baku jails serves as a stark warning to those who might attempt to return.

Azerbaijan’s proposal for a truce during COP29 rings hollow unless Armenian hostages and other political prisoners are released unconditionally. The 2023 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report on Azerbaijan states that there are “arbitrary detentions and serious problems with the independence of the judiciary,” making an unconditional return of Armenian hostages and release of political prisoners the only viable path to justice.

It is not enough to simply discuss the

principles of international law; they must be actively enforced. Armenian community leaders and civil activists must rally global citizens—from journalists to climate activists—to implement the principles. By leveraging modern technologies, you can amplify your voices and ensure that the Conventions on Climate Change and

media attention. This coordinated effort will compel journalists, delegates, and NGOs attending COP29 to seek answers from Azerbaijan regarding its Armenian hostages and political prisoners.

The goal is clear: a COP29 that truly stands for peace, marked by the release of Armenian hostages and political pris-



Luis Moreno Ocampo

Genocide are upheld.

I am supporting the idea of the civic movement defying hypocrisy and demanding a truly peaceful COP29. Our first step is to unite global Armenian community and launch a media campaign using the hashtags: #COP29 and #StopGreenwashGenocide and you can add #FreeArmenianHostages or #FreePoliticalPrisoners. Daily social media posts using these hashtags will build momentum, engage other communities, and attract mainstream

oners from Baku. Prepare yourselves, the Armenian communities, the truly peaceful COP29 will launch on July 23.

You have the commitment, reach, and determination to lead this transformative movement. By rallying global communities, you can ensure that COP29 addresses not only climate change but also champions human rights and justice.

Armenians, it is time to lead the charge. Post, comment, and use your voice. I and many others will follow you.

## Russia Rages over US Military Exercise in Armenia

RAGE, from page 1

the West, as embodied in Eagle Partner, the vitriol vented by Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova was up there. She painted the presence of American forces in the Caucasus in dire terms, saying the United States and NATO were intent on upsetting “the fragile balance” in the region and reigniting conflict.

“The appearance of the Americans in the South Caucasus, we have already seen this repeatedly in various parts of the world, will only fuel the conflict potential persisting in the region, and create new dividing lines, ... not only dividing lines, but also hotbeds of conflict,” the official TASS news agency quoted Zakharova as saying July 18.

“Western countries are maniacally dragging Armenia into various formats of interaction in Transcaucasia,” she added.

Zakharova’s comments suggest that the Kremlin is alarmed by the rapid erosion of its influence in Armenia and concerned that a growing US strategic presence there could disrupt the development of the North-South corridor, a nascent trade network connecting Russia and Iran that has helped the Kremlin’s sanctions-busting efforts and its war effort in Ukraine. Moscow may also be concerned that the United States is seizing the initiative in fostering a durable peace between Arme-

nia and Azerbaijan.

Armenia has taken rapid action to strengthen security ties with the West this year, following Azerbaijan’s decisive victory in the Karabakh war in 2023. Concurrently, Yerevan has fallen out with its long-time security guarantor, Russia, amid accusations that the Kremlin failed to live up to obligations to assist Armenia in Karabakh. Shortly before Eagle Partner got underway, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that Yerevan would withdraw from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization.

In contrast to Zakharova’s comments about the US desire to stir up trouble in the region, US diplomats tried in mid-July to breathe new life into the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process. Meanwhile, in an interview published by Hetq, US Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya cast some shade on Russia’s peacebuilding record in the Caucasus.

Washington “sees nothing to indicate that Russia’s military presence contributes to a more peaceful and stable South Caucasus region,” Zeya was quoted as saying.

Russia still has apparent levers of influence in Armenia. Yerevan, for example, is economically dependent on Russian trade and natural gas supplies. The Kremlin also

maintains a military base in Gyumri that hosts a Russian brigade. But for whatever reason so far in 2024, the Kremlin has mostly barked, not bitten in response to Armenia’s embrace of the West. It may

well be that the burdens of the Ukraine war are limiting Russia’s ability to act in the Caucasus.

(This article originally appeared in [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on July 19.)

## Armenia, Azerbaijan Accuse Each Other of Rejecting Meeting at UK Summit

ACCUSATIONS, from page 1

statement shortly afterwards that Yerevan had offered Azerbaijan a bilateral meeting in the UK, but that Baku had declined the invitation. It said that the offer of a meeting still stood.

Pashinyan and Aliyev most recently met in Berlin in February, in a meeting mediated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have repeatedly said they want to sign a peace treaty to end the conflict over the former breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Karabakh’s ethnic Armenian inhabitants enjoyed de facto independence from Baku for more than three decades until September 2023, when a lightning Azerbaijani offensive retook the territory and prompted around 100,000 Armenians to flee.

The two sides have since then pursued peace talks aimed at demarcating their 1000 km (625 mile) shared border, which remains closed and heavily militarized.

In May, Armenia returned four deserted Azerbaijani villages it had controlled since the early 1990s to Baku. The fate of several more villages, located in small enclaves of land surrounded by the other side’s territory, remains at stake.

Azerbaijan, which has several times the population of its longtime rival, also demands Armenia change its constitution to remove an indirect reference to Karabakh independence as part of the peace process.





# Community News

## Glendale Adopts Resolution Prohibiting Investments Related to Azerbaijan

**GLENDALÉ** — The Armenian Bar Association has partnered with the City of Glendale to advocate for and enact a Resolution Amending the City's Investment Policy to prohibit investments in or related to the Republic of Azerbaijan. The resolution also mandates a thorough review of all city funds to ensure compliance with these principles.

The new policy, which was supported by the City Treasurer and unanimously approved by the Glendale City Council on July 16, underscores the city's commitment to ethical investment practices and human rights advocacy. It aligns with Glendale's longstanding support for human rights worldwide.

Key provisions of the resolution include:

**Prohibition of Investments:** The City of Glendale will refrain from making investments in any entities or ventures associated with the Republic of Azerbaijan, in recognition of and response to ongoing gross human rights violations and international war crimes committed by Azerbaijan.

**Comprehensive Review:** The City Manager of Glendale is mandated to conduct an annual review of all city investments. This includes assessments of investments held by deferred compensation or retirement plans in which Glendale employees participate, such as CalPERS. The objective is to ensure full compliance with the newly adopted Investment Policy.

**Transparency and Accountability:** By implementing regular reviews, the city aims to uphold transparency and accountability in its financial operations. This proactive approach underscores Glendale's role as a leader in ethical governance and responsible investment practices.

At the meeting, Armenian Bar Association Investments Committee member Edgar Mkrtchian and ABA Vice Chair Steve Dadaian expressed the importance of this policy and their appreciation for the city's swift action and commitment to the protection of human rights. Mkrtchian and Dadaian summed up as follows:

"This resolution marks a significant step towards ethical investment practices and reflects Glendale's solidarity with the recent U.S. Senate stance on cutting off military aid to Azerbaijan as well as worldwide condemnation of Azerbaijan's ongoing campaign of ethnic cleansing in Artsakh. We commend the City Council for its leadership and commitment to upholding human rights principles in the face of global challenges."

The ABA has been at the forefront of efforts to advocate for justice and accountability, particularly in relation to the grave human rights transgressions by the Republic of Azerbaijan. This collaboration with the City of Glendale exemplifies the growing capacity and positive consequences of civic engagement and proactive governance in addressing international issues at the local level.



Reporter Vahe Gregorian with Star colleagues/friends Jesse Newell in foreground, Sam McDowell seated behind him, Pete Grathoff directly behind Sam and Blair Kerkhoff at back right

## Sportswriter Vahe Gregorian Focuses On the Human Spirit Driving Athletes

By John Gigian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

**KANSAS CITY, MO** — From the Olympics to the World Series and numerous Super Bowls, award-winning journalist Vahe Gregorian has

covered them all. What makes him different is that he has his eyes on more than the scoreboard.

Gregorian has been a sports reporter in Missouri for nearly 40 years, first at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as a reporter, and since 2013, a sports columnist at the *Kansas City Star*. He is a five-time winner of the National Sports Media Association's Missouri Sportswriter of the Year.

"I played sports and I'd grown up reading *Sports Illustrated*. I was fascinated not just in the quality of the writing, but in understanding what made people tick, what everyone's personal journey was," Gregorian said in an interview earlier this month.

Gregorian grew up in Philadelphia and majored in English at Columbia University, hoping to become a teacher and coach. However, he eventually had a change of heart.

"For one reason or another, when the time came to do that, I didn't feel as interested in the moment as I thought I would," Gregorian said. "The bottom line is I kept talking about writing and not doing it, and I had a family friend suggest that maybe I need to go to graduate school at the University of Missouri, so I applied and got in."



Vahe Gregorian with Tweed Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt's great-grandson at the Truman Presidential Library & Museum with the Society of Presidential Descendants. (Truman Presidential Library and Museum photo)

Still, he said, he did not exactly have his future mapped out. "I set out to go to grad school in Missouri not knowing what it would lead to, just trying to do what I said I would. It all fascinated and intrigued me early on."

While many view athletes as larger-than-life figures, and are mainly interested in the final result of a game or match, Gregorian felt his calling in writing was to go deeper.

"My mom once gave me a book called *The Boys of Summer*, and the second half of the book was about what became of the Dodgers players later in their lives. I remember being

*continued on next page*

## Philadelphia Heritage Walk To Put Armenian Identity in The Spotlight

**PHILADELPHIA** — The Philadelphia Armenian community is working toward a new project that will leave a lasting legacy of Armenian-Americans for generations to come — an outdoor gallery called the Armenian Heritage Walk outside the Philadelphia Museum of Art. With a planned unveiling of April 2026, the stunning walkway will feature public art and gardens celebrating the Armenian story and advancing cultural awareness in a renowned urban art and horticultural region.

The walk will flank the long-standing statue called "Young Meher," a legendary figure symbolizing the indomitable spirit of the Armenian people. While the walk will pay tribute to the unique Armenian identity, it will simultaneously celebrate Philadelphia's spirit of diversity. When visitors step onto the walk, they will discover the incredible story of a people who, exiled in genocide, found a new home in Philadelphia and helped shape it into the great city it is today.

Anchored in stones endemic to both Armenia and Philadelphia and decorated with exquisite artwork and lush landscaping, the walk will showcase the many cross-cultural gifts of this ancient race. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore and reflect on how one of the world's oldest civilizations not only endured but thrived in modern and post-modern America.

To learn more, visit [ArmenianHeritageWalk.com](https://ArmenianHeritageWalk.com).

## San Diego Bridge to the Future Gala to Be Held November 2

**SAN DIEGO, Calif.** — The New Bridge to the Future Gala Dinner and Dance will be held on Saturday, November 2, at 6 p.m. at the Westin Carlsbad Resort and Spa, 5480 Grand Pacific Dr, Carlsbad.

The gala will feature celebrity guests, entertainment and dancing, to celebrate and support the second building phase of the St. Sarkis Armenian Church campus near Del Mar, that is the new spiritual and cultural home for the Armenian community of San Diego and beyond.

Entertainment headliners at the Gala this year include the popular Allen G. Orchestra from Los Angeles, emcee Zanni Kalaydjian, a musical cocktail reception with complimentary wine and champagne, as well as the signature live auction. Co-chairs are Kathy Kassardjian and Dr. Anna Kulidjian.

"Our guests will enjoy a first-class event while supporting the building of our new church hall and other facilities on the St. Sarkis campus," Kassardjian said. "Since we opened in 2022, the church has been a hub of community growth and cultural activity. Everyone's continued support will make all the difference."

For tickets or donations visit <https://stsarkischurchsd.com/donate/>.

For sponsorship, contact Kathy Kassardjian, [kathykass55@gmail.com](mailto:kathykass55@gmail.com) or Sylvia Philibbosian, [philibbosian@yahoo.com](mailto:philibbosian@yahoo.com).





## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

so enamored with it, and something about those stories spoke to me,” Gregorian said. “I didn’t know that I could sit in that seat and do those things, but the idea about being in that bloodstream started to appeal to me.”

### A Sports Town in the Making

Gregorian covers teams in Kansas City, a city that has seen multiple championships across different sports in the last decade.

“When I got here in 2013, Kansas City Chiefs hadn’t won a playoff game in 20 years, the Royals hadn’t been in a world series in 28 years, and the whole tone of what you’re writing is ‘will they ever, how can they, what will it take.’ You’re almost writing to an audience that’s waiting for the trap door to fall open every day,” Gregorian noted.

Gregorian detailed how the tone of his writing has changed as the recent championships from the Chiefs and Royals have influenced how he has to cover sports and people’s mindset towards the team brought by the new sense of optimism in the community.

“The Chiefs have been a little more exciting, but what the Royals did in 2014 and 2015 was a little more emotional, because you felt like it was the end of a dismal era for Kansas City, and everything suddenly seemed like it was possible... it just changed the dynamic of the fan experience to things can go our way,” Gregorian said. “The tone changes from ‘will they ever win a playoff game again’ to ‘will they threepeat.’”

Gregorian covers many sports, but his role has seen him cover deeper issues that mean more than just a game to him and the reader. Gregorian detailed the emotional toll of going to the funeral of Yordano Ventura, who was a starting pitcher for the Royals when they won the World Series in 2015 before dying in a car crash in 2017.

“I went to the Dominican for his [Ventura’s] funeral, and we had to go right away and be embedded with the Roy-



Vahe Gregorian, left, with colleagues and friends Sam McDowell, sitting closest to Gregorian, and Jesse Newell.

als. That day, I started tweeting from the Royals bus on the way to the funeral and throughout, and I felt like half of Kansas City was following along, and you realize it was so meaningful for Kansas Citians to get to mourn through being in a place they couldn’t be,” Gregorian said.

Gregorian also detailed how he has been thrust into situations he never expected, such as when he covered the shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl parade in February. (One person was killed and dozens injured during the parade when shooters sprayed the crowd with bullets. Two men have been arrested.)

“You didn’t think that day was going to change everything and you would be writing about the day the music died... I was so personally crushed just by the feeling,” Gregorian said.

“I interviewed some people on the scene,



Reporter Vahe Gregorian asks a question from Kansas City Chiefs star quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

a mother brought her daughter from New Hampshire, because the mother had grown up here. Suddenly they had to take cover at Union Station hiding in a hallway by a staircase. They didn’t even see it directly, it was just a ripple. The girl was traumatized afterward, and trembling. I just remember thinking she will always be affected by this. The reason I’m bringing that up is that sports and the real world sometimes merge in uncomfortable and painful ways.”

### Going Deeper with History

Gregorian’s status as a sportswriter has moved him up in the media world and even presented him with non-sports opportunities in his articles such as his coverage of the Truman Library, a library and museum dedicated to the life and legacy of the late President Harry S. Truman.

“Got asked to do it, and at first I was a little hesitant because it seemed so out of my comfort zone. However, I realized it was a great privilege to be able to do it, and it was a great change of pace. It has opened my mind up to what Kansas City is about... I love Kansas City, it’s a great place, but now I understand it better,” Gregorian said.

Gregorian grew up around powerful Armenian voices, with his father, the late Dr. Vartan Gregorian, being a notable presence in the Armenian world as an educator, historian and president of the Carnegie Corporation, and before that, president of Brown University, and the president the New York Public Library.

“He was a great man... You start to see things over time, and naturally, as we became adults we came to understand his influence on so many things around him, so many important institutions. It’s breathtaking really to try and understand his legacy,” Gregorian said. “It’s a forever honor to be his son, and I know my brothers feel that way. I still can’t believe he’s gone, and I think we all would say we feel him with us every day.”

While he hasn’t covered many Armenian events or people himself, Vahe Gregorian is an Armenian-American and has paid at-

tention to events around the world such as Artsakh and Genocide recognition that often go uncovered. He explained how more Armenians in the media could potentially help draw attention to these issues.

“It’s one of the reasons when we talk about diversity in newsrooms and diversity in media. It’s not just because that’s good in itself, which it is. But it’s good because people will come to the table with knowledge and a set of perspectives that it may not otherwise,” Gregorian said.

### Awards

For his work, Gregorian has been recognized and risen to the ranks as one of the top sportswriters in Missouri. He acknowledged what the recognition meant to him, and the value it has had on his life.

“You wouldn’t say that it’s not great to get an award. Those are touching and feel like an affirmation of your efforts... I won the Associated Press Sports Editors’ number one columnist award in 2018, and that was especially cool because it was in the last couple of months of my mom’s life. So to be able to tell her that as it happened, there was something sweet about that,” Gregorian said.

Despite this, Gregorian doesn’t let the accolades and admiration overshadow the responsibilities of his job.

“These things are based on circumstance, and hopefully if you’re always giving your best and alert to possibilities around you, sometimes it manifests that way,” Gregorian said. “Can get into a bad spot if you go from writing for awards to writing for the audience.”

As someone who has now spent most of his life in the media, Gregorian detailed what advice he would give to aspiring sports journalists.

“Read as much as you can of the writers that move you, whether that’s sports writers or history books. That’s the only way you can really find your own voice is to absorb enough that you feel like you know who you want to be. It would be very hard to want to do this without being interested in people,” Gregorian said.

Gregorian ended by explaining what he hopes he is remembered for when his career is over.

“In the long game, being a good teammate makes you a better writer, because it makes you get outside your own head, and realize it’s about the people you’re doing it with also. Which sounds counterintuitive, but I’m certain that any day of work I have is made better by those who are supporting me too,” Gregorian said. “I hope if there’s one thing I do in this that I give that back to others myself.”

## Meet *Mirror-Spectator* Intern John Gigian

**WATERTOWN** — Every summer the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* hires an intern. The interns receive a stipend from the Armenian Students’ Association.

This year, the intern is John Gigian.

Gigian is about to start his senior year at UMass Amherst, where he is a journalism and history major.

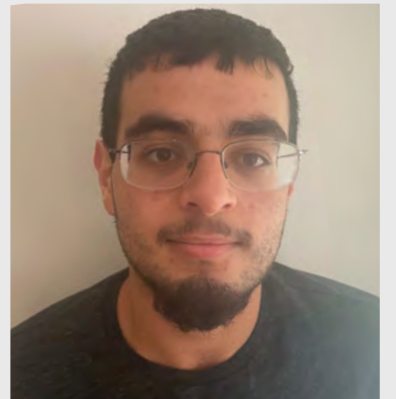
He is originally from Watertown and currently lives in Weston.

Gigian said that his long-term goal is eventually having a career in sports media covering basketball, football, or other sports as either a broadcaster, analyst or writer.

His first story, an interview — appropriately — with sports journalist Vahe Gregorian appears in this issue.

“John has been an excellent intern, receptive to ideas and eager to dive into the work,” said *Mirror-Spectator* editor Alin K. Gregorian

Aram Arkun, the *Mirror-Spectator*’s managing editor, added, “John has a bright future ahead of him. We hope he will continue to contribute to the paper after he returns to UMass.”







## COMMUNITY NEWS

## 9th Annual Youth Retreat of Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in USA and Canada

GLENDAL — The Armenian Catholic Diocese of Our Lady of Nareg of North America, held its annual youth conference this year again, with the invitation and under the auspices of Bishop Mikael Mouradian.

The hosting church for this year's conference was St. Gregory the Illuminator Catholic Church, the diocesan cathedral or Mother Church. The theme this year was "Pilgrims of Hope," in preparation for the 2025 "Holy Year," as declared by Pope Francis.

On Friday, June 28, Bishop Mouradian started the youth conference and spiritual education with a Holy Mass and Devine Liturgy. Then, 50 young people from many different parishes from around Canada and the United States headed to "Celebrity Ranch" summer camp, located in Hemet, where they participated in the three-day spiritual retreat.

Following the spiritual education, on Sunday, June 30, at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Glendale, the diaconate ordination of sub-deacon Haig Shahinian

took place during Holy Mass, by Mouradian and in the presence of the newly ordained assistant bishop of the diocese, the Most Rev. Bishop Parsegh Baghdasarian. Also present were, Rev. Father Ghazar Bedrossian from Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont, Mass., Rev. Father Levon Stepanian from St Gregory the Illuminator Church in Glendale, as well as Rev. Father Andon Noradungian and Father Richard Shakil from Sacred Heart Church in New Jersey.

Following the ceremony, those present gathered in the church hall, where a warm reception took place.

The next morning, in the same church hall, about 100 parishioners from Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, New Jersey and Toronto congregated for the annual conference. In the evening, the attendees enjoyed an outdoor dinner organized by the ladies' guild of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Armenian Catholic Church of Los Angeles, at the invitation of Most Rev. Father Armenag Bedrossian. The diocesan conference ended with a friendly send-off at Terrace



Bishop Mikael Mouradian

lounge in Burbank.

According to tradition, before the closing prayer, Mouradian announced that the 2025

annual conference will be held in New Jersey, at the Sacred Heart Armenian Catholic Church.



Youth participants of the retreat.



## St. Mark Readies for Annual Armenian Fest, September 1

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — St. Mark Armenian Church's Annual Armenian Festival will be held on the church grounds on Sunday, September 1, from 12 to 6 p.m., 2427 Wilbraham Road, Springfield. The Fest, which has become a favorite in the Greater Springfield area, is the parish's biggest event for nearly 30 years and will feature delicious hot meals, a live Armenian band, dancing, authentic Armenian baked goods and pastries, a raffle, and more.

Every year, the St. Mark Armenian Festival draws more than 1,000 people from Springfield, surrounding suburbs and throughout New England that enjoy great food, entertainment and a wonderful social atmosphere. Everyone is welcome to be a part of the culture and enjoy all that is offered.

The Fest involves dozens of parishioners lending their time and talents to put on this annual one-day event, which is the parish's largest annual fundraiser. Baking workshops have taken place over the summer, including the preparation of choreg (Armenian sweet rolls), cheese boreg (phyllo dough triangles filled with cheese); and Spinach Pie (phyllo dough squares filled with spinach and cheese). Workshops will continue up to the time of the Festival.

Hot dinners feature St. Mark's signature losh, chicken, beef and pork kebabs.

Attendees can enjoy an array of ethnic baked goods and sweets. New this year will be an Ancestry booth organized by parishioner Kristen Fraser, where attendees can learn about the family histories of St. Mark parishioners through old photos and short stories. There will also be a cultural booth with handmade silver Armenian jewelry and other items made in Armenia, and a raffle.

St. Mark's priest, Father Nigoghos (Nicholas) Aznaviourian, will be giving tours of the church throughout the event, and will explain the Armenian Apostolic faith and its history for those interested in learning more.

All proceeds from the Fest benefit the ministries of St. Mark Armenian Church. Sponsorship opportunities are also available, and donations can be made through the Church Donation Form link on the church website, stmarkarmenianchurch.org (select "Festival Sponsorship" from the dropdown). More information about the Fest can be found on the Facebook event page, on the church website, stmarkarmenianchurch.org.

Admission to the festival and parking are free. The event will be held rain or shine (All booths and seating are under tents). St. Mark is located at 2427 Wilbraham Road, Springfield.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# A Former Beauty Industry Executive Wanted to Fund a Harvard Scholarship to Honor Her Heritage. The School Said No.

By Jillian Berman

BOSTON (MarketWatch) — The Supreme Court’s decision last year to ban colleges from considering race in admissions has sent students, parents, counselors and schools scrambling to determine how it will impact their futures.

One possible implication, a recent court case suggests: fewer scholarships to benefit students from specific racial or ethnic groups.

Harvard University said it couldn’t fulfill the posthumous request of Jeanette Sarkisian Wagner, a former Estée Lauder executive, to create a scholarship at its business school for students of Armenian heritage who are interested in social enterprise, according to court documents filed by representatives of Wagner’s estate earlier this year. One reason, according to the documents: Harvard “cannot differentiate scholarship recipients based on race or ethnicity and cannot earmark funds for students of ‘Armenian Heritage.’”

The filing, which asked the court to allow the estate to redirect the funds in a way that would meet Wagner’s charitable objectives, came several months after the Supreme Court declared Harvard’s use of affirmative action in admissions illegal. The court’s ruling on affirmative action nearly one year ago didn’t address financial aid and scholarships. But following the decision, schools began looking more closely at their financial-aid and scholarship programs with an eye toward ensuring they didn’t draw scrutiny from the court.

Ray Madoff, a professor at Boston College Law School and the director of its Forum on Philanthropy and the Public Good, said she expects courts to see more of these requests to re-evaluate bequests focused on scholarships tied to race and ethnicity.

“It is possible that the affirmative action decision is influencing Harvard’s choice not to accept the gift,” she said.

Harvard didn’t respond to multiple messages seeking comment on the donation. An attorney representing the executors of Wagner’s estate declined to comment on pending litigation.

“If an institution with Harvard’s resources, money, people [and] connections feels like they don’t want to fight something like this, it feels highly unlikely that other institutions would have the ability,” said Dominique Baker, an associate professor of education and public policy at the University of Delaware. “It matters when institutions are saying that they can’t take the free money because the fight that they would have to wage in order to use it would be too great.”

## ‘A Guiding Light and Role Model for Women and Armenians’

Wagner, who died in February 2022 at 92, was best known as the head of the international division at cosmetics giant Estée Lauder during the 1980s and 1990s. In that role, she brought the company’s lipsticks and perfumes to the Soviet Union and China amid booming sales. Wagner was the daughter of two survivors of the Armenian Genocide. While she and her husband were alive, they donated to Armenian causes, according to court documents.

“Throughout her career, the Decedent launched marketing campaigns in more than 100 countries. But whether it was New York, Chicago, Europe, Russia or China, the Decedent held strongly to her Armenian heritage,” the court documents read. “For decades, the Decedent was a guiding light and role model for women and Armenians. She was smart, fierce, dedicated and caring — never forgetting her roots and her immigrant parents’ bravery and sacrifices.”

In her will, Wagner indicated that she wanted to use part of her estate to create a trust to fund a fellowship at Harvard Business School named for her father. Wagner directed the funding to go toward scholarships supporting students at the school who are of Armenian heritage and focused on ethics or social enterprise, or on how companies and other institutions can have a positive impact on society.

Wagner never attended Harvard, but she had a long history of philanthropy to various institutions, which included extensive support of students and children, according to court documents. According to her will, the funds for the program were to come from one-fourth of what was

left of her more than \$21 million estate after leaving more than \$1 million to family and friends.

But communications from Harvard to the estate indicated that Wagner’s desire would be “impossible or impracticable,” according to court documents. That’s because, according to Harvard, the school couldn’t differ-



Jeanette Sarkisian Wagner (MarketWatch photo)

entiate between scholarship recipients based on race and ethnicity and because there are no concentrations related to social enterprise or ethics at Harvard Business School, court documents said. That means “it may be impossible to identify a student who clearly meets these criteria,” according to the documents.

## Rules on Race and Ethnicity Factor not Fully Resolved

The legal rules surrounding how race and ethnicity can factor into scholarships are not fully resolved. The basic rules of federal nondiscrimination law that apply in the admissions context also generally apply in financial aid, according to Art Coleman, a founding partner of EducationCounsel, a consulting firm that works with colleges and other nonprofit organizations. But certain contextual differences can result in different outcomes, he said.

“As much activity as we’ve had on the admissions front, we’ve had virtually none on the financial-aid and scholarship front in court,” Coleman said.

Essentially, if a college is going to consider an applicant’s race or ethnicity when making a financial-aid award, it must have a compelling interest — or, in layman’s terms, a very good reason for doing so.

In terms of how a scholarship is designed, there can be more leeway for institutions to consider an applicant’s race when it comes to financial aid than there is in admissions, Coleman said. In the admissions context, a leg up to one student has the potential to take away a spot from another student. With financial aid, getting rid of a race-based scholarship has the effect of reducing the entire pool of available funds, adversely affecting all students, Coleman said.

The Supreme Court’s decision last year created a new landscape for what qualifies as a compelling interest in considering race in admissions. Before the decision, courts had viewed that working to enhance the educational benefits of diversity at colleges was an objective that could merit the consideration of an applicant’s race.

“This court effectively eradicated 45 years of precedent,” Coleman said. “We have, in essence, a blank slate when we’re attempting to establish what is a new compelling interest. It’s no surprise to see that many colleges and universities are looking as robustly at issues of financial aid and scholarships.”

Scholarships related to race and ethnicity generally make up a small proportion of the grant aid colleges provide, Coleman said. But any changes in colleges’ approach to considering race and ethnicity in scholarships and financial-aid decisions could impact the landscape of higher education more broadly.

“The message you communicate of welcomeness to underrepresented students over time” through these kinds of scholarships “is critically important, and sometimes having race associated with the scholarship says, ‘Here’s a welcome mat; we want you,’” Coleman said.

In the year since the affirmative-action decision, financial aid tied to race and ethnicity has come under threat in some states. In Wisconsin, a Republican-backed bill in the state’s legislature threatened to bar public colleges and publicly funded scholarship programs from considering race in financial aid.

Shortly after the Supreme Court issued its decision, Missouri’s Republican attorney general told the state’s higher-education institutions that they couldn’t consider race in financial aid. In response, the University of Missouri system has amended grants and scholarships to comply with the attorney general’s directive, but that move has soured the school’s relationships with some donors, Inside Higher Ed reported.

In this climate, higher-education institutions may be wary of scholarships that use race or ethnicity as a criterion — even if the law isn’t clearly settled.

## ‘Other Schools Might Take a Totally Different Approach’

It’s not uncommon for colleges and other nonprofits to say they can’t fulfill a donor’s request, said Philip Purcell, an attorney who advises donors and philanthropic organizations. But in the wake of the Supreme Court’s affirmative-action decision, he’s receiving more questions about whether it’s legal to structure the criteria for scholarships around race and ethnicity.

“They’re all worried that the Supreme Court case directly said financial-aid discrimination is a no-no,” said Purcell, who is also an adjunct faculty member at Indiana University’s Lilly School of Philanthropy. The case didn’t answer that question directly, he said; instead, it addressed discrimination in college admissions.

Still, there are other cases he’s watching closely to get a sense of how the courts view these issues. For example, in one case, a federal appeals court recently suspended a program by a venture-capital firm that awards funds to Black women business owners.

In the case of Wagner’s proposed scholarship, the court can work with the estate to find a different purpose for the funds that appear to meet her objectives. The estate proposed redirecting the money to Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs to use for scholarships for “exceptional students of Armenian heritage”; donating it to the Armenian General Benevolent Union, a nonprofit that administers scholarships and loans to students of Armenian descent; or the American University of Armenia.

In the past, race has factored into these decisions in strange ways. For example, in the early 20th century, Sen. Augustus Bacon of Georgia — a former slaveholder and Confederate soldier — used his will to transfer property to the city of Macon, Ga., to create a public park for the “sole, perpetual, and unending use, benefit and enjoyment of white women, white girls, white boys and white children of the City of Macon.”

Bacon made that bequest when segregation was the law of the land, Madoff recounts in her book “Immortality and the Law: The Rising Power of the American Dead.” But in 1966, the Supreme Court ruled that the park could no longer be operated solely for white residents.

While the court could have expanded the terms of the trust to make the park available to all citizens of Macon, it instead decided that Bacon, who had died decades earlier, was more interested in promoting segregation than in promoting charitable ends of establishing a park. The court shut down the park and gave the land to Bacon’s living heirs, who sold it to developers to create an office park.

By giving up Wagner’s bequest, Harvard appears to be conceding that the philanthropist was more interested in promoting opportunities for students of Armenian heritage than in giving to Harvard specifically.

“Other schools might take a totally different approach, because they could use the money,” Purcell said. Harvard, meanwhile, had an endowment worth nearly \$49.5 billion in fiscal year 2023, retaining its status as the wealthiest U.S. college.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Presidential Speechwriter Ken Khachigian Reflects on a Storied Career in Memoirs

KHACHIGIAN, from page 1

his home in California to write what Reagan biographer Edmund Morris considered as Reagan's greatest speech, delivered at the camp on May 5, 1985.

While preparing the speech, Khachigian accepted an invitation from a close friend, Jim Renjilian, to participate in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at Arlington Cemetery. In his book, Khachigian recalls, "As I listened to the choir and service conducted by local Armenian clergy, I began hearing other voices — ones I heard as a young boy. Many of my parents' social friends were, like Dad, Armenian immigrants, and genocide survivors from his ancestral village, Chomaklou, in Turkey's Cappadocia region. When they gathered to visit, they sometimes softly referred to the *Caghtaghnatoun* [kaghtaganutun] — the coerced exile from their homes when the Turks murdered the population of Anatolia by arms, starvation, pestilence, and forced march."

Khachigian also had read Aris Kalfaian's *Chomaklou: The History of an Armenian Village* (transl. Krikor Asadourian; edited and revised, with a preface and afterword, by Michael Ekizian, New York: Chomaklou Compatriotic Society, 1982), with its descriptions of the horrors of the Syrian camps.

All this served as inspiration for Khachigian. He wrote, in the same chapter, "In 1915, there was a Bergen-Belsen in the Syrian desert that history had forgotten, and the pain and suffering endured by the victims and the survivors of the Armenian Genocide suddenly made my mission very real during our quiet ride back to the White House." Of course, he later said, he did not tell President Reagan any of this at the time.

## Prominent Speechwriter and Consultant

Khachigian volunteered on the Nixon presidential campaign in 1967 while still in law school, and afterwards began working for the Nixon Administration in various capacities, including as researcher and speechwriter. He worked for President Gerald Ford's Administration briefly but moved to San Clemente, Calif., to help Nixon write his memoirs. He joined the Reagan presidential campaign in 1980 as chief speechwriter and continued in 1981 as the president's chief speechwriter and special consultant. He entered private practice as a political consultant in California but continued to periodically write for Reagan and served as an adviser to the presidential campaigns of Bob Dole, John McCain and Fred Thompson.

Khachigian declared in a recent interview to the *Mirror-Spectator* that when he was called to Washington from California to prepare a speech for Reagan, sometimes he didn't charge at all. He would get reimbursed for transportation and lodging, and sometimes be paid a small fee, but primarily, he said, "It was an honor to be called back. I am looking at pictures here right in front of me of sitting with the president at Camp David, or in the Oval Office, and Air Force One. It is not a huge sacrifice to be paid a little bit less money to go back home and say I was with the president yesterday."

He continued national political consulting and also was active in Californian politics, serving as senior advisor and principal strategist for Governor George Deukmejian, in the 1982 and 1986 elections, advis-

ing Pete Wilson in his victorious gubernatorial and Senate campaigns, and working on campaigns for Dan Lungren and Bruce Herschensohn.

Meanwhile, his main bread and butter came from working for corporate clients, providing consulting, communications and crisis management. For the last 12 years before he retired, he was with a law firm

tough life, it wasn't something he enjoyed all the time. He said, "One thing I noticed about it was a lot of it was a struggle. I found my dad struggling a lot, with bad years and a few good years, and the bad years wore heavily on him. I didn't think it was something I wanted to do."

Instead, he decided to go to college, graduating University of California, Santa

(Ghazar). He remembered in his interview for this newspaper that the sermons were half in Armenian and half in English.

He said, "I was bilingual until I was in kindergarten. Then you go to kindergarten and all your friends and your neighbors are Americans. You continue at home, it's mostly English, but you are still bilingual a little bit. So, I can speak kitchen Armenian."

When asked if knowing Armenian (with some scattered words of Turkish) helped him in any way to work differently as a speechwriter, he said he had never thought of it, but "At any event, knowing those different words, I think, helped your mind perhaps be a little bit more creative."

"It was interesting growing up. My feet were always half in one culture and half in the other culture growing up. But I am still active in the Armenian community," Khachigian said. "And then, on the other hand I belong to groups that are solely non-Armenian. I still live in two worlds, and it is funny how people view you that way. It's hard."

Khachigian was a popular student, who became sophomore, junior and then senior class president in high school. While he generally did not experience any anti-Armenian prejudice, there were two incidents that stuck in his mind. Once in grammar school, when he was 8 or 9, he said, "a young boy called me a dirty Armenian and I was instructed to beat him up when I got home. I was hoping that he would never call me that again, because I didn't want to have to beat him up."

The second one was with the first girl he dated in high school. He couldn't get a second date because her father wouldn't allow his daughter to date an Armenian. Khachigian said, "I was baffled by it. I was just taken aback because otherwise there wasn't any discrimination within the school, amongst my friends or within the community." In fact, since the girl was a sophomore and Khachigian was then a senior, Khachigian could have been considered a prize catch for her.

Khachigian also said that his father was blackballed by a fraternal organization, either the Elks or the Eagles, when he tried to join.

## The Chomo's

Khachigian declared that Armenians from Chomaklou call themselves Chomo's. His family connection to Chomaklou remained a constant thread throughout his

*continued on next page*



Ken Khachigian, right, celebrating with President Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan immediately after Reagan declared his candidacy for reelection on January 29, 1984 (photo courtesy Ronald Reagan Library and Foundation)

in Washington and Denver, doing lobbying work occasionally but mostly helping them with their communications and shaping how they branded their company, as well as crisis management. As he observed, "If I could shape the message for a president, I could certainly help a company shape its message to help its corporate brand."

When he was working for various clients, they were in charge, but, he said, "I probably gave well over 100 speeches on my own throughout the country, and mostly in California. I raised money for a lot of candidates. I would get asked very frequently by candidates running for office because I became prominent in California as a high profile person." Moreover, he said, "when I speak for myself, I get to say whatever I want."

Khachigian has raised money for the Armenian Assembly of America all over the country, and has spoken at Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Missionary Association of America, Armenian National Committee of America and Armenian Eyecare Project meetings over the years.

## Childhood

Khachigian traversed a long road to his position of prominence in politics. He related that growing up on a family farm in Visalia, in the San Joaquin Valley, he began driving a tractor at 6 years old. "We didn't have a shower, so I started bathing out of a milk pail till probably I was 9 or 10 years old. We had one *zakaran* [bathroom] for 6 of us in the house, and one, what we called a *shashma*, in the barn, for when things were very urgent. So we were total *kiughatsis* [villagers] out there on the farm." He was doing heavy tractor work at age 12 and one summer a few years later, had to take over the irrigation chores.

Though he said he didn't consider this a

Barbara, with honors in 1966, and Columbia Law School in 1969, but those early years did leave some important traces on him. He said, "I grew up in the age of radio where you had to picture things and you didn't have television so you had to visualize what you heard on the radio. I think that made a big difference in how I wrote." Moreover, sitting on a tractor for 7 or 8 hours a day and driving back and forth constantly left one with nothing else to do but to think, he observed.

## California Armenians

Both of Khachigian's parents spoke Western Armenian, but he said his mother, born in the US, worked to Americanize his father and the children. Consequently, Khachigian and his brothers went to concerts, and joined DeMolay, a fraternal organization for young men, as well as 4-H clubs. Khachigian saw Adlai Stevenson when he came to town and met Jack Kennedy when he was 15 years and Kennedy was campaigning for president in 1960.

At the same time, Khachigian in a 2020 article noted that his family drove 15 miles each Sunday to the First Armenian Presbyterian Church in Yettam, where much of the congregation was originally from Chomaklou. He was given the baptismal name of Khazar



Ken Khachigian, third from left, led the preparation of briefing books for the four 90-minute dialogues Richard Nixon, second from left, had with British television host David Frost in May 1977, together with future TV star Diane Sawyer and former chief White House speechwriter Ray Price, at far right (photo courtesy Richard Nixon Library and Foundation)





## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

life. “Those of us who are around, we still talk about it. Even the non-Chomakloutsi’s are a little bit envious I think of how close knit we are,” he said. He remembered the picnics in Mooney Grove Park near Visalia, and a family trip in 1955. “Of course every major city we stopped in, in Detroit and Chicago, we didn’t stay in hotels. We stayed with Chomaklou relatives,” he said. This was true in New York City also, where they attended a big picnic of Armenians from Chomaklou in Van Cortland Park in the Bronx, at which his father united with some childhood friends.

Once, Chomaklou even made an appearance on the presidential level. Khachigian related that when his father passed away in December 1975, he was working for President Nixon in San Clemente, California. Nixon asked what he could do to recognize his father. Khachigian explained that his father came from the small village of Chomaklou near Kayseri and the best way was to donate in his memory to the Chomaklou Compatriotic Society. So President Nixon wrote a 500 dollar check to the society, which is worth almost 3 thousand dollars today accounting for inflation. This might be the only instance of an American president donating to an Armenian compatriotic union.

Khachigian still keeps in touch regularly with some Chomaklou Armenians in Orange County, where he lives, and has reconnected with others. He learned that there is a small group of them in Cordoba, Argentina, and said that one of his goals, if he can manage it, is to find them and visit.

#### President Reagan’s Public Mention of the Armenian Genocide

The April 22, 1981 proclamation by President Ronald Reagan in remembrance of the Holocaust includes the phrase “Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it,” which took place at a time where the State Department and executive branch of the US government generally appeased NATO ally Turkey by not using the word genocide for the events of 1915.

Khachigian was the one responsible for writing this one-off usage, not to be repeated again by a president until Joe Biden’s acknowledgment. When asked how hard it was to get it accepted, he replied, “Well, actually it was very easy because the State Department never got involved. I never tried to sneak it through because that was not in my temperament. I never tried to manipulate my position, but I had the opportunity to use it in the proclamation.”

To be safe, he did get approval. He said, “First I did what I was supposed to do, and I checked initially with the Deputy Nation-

al Security Advisor, Bud Nance [James Wilson “Bud” Nance]. I said, Bud I want to alert you to this, that I am putting this into the proclamation and it could be controversial. Then he looked at what I wrote and he said, well that’s a fact, isn’t it? And I said, As far as I am concerned it is a fact. Then he said, okay, well, it is okay with me.

“Then I thought well I had better doublecheck, because this could be scrutinized and I don’t want the blame coming on me, I don’t want to take full responsibility for this. So, Dick Allen, Richard Allen, was the National Security Advisor, and I had known him since 1968, from the Nixon era, and I said, Dick, I want to show this to you. I’d shown it to Bud Nance. Here, please read this proclamation, and he said, well, that is historic fact. I said, well, yes it is. He said, well, as long as it is an historic fact, there is no reason why it shouldn’t be in the proclamation. I had the check off from the two National Security Advisors, and boom, it went in to the president, and nobody else. It never went to the State Department. It ended up in the proclamation.”

Khachigian said, “It is amazing, when true facts are presented, and people don’t deny them, it becomes part of official history. That is the problem with the State Department: they don’t deal with straight facts. All these years, and even now, they dance around it, and then they came back the next year and they danced around it. Then they came out with this term which I don’t even understand, *Medz Yeghern*.”

He could not recall any big outcry or retaliation in the Administration, but the Turkish government did blame “the Armenian speechwriter,” and tried to say this was not the true voice of the president. Khachigian said, “But they couldn’t change the fact that it was a statement by the president, and it is a part of history. They can’t change that.”

#### Armenian Americans in Politics and Lobbying

George Deukmejian was a role model for him, Khachigian said. He introduced himself to Deukmejian while going to the 1968 Republican Convention in a shuttle bus. He told then State Senator Deukmejian that he was working for presidential nominee Nixon, and Deukmejian and his wife Gloria invited Khachigian for breakfast. Khachigian said he became Deukmejian’s source into the Nixon campaign, and they became close. In 1970, Khachigian helped him in his first race for attorney general.

He said that though both Deukmejian and he had the goal of setting an example to get more young Armenians involved in politics, he was bothered that in fact they do not. He said, “They get successful in business, and they get successful in a lot of other endeavors, but they don’t apply themselves the way they should in politics. Even when they do get involved in politics, it is not at a level where they can make a difference. A lot of them become bureaucrats...”

He said that he hoped his book will encourage Armenians to engage more in politics: “Even though this book is not aimed at the Armenian community, I just hope that young people see the name, and it has the same effect that it had for me when I was growing up, when I would see the name William Saroyan, or I would see the name George Gardikian, or [that of] some other prominent Armenian. It gave me some source of pride, thinking that I could achieve some high goal. So I hope to be a role model.”

(Just to be clear, the book, unlike this article, only directly mentions Armenians in a few places where Khachigian refers to working with Governor Deukmejian, a few mentions of growing up in Visalia, and the chapter on Chomaklou and the Ber-

gen-Belsen speech.)

As far as what is taking place now, with the emptying of Artsakh and the dangers Armenia itself faces, Khachigian confessed that while not a specialist in this field, he did know one thing: “I always have said this and continue to say this: that Hayasdan has made a huge, huge mistake by not engaging financially in a very large way in lobbying in Washington.” He said he told two different ambassadors of Armenia that they should be ready to spend money because otherwise they give ground away to Turkey and Azerbaijan and everyone else against Armenian interests. He said, “until you are willing to spend, 5, 6, 7 million dollars a year on lobbying you are going to lose. You can’t just depend on the Armenian Assembly and the ANC [Armenian National Committee of American] to do your lobbying. It just doesn’t work that way.”

He said he even explored creating a powerful organization like the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) by talking with some large Armenian donors, but to no avail.

At present, Khachigian said, “I just think that in return for the genuine effort by a lot of our organizations, all they are given in return is lip service.” Even politicians like Rep. Adam Schiff, who has received a great deal of support from the Armenian community and was in the influential position of head of the House Intelligence Committee, did not confront and take on the president or State Department directly, Khachigian said, by “stomping into the White House and saying this has got to change, or leading a delegation to the White House.” Resolutions, letters or statements are not sufficient to change policy, he observed.

Ultimately, the best way to get action is to make professional lobbying organizations earn their pay, Khachigian said. He explained, “The way to make them earn it is to spend millions and millions and millions of dollars and say we pay you to deliver the goods, and that means countering what the Azeris and Turks are doing at State. If you can’t do it, we hire a different lobbying organization, and if that lobbying organization can’t do it, we hire the next lobbying organization, the next pr organization, and we pay them 5 or 6 million dollars. If you want to make this money, you deliver the goods.”

Khachigian issued a powerful statement on LinkedIn and the Armenian press concerning the September 2023 Azerbaijani invasion of Artsakh on October 4 of that year, declaring that America waived its conscience, as it had in 1915. He called out the moral cowardice of President Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in the face of a genocidal purge of the Armenians there.

In speaking with the *Mirror-Spectator*, Khachigian recently exclaimed about what happened to the Artsakh Armenians: “I do know this, that you have 120,000 people who are involved in another *kaghtaganutium*. That was a *kaghtaganutium* – instead of mules and walking on their feet through the desert, they were in old Toyota trucks and beat up cars going through the Lachin corridor, or however they got to Hayasdan, with only what they could carry on their backs and leaving their homes, and

having the equivalent of what happened in 1915, having their churches destroyed, their houses taken over, and their lives lost forever – that was the same. The only thing that didn’t happen was that they weren’t slaughtered, that they had a minimum of food, and they had a place to go, where at least some of them found some housing and food and water, but it wasn’t any different. One hundred and twenty thousand people lost their lives and the State Department didn’t do anything.”



Ken Khachigian, left, with Gov. George Deukmejian (courtesy Khachigian (courtesy Khachigian family photo collection)

Instead, he said, the US offered a ridiculously small sum of money, some 17 dollars of person, as aid, and Armenians did not have a pr campaign and a political lobbying campaign jumping all over that as they should have, while every day there is shouting and screaming about what is going on with Israel and Hamas.

#### Memories

Everyone kept telling Khachigian that he ought to write his memoirs and ultimately he did, because, he said, “Obviously not many people get to spend as much time as I did with the two major political figures of the last third of the last century. Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan ... were the political giants and political legends of the Cold War. I had a unique story to tell and the unique life that I had led, coming from where I did to what I had achieved...”

He said that one good thing about waiting so long to write this book after many other people already wrote about the same events is that he can set the record straight. Khachigian noted: “I had four and a half years to spend with my files. I kept diaries and very meticulous notes. So part of what I have done is correct the record as well, where it has been distorted or mistold by other people.”

He had developed a close relationship in particular with Reagan. The reason, Khachigian said, was that he thought they had similar backgrounds, coming from small towns and growing up in radio. “Even though he was born 1911, so he was 33 years older than I was, nevertheless, I think culturally we understood each other, a lot better than others did. I don’t know, we just, we got along, I think. I think he just felt comfortable around me,” Khachigian stated. “I was more of a speech collaborator rather than a speech writer, I think.”

While he never took a strong advocacy role while working as presidential speechwriter, Khachigian said that in hindsight, he regretted not speaking up at certain meetings contrary to what others were saying. He addresses this in his book.

Khachigian’s book concludes with a chapter called “The Lions Gather,” in which he accompanies Nixon to a meeting with Reagan in 1990. Khachigian reminisced: “I couldn’t have ever believed at any point in my life that I would have been in a position to have been there, sitting with those two men who I had created an extraordinary bond with, especially with Reagan.”



Ken Khachigian at the Armenian Genocide memorial complex in Yerevan in 2009 (photo courtesy Khachigian family photo collection)





# Arts & Culture

## Gyumri-Based HAYAT Project to Conclude Tour with Concert at LA's Peacock Theater

NEW YORK — Hailing from Gyumri in Armenia, HAYAT Project returns to Los Angeles to close out their successful 2024 world tour at the Peacock Theater on November 24, presented by Live Nation and RE Concerts.

The world tour kicked off on May 8 in France, captivating audiences with uplifting original songs as well as new renditions of traditional Armenian songs. After concluding the European leg of the tour, the band returned to Armenia where they continue to perform in various cities.

Well-known for their infectious and energetic songs, the band will debut new music in Armenian and English languages at the Los Angeles show, and perform fan favorites. Joining them on stage will be comedian Liana Vanoyan, best-known for her hilarious characters on social media, her movie and tv roles, and her participation in HAYAT Project's videos.

The catchy melodies, soaring vocals, and energizing beats that make up HAYAT Project are sure to get audiences feet tapping and body moving with mash-ups such



Members of the Hayat Project

as 1,2,3,4, Nanay Ninai, Tash Tush and Jan, Jan, Jan Jan that demonstrate their distinctive fusion of pop and traditional Armenian music. The band also has original songs.

Since its inception in 2019, HAYAT Project has delivered more than 100 exhilarating shows with 12 sold-out nights in the United States. The band's strong social media presence boasts over 121,000,000 views on YouTube and millions of engagements on other social platforms.

The band members are Nare Hovhannisyan (vocals), Hovhannes Serobyanyan (vocals), Gevorg Hakobyan (woodwind instruments/vocals), Arthur Yeghiazaryan (keyboard), Tigran Khachatryan (keyboard), Mher Martikyan (bassist), Armen Tadevosyan (drummer), and Armen Hovhannisyan (guitarist).

For more information, visit [www.hayatproject.com](http://www.hayatproject.com), or check them out on social media at [www.facebook.com/HayatProjectGyumri](https://www.facebook.com/HayatProjectGyumri), [www.instagram.com/hayat.project](https://www.instagram.com/hayat.project) or [www.youtube.com/@Hayat-PROJECT-Gyumri](https://www.youtube.com/@Hayat-PROJECT-Gyumri).

Tickets are on-sale now through AXS.



Luc Baghdassarian

## Luc Baghdassarian

### *On Music, on Dance, on Being Armenian*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Conductor, choirmaster and pianist Luc Baghdassarian was born in Geneva, where he studied at the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique de Genève, where he obtained a first prize in piano virtuosity in Maria Tipo's class and a first prize in chamber music. He perfected his conducting skills with conductors Karl Oesterreicher and Erwin Acell in Vienna, as well as in Florence and Milan with Carlo Maria Giulini during five years. His many concerts in Europe, Canada and Argentina (as a concert artist, chamber musician and conductor) have earned him an excellent reputation. He conducted many prestigious orchestras and choirs in Switzerland, Armenia, France, the US, Romania, Italy, Russia, etc. He won first prizes at the international conducting competitions in Grenchen (Switzerland) in 2002 and Vienna in 2005.

My interview with him took place on July 6, at Komitas Hall of Yerevan, a day after his concert with National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia. His manager, Céline Dall'Aglio, was present.

**Dear Maestro, have you counted how many times you have visited Armenia?**  
I do not know exactly, but it is between 25 and 30.

**I remember you as a choir conductor.**

Yes, my first concert as conductor with choir and orchestra was here, in this Komitas Hall, which was in 1998, with Coronation Mass by Mozart. Two years ago, I had the privilege to conduct Fauré's Requiem with the wonderful Hover choir of Armenia, which was really amazing.

**Is it easy for you to go from choir to orchestra and vice versa? Do you prefer one?**

It is an interesting question. There are two different techniques. If you are conducting an orchestra with a technical choral it is of course not good for an orchestra and vice versa. So, you have to mix between the two techniques to conduct a piece with choir and orchestra.

**What about your third love – piano? Do you continue your piano recitals?**

Yes, but not as a soloist, as it takes much time. I play with the DS Trio. For me it is absolutely important to stay with the instrument, because it is the experimentation of different colors and atmosphere. Piano is like a little orchestra, with great power and many possibilities. The orchestra influenced me as a pianist and piano influenced me as a conductor.

see BAGHDASSARIAN, page 16

## Academy-Award Qualifying Short 'Nowhere' Is Now Streaming

YEREVAN — "Nowhere", an award-winning and Academy-Award-qualifying short film from Armenia by Garin Hovannisian, is now available for streaming on YouTube. Hailed as "the best short film of the year" by *The Jerusalem Post* and "a twisted fairytale for our time" by *LA Weekly*, "Nowhere" is a 12-minute black-and-white film set in the city of Nowhere, where shadows dream of a life without their human masters — and finally declare their independence.

The film recently completed a successful festival run, winning "Best of Fest" at the Oscar- and BAFTA-qualifying LA Shorts International Film Festival (United States) and "Best Experimental Short" at the Short Encounters International Film Festival (Greece). It was also screened at 11 festivals in total, including the Odense International Film Festival (Denmark),



Still from "Nowhere"

Cinequest Film and VR Festival (United States), and RiverRun International Film Festival (United States).

"On its face, 'Nowhere' is a simple fairytale — a love story," said Garin Hovannisian, the writer, producer, and director of the film. "But hidden under it is something a little darker and more complicated than that: an allegory of freedom — a parable about so many people struggling across the world."

"Nowhere" was written, produced, and directed by Hovannisian, produced by Alec Mouhibian, co-produced and with cinematography by Suren Tadevosyan, ACG. The VFX producer of the film is Vasil Shahbazyan and the associate producer is Anush Ter-Khachatryan. The film features production design by Tigran Asaturov, music by Andranik Berberyan, and costume design by Narine Sahakyan.

Hovannisian is a writer, filmmaker, and illusionist who lives in Yerevan. His films include 1915 (2015), which won Armenia's top film prize; I Am Not Alone (TIFF 2019), an official selection of the European Film Awards, IDA Award nominee, and winner of AFI Fest and DOC NYC; Truth to Power (Tribeca 2020); Invisible Republic (GAIFF 2022), and City of Cards (2023). He produces his films through Avalanche Entertainment, a production company he founded with Alec Mouhibian. He is also the author of Family of Shadows and has written for The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and The Atlantic.

Garin is also the founder of the arts foundation Creative Armenia and the incubator Artbox.

Watch the critically acclaimed short film now on YouTube at [hovannisian.com/nowhere](https://www.hovannisian.com/nowhere).





ARTS & CULTURE

Chookasian Folk Ensemble Founder to Be Inducted into Valley Music Hall of Fame

FRESNO —John Chookasezian, founder and music director of the Chookasian Armenian Concert and Folk Ensemble, has been honored and inducted into the 2024 “Valley Music Hall of Fame,” in Fresno, as “Musician of the Year.”

Central Valley Music Hall of Fame Fresno event honoring John Chookasezian, will be held on Wednesday, September 25, at 6 p.m., at the Roger Rocka’s Dinner and Show Theater, 1226 Wishon Ave., Fresno. Tickets will be available starting July 31.

John Chookasian is a 1st generation American-Armenian, whose parents were born in historic Sepastia (Sivas, Turkey). His parents Manase and Arshalous Chookasezian witnessed, suffered, survived and escaped from the 1915-1923 Armenian Christian Genocide; that was planned, perpetrated and executed by the inhumane Ottoman Turkish Government.

Chookasezian and his wife Barbara, have been “Culture Bearers” who decided to form an Armenian Concert Ensemble that would perform, preserve and record the many lost or forgotten Armenian songs and dances of Eastern and historic Western Armenia.

During their many travels, they found, transcribed and arranged these vanished unique Armenian songs and later played them on the same stage, in every concert and festival performance.

The Armenian Ensemble recorded these rare, unrecorded unique Armenian songs for their Armenian 5 CD albums. Presently, these 5 Armenian CD albums are located and housed in the Smithsonian Library, in Washington, D.C.

Chookasezian’s Armenian Ensemble has



John and Barbara Chookasezian

performed for: concerts, festivals and special events throughout California, across the USA and Armenia for the past 35 years.

During 1999, then president of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, personally invited the Chookasian Armenian Concert Ensemble to Armenia to conduct a month-long tour throughout Armenia and Karabakh. During the Armenian Ensemble’s last concert performance in Yerevan’s Grand Philharmonic Concert Hall, Cultural Ambassador, Royland Sharoyan, presented John with “Armenia’s National Gold Medal Award.

During 2006, PBS TV, Fresno Channel 18, TV, came and filmed the Chookasian Armenian Concert Ensemble’s Concert performance at California State University, Fresno and later broadcasted their Armenian concert several times, to more than one million TV viewers in California.

Also, their Fresno University concert performance can be seen on YouTube.

Prior coming to Fresno, John formed a Middle East performing group called The King Tut Revue, that performed successfully for numerous lounge shows, films,

conventions, private and corporate parties, etc. in many of the major Las Vegas Hotel and Casinos, for 12 years. Lastly, John is a professional union actor and has acted in 41 major motion picture films and TV series.

At an early age, John was exposed to Armenian songs and dances by the surviving Armenian Genocide musicians, when they visited his parents’ apartment for many years.

When John entered the band at Newtown High School and learned formal playing of the clarinet, several of the Armenian churches and organizations in New York asked John to form an Armenian band for their annual picnics and their other events.

John solicited and found other Armenian musicians in New York and formed The Hye-lites of New York. The new Armenian group rose in popularity, as they accepted many band jobs from Richmond, VA, up to Providence, R.I.

for several years.

Later, John formed a second Armenian band called “The Halvah-Jees (The Candy Makers). The famous master oudist, Chick Ganimian, decided to join John’s group.

They play along the Eastern Seaboard successfully for over ten years.

A talent scout from the Las Vegas Tropicana Hotel and Casino, caught their Armenian Middle Eastern show, featuring Oudist, Chick Ganimian, at New York’s prestigious Round Table Night Club and offer the group a one year + contract to perform for their Las Vegas hotel lounge shows.

Thus, the new Las Vegas, “King Tut Revue” was formed and performed in every major hotel and casino for 12 years.



# Tekeyan Cultural Association

# Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

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



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

☐ \$240   ☐ \$480   ☐ \$700   ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Memo: Sponsor a Teacher  
Mail your check to:  
TCA Sponsor a Teacher  
5326 Val Verde, Houston, TX 77056



Your donation is tax deductible.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE



## Yerevan Concert Pays Tribute to Konstantin Petrossian

YEREVAN — On July 3, a concert-presentation of the book with selected songs by the composer and conductor Konstantin Petrossian was held in Yerevan at the house-museum of Aram Khachaturian. The performers were students of the Romanos Melikyan College of Music, where an auditorium named after Petrossian was inaugurated last year. The concert in a crowded hall, where the composer's new songs were

performed for the first time, was a great success and became a notable phenomenon in the cultural life of Armenia.

Petrossian, a prolific composer, is a member of the Armenian Union of Composers, American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), American Music Center, and Armenian Musical Assembly. Since 1995 he has served as the cultural and music

director of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church in Providence. He has also been the artistic director and conductor of the Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island since 1995, and the Armenian Chorale of Greater Worcester since 2000. Konstantin Petrossian also is the president and artistic director of the Armenian Music Festival of Rhode Island, Inc., which was organized in 1997.

# Books

## Benjamin Alexander's *Ararat in America*

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Subtitled “Armenian-American Culture and Politics in the Twentieth Century,” Benjamin Alexander's sociological study sheds interesting light on events that shaped immigrant life in America for both survivors of the Armenian Genocide and those who preceded them at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Started as a doctoral dissertation at the CUNY Graduate Center in 1998, *Ararat in America* follows a rough chronological order.



Benjamin Alexander

After a cursory 20-page overview of 3,000 years of Armenian history, Alexander moves on to several chapters with titles such as: “The Contested Homeland: the First World War and the Genocide” and “Years of Adjustment: Armenian Americans in the 1920's.” These and the third chapter, “The Tourian Affair: Contested Memories and

the Archbishop's Murder,” are the most successful in the book.

I, for one, live just two blocks away from Holy Cross Church in Washington Heights — where Archbishop Tourian was brutally murdered during a Christmas service by ARF zealots — but I knew little about the details of the conflict that led up to this tragic event which has had ripple effects well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

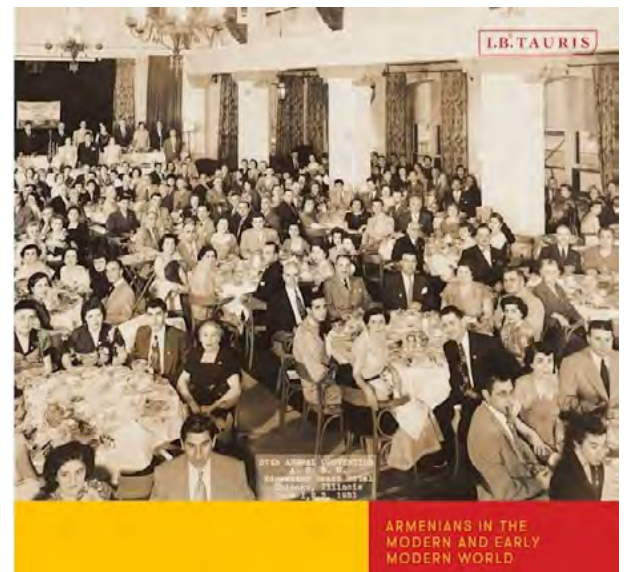
Other important questions that Alexander discusses in this volume include the following: how does a persecuted

people which has suffered a genocide regroup in a new country thousands of miles away from their homeland? How do they divide themselves politically and otherwise? Why do conservative modes of thinking continue to dominate these communities, as they simultaneously assimilate into American society and take on its more progressive, liberal modes of thought and habits? The book also contains fascinating information about figures such as General Dro and amusing anecdotes about arranged marriages and dating at mid-century in certain Armenian circles.

However true it may be that much of the Armenian-American community was once divided along the Tashnag/Ramgavar split in both its secular and religious incarnations, this has lessened in importance as time has passed.

The last chapter, “The Power of a Word: Naming and Claiming the Genocide,” is perhaps the least satisfying in no small part because it ignores almost all the Holocaust and trauma scholarship done by fine scholars such as Shoshona Feldman, Marc Nichanian and Taner Akçam, as well as seminal work by filmmakers such as Claude Lanzmann and Atom Egoyan on the impossibility of knowing or understanding the genocidal will to annihilation.

But my main criticism of Alexander's book is simply that it lacks complexity and often oversimplifies such as when he uses sentences like “a good Armenian” and “a good American.” Another vexing problem with the book is that it needs to be copyedited: there are simply too many repetitions, typos and stylistic inadequacies. More disturbing perhaps, is the author's glossing over of groups of Armenians such as emancipated women, feminists, agnostic/atheists, LGBTQ + people, as well as Armenians who grew up in half-Armenian and half-gentile “odar” families, or Armenians who had at one point become assimilated but later went back to their roots. Nor does Alexander discuss in any serious way, for example, important groups such as Catholic and Protestants Armenians who have contributed mightily to Armenian culture in general and Armenian-American society in particular. There is also the question of methodology and research,



which is top-heavy with traditional conservative historians. Apart from the cursory mention of Stuart Hall and Benedict Anderson, Alexander ignores the contribution of important philosophers and thinkers such as Edward Said, Fernand Braudel, Michel Foucault and Hayden White and their contributions to theories of culture and colonialism.

There are also statements that simply seem wrong, such as the following: “The East had a simple rural virtue and a touch of mystique, the West (as exemplified by Western youth) had the sophistication, and the task of Armenians, was to find just the right blend.”

Assimilation always involves sacrifice, but Alexander's generalities fray the reader's nerves. Stereotypes about the East and West and so-called differences between Armenian Americans and their host society which ignore their difference vis-à-vis Soviet Armenia and the post-Soviet Armenian republic render argumentation problematic. Which East is Alexander actually referring to? The lost lands of Western Armenia? Lebanon and Syria? The First and Second Republics?

I do not want to seem unfair to Alexander. This is after all a modified dissertation of only 180 pages — clearly, an enormous amount of work went into writing it. To his credit, the book is meticulously footnoted and gorgeously printed. Perhaps the thing to do would have been to restrict his field of enquiry to something like: “The Role of the Tashnag Party in Armenian Politics” or simply to write a longer, more ambitious study. Alexander seems like a thoughtful, intelligent scholar who will perhaps write a more insightful and inclusive volume in the future.

Buy *Ararat in America*: [www.bloomsbury.com/us/ararat-in-america-9780755648818/](http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/ararat-in-america-9780755648818/)





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Epic hummus board (Photos courtesy Once Upon A Chef)

## Jenn Segal: Epic Hummus Board

“A friend brought this colorful hummus board to my house for a party, and it became the instant star of the evening — my guests raved about it, and it was the first dish gone from the appetizer table,” says Jenn Segal. She is the professionally trained chef, mother of two, author of two bestselling cookbooks, and founder of Once Upon a Chef <https://www.onceuponachef.com/>, the creative cooking blog that showcases easy (and stress-free) family-friendly recipes from a trained chef’s point of view. Jenn’s blog is known for her updated spins on everyday classics. Meticulously crafted with an eye toward both flavor and practicality, her recipes focus on exactly what you feel like making in today’s demanding and hectic times.

Jenn is practical with her recommendations for the most useful kitchen equipment. She includes tips with each recipe, and offers guidance on such subjects as salting (don’t under-salt), the doneness of foods (use a thermometer), and using up vegetable scraps (use carrot peel in a carrot cake.) “This dish marries some of my absolute favorites — creamy hummus and the iconic cucumber and tomato Mediterranean salad. While it requires a touch more effort than your usual dip, the gorgeous presentation and downright deliciousness make it every bit worth the time. Plus,



Jenn Segal (Photos courtesy Once Upon A Chef)

you can save time by using good-quality prepared hummus. But for truly rich, creamy hummus, skip the supermarket varieties and opt for a tub from a reputable Middle Eastern or Greek deli, restaurant, or grocer. Or if you’ve got a bit of time on your hands, my tried-and-true (<https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/hummus.html>) homemade hummus is a breeze to whip up,” she adds.

“Hummus is a popular Middle Eastern dish made from a blend of chickpeas, tahini, lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, and spices. It’s commonly served as a starter or mezze, paired with pita bread, or as a side to dishes like <https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/falafel.html> falafel, <https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/lamb-kofta.html> kofta or <https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/middle-eastern-chicken-kabobs.html> kebabs. I was fortunate enough to learn how to prepare authentic hummus from a kebab maker in the Old City of Jerusalem,” says Jenn.

Chickpeas have been cultivated and grown throughout the Middle East and in the Mediterranean for thousands of years. Chickpeas have been around for centuries, being one of the earliest crops grown in Mesopotamia, and was commonly

eaten on the streets of Ancient Rome. Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates made reference to hummus and how nutritious it is in their writings (<https://fortheloveof-hummus.com/>).

“This hummus can be made up to 3 days ahead of time and stored in the refrigerator. The salad can be prepared up to 3 hours ahead of time and stored in the fridge. The chickpeas are best made before serving, but they can be prepared up to 3 hours ahead and stored at room temperature; if necessary, you can crisp them back up by reheating in a 350°F oven until hot,” she adds.

Servings: 8 to 10  
Prep Time: 35 minutes  
Cook Time: 25 minutes  
Total Time: 1 hour

### INGREDIENTS:

3 cups (1 1/2 lbs.) homemade or store-bought hummus

For crispy roasted chickpeas:

1 (15 oz.) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed  
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

For the yogurt sauce:

1/2 cup Greek yogurt (preferably whole milk or 2%)  
2 tablespoons mayonnaise, best quality such as Hellmann’s or Duke’s  
1 1/2 teaspoons lemon juice (from 1 lemon)  
1 small clove garlic, minced  
1/4 teaspoon dried dill  
1/8 teaspoon salt

For the tomato-cucumber salad:

1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley  
1 cup quartered cherry or grape tomatoes (from 1 pint)  
1 cup finely diced seeded English/hothouse cucumber (from 1 small cucumber)  
1/4 cup thinly sliced scallions, dark green parts only (from 3 to 4 scallions)  
1/8 teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 tablespoon lemon juice (from 1 lemon), to taste

For serving: Pita bread, pita chips, crackers

### PREPARATION:

Make the roasted chickpeas: Preheat the oven to 425°F and line a baking sheet with heavy-duty aluminum foil. Place the chickpeas on the prepared baking sheet and toss with the olive oil, salt, pepper, and cumin. Roast for 20 to 25 minutes, stirring once, until the chickpeas are golden and crispy.

Let cool.

Meanwhile, make the yogurt sauce: In a small bowl, whisk together the yogurt, mayonnaise, lemon juice, garlic, dill, and salt. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Make the tomato-cucumber salad: In a medium bowl, toss together the parsley, tomatoes, cucumber, scallions, salt, oil, and lemon juice.

To serve: Spread the hummus on a serving platter, using the back of a spoon to swirl it nicely. Spoon three-quarters of the tomato-cucumber salad (including the juices) over the hummus. Scatter the roasted chickpeas over the salad and dollop the yogurt sauce around the top (you may not need all of it). Spoon the remaining salad over top. Serve with pita bread or pita chips.

The hummus and yogurt sauce can be made up to 3 days ahead of time and stored in the refrigerator. The salad can be prepared up to 3 hours ahead of time and stored in the fridge. The chickpeas are best made before serving, but they can be prepared up to 3 hours ahead and stored at room temperature; if necessary, you can crisp them back up by reheating in a 350°F oven until hot. The hummus board is best assembled right before serving.

For this recipe, go to:

<https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/hummus-board.html>

<https://www.onceuponachef.com/>

<https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/hummus.html>

To order Jenn’s cookbooks, visit: <https://www.onceuponachef.com/cookbooks>

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This recipe is excerpted from Once Upon a Chef by Jennifer Segal. Copyright 2018 Chronicle Books.

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# Luc Baghdassarian

## On Music, on Dance, on Being Armenian

BAGHDASSARIAN, from page 12

**Maestro, I know you are, like me, passionate about dance.**

This comes from my parents! My father was a big fan of Beethoven, my mother was very fond of Schubert, but both were big fans of ballet — Nureyev, Baryshnikov, also American musical comedy, Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly. They traveled to Saint Petersburg for only one reason — to attend Kirov shows. In his 20s, my father was a professional ballroom dancer: tango and waltz. I also admire dancers, for me dance is the strongest art, being so hard for the body. As a musician, I have two main inspirations: voice and dance. If someone can dance to the music, it means that it is good music. There is movement, direction and structure in any music. Even in the music of Holy Liturgy there is movement (the maestro started to hum the melody of

all the notes of the score. It is all about human contact, the pretext to communicate with other people. I could not know all the musicians of the orchestra, but with the music you can speak to all of them. If I do not have this contact, I cannot conduct! Before the first rehearsal, I imagine the atmosphere and the character of the piece. The magic of this job is that with hands, body and musicians, we create unique moments!

Yesterday night all the pieces were gorgeous, but for me the *Cavatina* by Beethoven was a gift that the orchestra has given to me. This music is not possible! Why? Because it is too beautiful. For me this music is the highest level of human creativity, surely, above is God!

**I guess you are Armenian only on your father’s side.**

Yes! My mother was Swiss, from the French part of Switzerland. My father



*Khorhurd khorin* – the beginning of Armenian Liturgy - AB). If this movement is broken, the music is not good.

**Have you collaborated with dancers?**  
Yes, twice with the dancers of the Swiss company “ADN dialect” we performed *Verdi’s Requiem*.

**What about Armenian dance and music?**

My grandfather had many vinyl records, and the first vinyl I heard was of Armenian traditional music, and I was dancing to them. Two days ago, I was in a restaurant, we were enthusiastic, there was a singer and a traditional Armenian instrumental band. If I say I do not like Armenian music, it would be like saying I do not love my mother. It is impossible. All this music is based on absolutely wonderful rhythmic melodies. And yesterday night I saw people dancing traditional dances on the streets and on Cascade, which was another great cultural expression!

**I would like to thank you again for yesterday’s concert. I have heard our National Chamber Orchestra for many times, yet yesterday sound was absolutely different, so gentle, elegant, light, transparent and charming with its pianos and pianissimos. Of course, the role of the conductor is very important in gaining such sensibility and gracefulness. Does it come from your personality?**

It begins from the absolute love for music. The most important thing to know is that the music is not the goal, the goal is love, to respect the other people and to love

was born in France; his French name was Charles, but his Armenian name was Vasquen. All the members of my paternal family lived in Lyon in France. After the Genocide, my grandfather had to leave Moush for a camp in Thessalonica. After 10 years, he finally arrived in Lyon.

**Yesterday from the stage you announced that although you do not speak Armenian, your heart is Armenian. And what was and still is Armenian in your family?**

Komitas! Khachaturian! Aznavour! Aivazovsky! By the way, I loved Aivazovsky’s paintings much before I knew he was Armenian. And, of course, the cuisine. My grandmother has taught my mother to make authentic *tolma* from Moush, so my Swiss mom used to make the best *tolma* in the world! And a very special dish from Moush called *Mshou klouluk*!

**What about conducting Armenian music?**

Komitas and Khachaturian are the best and most famous composers. Last April 24, I conducted my Swiss orchestra OVS with eight *Miniatures* by Komitas-Aslamazyan and the audience was touched by this music so simple (in appearance) and perfect! In September I will conduct the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia again, in the Victoria Hall in Geneva. That’s a great pleasure and honor!

**I am sure your concert in Geneva also will be as great as it was yesterday. Many thanks and all the best to you, dear Maestro!**

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MAINE

**JULY 28** — The fourth annual Annual Armenian Picnic will be held 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Searsport Shores Ocean Campground, Rt 1, Searsport, Maine. Featuring the Maine Kef Ensemble, Kotwica and Folk Dance Lessons by Carolyn Rapkevan. A truly unique picnic experience on cool Penobscot Bay. Free admission. For more information: makersguildmaine.org

### MASSACHUSETTS

**JULY 29** — Saint James Armenian Church 24th Annual Harold Partamian Golf Tournament, Monday, Oakley Country club in Watertown, Rain or shine/ Scramble Format/ Raffle/ Silent Auction, Following golf- cocktails, appetizers and banquet dinner at Oakley Country Club. Please see church web-site form full information, registration and sponsorship.

**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.

**AUGUST 25** — Armenian Church at Hye Pointe Picnic, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill, 12 Noon to 5 PM. Live Music featuring the fabulous Jason Naroian Ensemble. Menu includes Lamb Shish, Losh & Chicken Kebab, Kheyma, Vegetarian Plate. Available, Beverages including Cash Bar, Cash Raffles, Armenian Pastry Table, Air Conditioned Hall, Tours of the new church will be given. Bring your lawn chairs for sitting outside. For more information visit: [www.hypointearmenianchurch.org](http://www.hypointearmenianchurch.org) or call (978) 372-5688.

**SEPTEMBER 14** — The Mosesian Center For The Arts in Watertown will host a concert starting at 7:30pm with oud master John Berberian and the bands Armadi Tsayn and RazAvaz, for a night of Armenian folk music from the Armenian Highlands to the Diaspora. Armadi Tsayn, features young musicians who pay homage to the rich legacy of Western Armenia. Members include Alek Surenian and Sam Sjostedt, both of whom studied under Berberian. RazAvaz is a contemporary Persian ensemble based in Boston. Purchase tickets at : <https://www.mosesianarts.org/timedevents/1836?vrid=WmF-PNXZnPT06OmVjYmlzOTQ2NGMxMjg4NTM0YmFjZjI2M2JmYzE2N2Fk&-showall=1> For additional ticketing inquires: 617-923-0100, tickets@moseianarts.org

**SEPTEMBER 15** — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church will celebrate the 84th anniversary of the church’s inception in Belmont. To commemorate this special occasion, His Excellency, Most Rev. Bishop Mikael Mouradian, will celebrate High Mass on Sunday, at 10:30 a.m. During the mass there will be an altar boy (Tebir) ordination from the ACYG - Boston members. Additionally, a luncheon will follow at 2 p.m. at Oakley Country Club in Watertown. Holy Cross Armenian Church is located at 200 Lexington St., Belmont. For more information, call 617-489-2280.

**OCTOBER 19** — AFA Kef Time is here again! Join the fun at the Armenian Friends of America (AFA) Dance. Open to all. Saturday, 6:30 p.m. to midnight. Featuring the live music of: Leon Janikian, Jason Naroian, John Berberian, Bruce Gigarjian and Bob Raphaelian. The Armenian Church at Hye Pointe; 1280 Boston Road; Haverhill. Individual tickets \$55; Tables of 8 - \$425. Ticket price includes Dance, Individual Mezza platters, coffee & dessert. Advanced tickets only - No tickets sold at door. There is a capacity limit. Online Ticket Sales at [www.Armenianfriendsofamerica.org](http://www.Armenianfriendsofamerica.org) or call Mary Ann #603-770-3375 or Kathy #978-902-3198.

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

**NOVEMBER 7** — Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) Boston Child Care Committee presents a special evening with joy and laughter at the Wellesley Country Club in Wellesley, MA featuring comedian Kev Orkian to benefit Khoren & Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan. For more info and RSVP visit: <https://amaa.org/bostonchildcare2024/>

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

### NEW YORK

**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](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://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.





## COMMENTARY

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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## NATO Peace Talks Between Armenia and Azerbaijan

By Suren Sargsyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

On July 9-11, the United States hosted NATO's summit celebrating the 75th anniversary of the organization. Its goal was to unite the Alliance's 32 member states to address pressing global challenges. The summit was organized at a critical juncture for the organization, as NATO is going through complex geopolitical dynamics and is reaffirming its commitment to collective security. Thus, the summit is a strategic pivot towards securing NATO's future relevance. There are also a number of issues which were not included in NATO's agenda but still shape the geopolitical challenges of the future. These are the upcoming presidential elections in the United States and the European Union (EU) that will undoubtedly influence the future nature of transatlantic cooperation.

The agenda of the Summit became known only days before the summit and focused on three pivotal issues outlined by NATO's Secretary general Jens Stoltenberg. First is boosting allied defense and deterrence: This remains "NATO's core business," aimed at enhancing collective defense capabilities amidst evolving security threats. Second is support for Ukraine: Recognized as the most *urgent* agenda item, NATO will advance unwavering support for Ukraine and "help build a bridge to Ukraine's future membership." Third is strengthening global partnerships: With a strategic emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region, NATO seeks to deepen alliances with countries like Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand "to strengthen the vision of peace, security, and prosperity in these two deeply interconnected regions."

Of course, it might seem that the NATO summit has nothing to do with Armenia and Azerbaijan, but this is not the case. The Biden administration invited both countries' foreign ministers to push for peace talks between Yerevan and Baku. No significant agreements were reached during the meeting, but what followed is crucial. The Biden administration and the West are feeling pressured due to the upcoming November elections, with Trump's chances of winning on the rise. European NATO members are concerned about NATO's future if Trump is re-elected, and so are working to address issues during Biden's term, fearing abandonment in facing Russia under a Trump presidency.

Reconciled relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan fall among the core interests of the United States and the NATO agenda. The improvement of relations between the two countries will mean diminished Russian influence in the South Caucasus region which has always been the United States' and the West's longstanding priority. Additionally, Armenia's explicit interest in strengthening and deepening ties with both the United States and the European Union presents an opportunity for the US to capitalize on these developments.

As fostering reconciliation in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations stands as a priority in US foreign policy, the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers were invited to the NATO summit in Washington. This was announced by US Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien during his visit to Baku. Before the summit, there were no official statements confirming potential peace talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers mediated by the US during the NATO events. However, Principal Deputy

Spokesperson Vedant Patel of the State Department assured that efforts were underway. Specifically, during the press briefing when asked about organizing peace talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers, he responded that "this is a priority for us, a priority for the Secretary and other officials across this department. I have no doubt that it's something we'll continue to work towards. Specific meetings and engagements on the margins of the summit – I just don't want to speak to the schedule yet." Thus, the United States was open in its intentions to advocating for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a stance that is evident in high-level US official discourse.

During a hearing in the House of Representatives at the end of June, Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien underscored that they "are very clear with President Aliyev that this is a time to make peace." He later reiterated the same message in his official statement following his talks in Baku with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Foreign Minister Bayramov: "The US wants a strong relationship with Azerbaijan. We welcome bold leadership to complete a peace agreement with Armenia without delay." This concerted effort highlighted the United States' commitment to facilitating stability and peace in the region as well as diminishing Russia's influence through diplomatic engagement. In line with their intentions, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken hosted peace talks between Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov on July 10 in Washington, D.C. on the margins of the Washington NATO Summit. Secretary of State Blinken noted that Armenia and Azerbaijan "are very close to being able to reach a final agreement, one that the United States would strongly, strongly support."

But the statement coming on July 16 from the Spokesperson of the US Department of State Matthew Miller was really shocking. "We do think a deal is possible, but it requires both sides to make some difficult choices and tough compromises, and so what we're going to do is continue to push them to resolve those final differences and reach an agreement," the spokesperson said.

This was a really exceptional wording, which means that there was huge pressure put on Armenia in Washington DC to make additional concessions, and to take difficult choices and tough compromises, because it is difficult to imagine why Baku should make such difficult concessions.

Thus, the NATO summit in Washington marked a pivotal moment for the alliance not only because it celebrated the 75th anniversary of the alliance but also addressed pressing global challenges. Amongst NATO's key priorities, the United States is advocating for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, recognizing it as one of the US foreign policy priorities. The US State Department has actively worked towards reaching a final peace agreement and is most likely to continue these efforts by taking advantage of such an opportunity as Armenia is ready for more concessions.

(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.)

## Finding a Safe Space for Displaced Children

By Mira Antonyan

Scenes of damaged buildings and infrastructure stream from conflicts in Gaza, Haiti and Ukraine in a near-constant flow of destruction and devastation. Unseen is the carnage that these conflicts can inflict on families — and particularly children — who are left to pick up the pieces long after the military and news crews leave.

How can we help children like these, and also those here in the U.S., with news this month from the Biden administration that asylum seekers who cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally will be banned?

Around the world, more than 468 million children live in conflict areas. Social workers are helping these children with PTSD, displacement, and abuse. Children like 11-year-old Artyom Davtyan, who had emotional and behavioral issues and suffered abuse from an alcoholic father who has since vanished — all before having to flee Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in September. He is now living in Armenia with his aunt until he and his mother can reunite

and return to Artsakh.

In 2020, armed conflict involving Azerbaijan and Armenia decimated the Armenian breakaway state of Artsakh. In 2023, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military offensive against Artsakh, forcing the population to leave their homeland. With no other options available, all of the displaced individuals sought refuge in Armenia, the only accessible neighboring country.

We hope to pass on lessons learned in Artsakh to our mental health colleagues and humanitarian workers around the globe who sadly find themselves in similar situations.

### Lesson 1: Address the Person, Then the Needs — and Do It with Empathy and Compassion

In conflict areas, people focus on physical survival mechanisms first. When access to essentials like medication, food, water, electricity and heating is limited or non-existent, introducing mental health support programs is often premature. Well-meaning helpers in the region must prioritize establishing programs and infrastructure that meet these basic needs first, as these are often what the

affected children and families urgently require. But it is crucial not only to provide food, water, and shelter, but also to offer support and assurance that individuals/families are not alone and are in a safe environment.

Therapy won't work when there is a hole in the roof. Therapy and psychological support cannot be effective if more immediate survival needs are unmet. For example, in Haiti, after the 2010 earthquake, many people declined therapy interventions because their immediate concern was finding housing. Similarly, in Ukraine, facilities and infrastructure built between 2022 and 2023 to deliver mental health support were repurposed as regional aid centers, aligning with the more pressing needs of the community.

### Lesson 2: Focus on Resilience Building

The mental health support pyramid developed by the World Health Organization suggests shifting from a typical vulnerability-based approach paradigm to a resilience-building paradigm in crisis areas. Humanitarian aid typically continues for two

see SAFETY, page 19





COMMENTARY

# The US Must Support France Against Azerbaijan

By Michael Rubin

President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan all declared, “diplomacy is back” as they prepared to take office. Their implication: President Donald Trump’s antics were unprofessional, and his willingness to throw allies under the bus, whether on a personal whim or due to negligence, undermined America’s effectiveness and reputation. Frankly, they were not wrong. Trump’s willingness to counter convention and his erraticism had benefits—NATO members paid their dues and deterred Iran—but the net effect was negative. Long-time allies understood that Trump was transactional, history meant nothing, and that the United States might abandon them in their hours of need.

Was Biden Different from Trump in Diplomacy?

The problem with such criticism of Trump coming from Biden’s team today is that Biden proved no better. He entered office with personal grudges against Afghanistan’s elected leaders, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and he proceeded to betray all three.

Withdrawal from Afghanistan was bad enough, but the gratuitous humiliation of Afghan allies who had fought and bled for America was inexcusable. Among Blinken’s first acts as secretary of State were lifting sanctions on the Houthis attacking Saudi Arabia and ending Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s “Maximum Pressure” campaign that had constrained Iran’s support for proxy groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

Perhaps Biden’s promise that diplomacy was back referred predominantly to Europe. Germany resented Trump-era questions about its Nord Stream-2 efforts to increase European dependence on Russian gas. French leaders, too, made little secret of their disdain for Trump in favor of a party whose last two secretaries of State prided themselves on their fluent French.

Alas, while Biden’s team issues statements with the polish of the pre-Trump-era, they did not revert the substance of their diplomacy to give allies deserved respect. Despite a career built on foreign policy, Biden never rec-

ognized alliances require mindfulness of partners’ needs, and not just demands they support American interests.

Does France Now Act with More Moral Clarity than the United States?

Here, France is a case-in-point. While Americans joke about French fortitude and resentments linger about Jacques Chirac’s opposition to the Iraq war based less on principle and more on a history of his own personal financial entanglement with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the reality is that France today shows greater resolve in the face of civilizational threats than does the United States.

Senior French leaders and diplomats may approach the Islamic Republic and its faux-reformists with credulity, but the French security services provide backbone to their Western counterparts. They understand the Iranian danger because they learned the hard way. In the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, Iranian intelligence and the Qods Force conducted more assassinations in France than

## IT IS TELLING THAT FRANCE TODAY OFFERS WEAPONS TO FRIENDS, WHILE THE UNITED STATES GIVES ADVANCED JET FIGHTERS TO ENEMIES.

in any other country. France, too, has stood firm against Iranian nuclear violations while Sullivan offers Tehran a pass in the desperate hope that his career-defining gamble on Iranian moderation will pay off.

Likewise, while Biden, Blinken and Sullivan have appeased Turkey with gifts of F-16s despite the terror-sponsoring NATO members support for Hamas and the Islamic State, its occupation of Cyprus, its refusal to return F-35 Joint Strike Fighter schematics, and its cultivation of Russia and China, the French government has stood up to Turkey.

French security recognizes Turkey under President Erdogan is no different from Iran under Supreme Leaders Khomeini and Khamenei. French security acknowledges privately that Turkish intelligence was responsible for the 2013 murder of Kurdish civil society activists in Paris. While Trump greenlit Erdogan’s 2019 invasion of Kurdish-controlled northeastern Syria, French President Emmanuel Macron criticized the Turkish aggression for what it was. He understood what Biden did not: diplomacy need not appease NATO’s most temper tantrum-prone leader.

More recently, the French government has been at the forefront of efforts to enable Armenia to defend itself against Azerbaijani threats to overrun then oldest Chris-

tian country on earth. France’s provision of weaponry comes against the backdrop of Biden administration indecision at best and malign neglect at worst. It is telling that France today offers weapons to friends, while the United States give advanced jet fighters to enemies.

Has Azerbaijan Become a State Sponsor of Terror?

Azerbaijani dictator Ilham Aliyev has reacted with fury that anyone would impede his march across the South Caucasus as he seeks to unify Turkey and Azerbaijan and erase Armenia from the map.

Two months ago, France accused Azerbaijan of fomenting rioting and unrest in New Caledonia, a French territory in the South Pacific. Many diplomats reacted with disbelief. After all, Azerbaijan is a tiny country 8,500 miles away. The accusation was also surprising because, while New Caledonia suffers periodic unrest, it is analogous to Puerto Rico in that locals regard the independence movement as fringe. Azerbaijani involvement should not surprise analysts, though. As the son of a member of Soviet Politburo-turned-Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev has grown up in a culture of impunity. The deference with which Washington, London, and Moscow treat him only accentuates his sense of immunity. He cannot abide by any challenge, and believes himself the equal to Macron. Aliyev today adopted not only Erdogan’s hatred of Christianity, but also his temper tantrums.

Any doubt about Azerbaijani fingerprints to the New Caledonia violence is over. Speaking to the media last week, Aliyev promised Azerbaijani support for separatist movements not only in New Caledonia, but also in Corsica and the Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte. His implication: If France does not cease defending Armenian sovereignty, Azerbaijan will unleash terror worldwide.

If diplomacy is back and the adults really are back in charge in Washington, there can only be one response: The United States must treat Azerbaijan as a pariah and rogue regime. Aliyev’s words combined with the violence in New Caledonia should be enough to begin discussing Azerbaijan’s designation as a state sponsor of terror. The White House should also tell the United Kingdom that it will no longer accept London’s diplomatic deference to British Petroleum on all matters Azerbaijan. It is also time to recognize that, the propaganda of Azerbaijan’s official and unofficial lobbyists in Washington aside, that the country does more to advance Russia’s interests than those of the West.

On September 11, 2001, France stood with the United States. Washington need not always agree with Paris, but America should always have France’s back. If Ilham Aliyev wants to attack France because Macron stands up to his racist bullying and aggression, Aliyev should realize he risks terror designation and rogue regime treatment commensurate with Azerbaijan’s actual behavior.

(Michael Rubin is director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.)

# Azerbaijan’s Human Rights Abuses Should Bar it From Ever Hosting the COP Summit

By Paul Polman

On September 19 last year, Ruben Vardanyan, a successful businessman, international philanthropist and proud Armenian was captured and illegally imprisoned by the Azerbaijani army.

Since then he, alongside 22 other Armenians, has been illegally held hostage by the Azerbaijani authorities; refused a proper trial and access to independent international legal advice, or any visitors; denied proper food or medical treatment; and, as we found out recently; dreadfully mistreated.

The 23 that are being held captive by the Government of Azerbaijan include seven other political leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, alongside innocent civilians.

We should not be surprised; Azerbaijan is a country that has scant regard for human rights and international law. The country is scored a pitiful 7 out of 100 by Freedom House, which tracks democracy and freedom across countries.

Since 2003 when Ilham Aliyev took over the presidency from his father, corruption has become even more rampant, civil liberties have been destroyed and the political opposition squashed, leaving no room for independent expression or activism.

Journalists face harassment, blackmail and bribery attempts. If they resist, they are thrown into prison. Those that leave face their families being persecuted.

Ruben was captured when the Azerbaijani army was sent into Nagorno-Karabakh, which is a disputed region

between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where he was trying to protect the local Armenian population from the coming violence. After a ten month long absolute siege which denied local people food, fuel and basic medical supplies, Azerbaijan forced more than 100,000 Armenians to leave their homes and possessions and flee for safety. Many have called it a genocide.

Ruben is a skilled and committed business leader. He has devoted himself to a wide range of philanthropic causes, including schools, colleges and the Aurora Prize, which recognizes individuals for their extraordinary humanitarian work around the world (and for which I sit on the Board).

Now the international community has an opportunity to respond to his illegal detainment, and that of the other illegally held Armenian prisoners. Barely a year after their naked aggression, in November Azerbaijan is due to host the COP29 United Nations Summit on climate change in its capital, Baku. These are the biggest international climate talks of the year.

That Baku was ever chosen as the host city is highly contentious. Almost half of its GDP, and 90 percent of its export revenue, comes from oil and gas production. The country’s President has no serious interest in tackling climate change or reducing emissions. Indeed, earlier this year President Aliyev said he wanted to increase gas production by a third over the next decade, and has made clear that hosting COP29 will not them from investing in the gas “provided by God.”

Government representatives have claimed that they want

this to be the “COP of Peace.” This is despite having invaded a neighboring country less than a year ago, and having not yet secured a fair peace deal, nor showing any real intention towards doing so. They continue to hold the political prisoners, and are failing to improve human rights. Just a few days ago [4 July] Amnesty International called on the United Nations to make sure the Azerbaijani authorities uphold the international rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly for all those attending COP.

Members of the European Parliament have outright called for a boycott. An increasing number of governments around the world are expressing their anger at Azerbaijan’s behavior. I sincerely hope that David Lammy, Britain’s new Foreign Secretary, will add his voice to this rising chorus, given his avowed commitment to human rights. The United Nations should demand from Azerbaijan a release all Armenian prisoners before the COP29 summit, as well as launch a review into how future host countries are selected.

You too can take action. You can write to Elon Suleymanov, Azerbaijan’s ambassador to the United Kingdom, at their embassy at 66, Holland Park, London, to demand his country releases its political prisoners and hostages immediately. You can also register your support on the website of the campaign to free the Armenian Prisoners and follow the campaign on social media.

(Paul Polman is the former vice chair of the UN Global Compact.)





## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenia's Top Leaders on Vacation: Some Hope They Wouldn't Come Back

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's office surprisingly announced that he was going on a long vacation from July 15 to August 12. More shockingly, several other officials of Armenia had decided to go on vacation at the same time, leaving the country without its top leadership.

I would have had no concern if Pashinyan had gone on a one or even two-week long vacation. Everyone needs a break from time to time. But, the top leader of the country going on vacation for almost a month is incredible. I have not heard of the leader of any country in the world having gone on a 29-day vacation.

Besides the astonishing length of the absence of the prime minister from office, I have three other concerns:

1) There seems to be no basic understanding that several of the country's leaders cannot be absent from office at the same time. What if, God forbid, would a war break out or some other serious emergency occur? Normally, when the leader of any country is temporarily absent, his deputy performs his functions -- not in Armenia. Several members of the Armenia media reported that the Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan, who is supposed to replace the Prime Minister during his absence, has also gone on vacation for nine days during the same period. Fortunately, there is a second Deputy Prime Minister who will fulfill the duties of Prime Minister. Furthermore, the Speaker of the Parliament, Alen Simonyan, decided to go on vacation for 20 days from July 16 to August 5. He will be replaced by Deputy Speaker Ruben Rubinyan (July 16-22) and Deputy Speaker Hakob Arshakyan (July 23-August 5). Also on vacation are Finance Minister Vahe Hovhannisyan (for 10 days) and Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan (until July 22).

2) If the leaders of Switzerland were to be absent from their offices for days, weeks or even months, nothing untoward would happen, since the country is located in a peaceful part of the world. Regrettably, Armenia is located in a precarious region with constant threats from Azerbaijan. Armenia's leaders have to be constantly on alert and work diligently to solve its myriad problems. Under these circumstances, their going on lengthy and simultaneous vacations is reckless and irresponsible.

3) Finally, Pashinyan announced last month that Armenia is ready to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan in one month. Why would he then turn around and go on vacation for a month? Shouldn't he be in his office, if, by a miracle, Pres. Aliyev agreed to sign such a treaty which I believe is not only useless, but also contrary to Armenia's interests? Aliyev is cleverly stringing

along the signing of a peace treaty to extort endless concessions from Armenia!

Even though the leadership's wholesale absence entails a major risk for the country, many Armenians are not too concerned. On the contrary, they are happy that the leaders are away from office so they can do less damage to the country's interests. Some members of the public are hoping that these leaders would remain on permanent vacation and not return to their positions.

Some of the readers feel that I am too critical of Pashinyan. While it is true that no one is perfect, starting from me, the prime minister goes to extensive lengths to make egregious errors and baseless statements which would have been laughable, if they did not have such serious consequences. Hundreds of such examples come to mind. Let us just mention the latest example when the Prime Minister along with his wife attended the UEFA's Soccer championship game on July 14 in Berlin.

Pashinyan, obsessed with social media, regularly posts on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube, all of his speeches, meetings, and visits. Unlike other world leaders, he walks around with one or two cell phones in his hand.

During the soccer match in Berlin, he placed his cell phone in front of him and videotaped, not the match, but his own face, adding a bizarre song to the video by a 31-year-old female American singer known as Tinashe. Wikipedia described the song, titled "Nasty," as "an understated R&B and rhythmic pop song on which Tinashe 'rap-sings' about searching for someone to match her sexual energy, which she alternately calls her 'freak' and her 'nasty', while also using several double entendres. The song has a 'robotic' hook and, in its second verse, she details a sexually charged date night, singing 'Shot-gun, my thighs on the seat, I ain't got nothin' underneath, Looks like you're 'bout to spend the night, Looks like, I'm 'bout to change your life.'"

Why would the prime minister of Armenia add such an inappropriate song to his video, with the word "nasty" repeated 59 times in the song?

Surprisingly, Pashinyan's video along with the song, "Nasty," was reported by TV channel 5 in Los Angeles. The headline of the segment on TV was: "Pashinyan & wife in Berlin at Euro Soccer Finals, Listening to Nasty Song." The TV channel asked: "What do the 2024 European Championship final, Tinashe and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan have in common?" My answer: Absolutely nothing!

Channel 5 reported that Pashinyan posted on TikTok a second video showing the victory celebration at the end of the soccer match, once again adding the song "Nasty." The TV channel stated: "It is not known why he chose the one-time Crescenta Valley High School student's song as the background music for the two videos. It is also not known how exactly he found the song in the first place."

It is almost impossible to explain the Prime Minister's actions and motives. Maybe, he is looking for a Hollywood gig after he is no longer Prime Minister.

## Finding a Safe Space for Displaced Children

SAFETY, from page 17

years following a crisis, and it is not uncommon for people to become dependent on that aid if they are not equipped to become self-sufficient.

A significant part of our work involves helping individuals rebuild their social skills and networks, which is crucial as we begin the process of upskilling them. This, however, is not an easy task, especially when working with people who have lost their homeland, houses, livelihood, and, in many cases, a significant portion of their community and workforce. Our goal is to empower families to help themselves and to start thinking practically about their future — where to start, and how to rebuild their lives.

The resilience-focused approach encourages people to look forward and not just focus on past traumas. We have found that when this strategy is implemented properly right after a crisis, it significantly reduces the need for specialized psychological and mental health support later on.

### Lesson 3: Balancing Structure and Flexibility

Children need structure to thrive, but they also need room to grow. This may sound counterintuitive to the strict protocols often employed in modern social work; however, we have found that flexibility is key when supporting children and families in conflict areas.

To address this, we established temporary social work centers in 13 of the most refugee-populated areas. These centers provide a space where children and families can interact, play, and re-establish social networks that they have lost. We provide support to overcome language barriers, facilitate introductions and orientations to new schools and cultures, and create a safe environment for children to express themselves, make friends, and just be kids.

We typically initiate social activation and upskilling programs six months after displacement. This approach has significantly improved outcomes in these 13 communities. Mothers become more involved in their children's education, build new networks with other parents, and often engage in re-skilling and employment training.

Our primary goal extends beyond establishing rules; it is about fostering a positive example of resilience and recovery.

It doesn't mean we ignore the past. Instead, we focus on setting a positive example of overcoming atrocities. It is crucial for children to see parents, counselors, teachers, and other adults demonstrating fairness, adaptation, and proactive behavior in a new environment. They need to see how to take charge of their lives, and to stand up for themselves and others. This helps children learn not only to survive but also to thrive in their new environments.

### Lesson 4: Never Underestimate the Impact of Local Culture

Cultural norms can differ significantly even between neighboring villages, and it is impossible to develop a one-size-fits-all plan for an entire region.

For effective intervention, though, it is critical to have a deep understanding of family dynamics, local biases, levels of trust in government, and historical patterns of abuse. To bridge gaps in understanding and services, we employ a unique team structure: Each family is supported by a pair of social workers, one with local knowledge and another who is a refugee themselves.

This pairing ensures that each family has a social worker who comprehensively understands their history, current situation, needs, and strengths, and can develop a tailored support plan based on these insights. The approach allows the teams to balance their combined expertise effectively, addressing the challenges of displacement with an in-depth understanding of the local social, cultural, and political context. This ensures that our interventions are sensitive to the cultural nuances that influence the effectiveness of our support.

### Lesson 5: Treat the Whole Family

Our primary goal is to reunite children with their families. In Artsakh, we are fortunate to work within a culture whose families are proactive in supporting one another. Our approach involves attaching/assigning social workers to families, enabling them to monitor and follow family dynamics over time, and identify any changes or challenges. This approach is crucial for identifying individuals who might otherwise be overlooked by the system.

Our teams ensure that children have access to education,

healthcare, public services, and proper documentation. They also coordinate with local humanitarian efforts in that area to provide comprehensive support. In a country where the social-work system is underdeveloped, attaching social workers directly to families has proven to be the most effective form of assistance.

In Artsakh, we also encountered many elderly people living independently, supported only by neighbors as their families have been displaced or killed. In these cases, our focus shifts to fostering community bonds. We facilitate interactions that help people to get to know each other, form new networks, and establish strong and supportive relationships.

### Rebuilding Lives, Families, and Communities

Whether the crisis stems from man-made conflict or a natural disaster such as the 1988 earthquake in Armenia that marked the beginning of my career, it is vital that children affected by conflict receive timely assistance. These young victims require ongoing support to navigate their pain and trauma. The combination of love, care, energy, and empathy, along with professional support, is vital. Social workers closely connected with families play a crucial role in addressing both immediate needs and deeper psychological suffering. This relationship builds trust and establishes the social worker's credibility, helping individuals shift from recovery to becoming active and empowered, and ultimately reducing their dependency on humanitarian aid.

In the long run, fostering individual and community resilience allows for the efficient and effective use of limited resources. It significantly improves the physical and mental health of those in crisis zones, and is essential in rebuilding broken lives, restoring families, and revitalizing communities. This holistic approach not only addresses immediate needs but also lays the foundation for sustainable recovery and growth.

(Mira Antonyan, PhD, is the executive director of the Fund for Armenia Relief Child Protection Center, President of the Armenian Association of Social Workers and an associate professor at Yerevan State University. This commentary originally appeared in *Psychology Today* earlier in July.)





# Armenian Students Win Five Medals at 65th International Mathematical Olympiad

BATH, England — The Armenian team has won five bronze medals and one letter of commendation at the 65th International Mathematical Olympiad held in the city of Bath, Great Britain, July 11-22. The event featured 609 students from 108 countries.

Four of the six representatives of Armenia study at PhysMath School after A. Shahinyan, two study at Quantum College.

Aghasi Darbinyan, 11th-grade student of Quantum school, and Hayk Andriasyan, 12th-grade student of the same institution, won bronze medals, and 11-grader Mikayel Galstyan received a letter of commendation.

The Armenian team was led by Smbat Gogyan (“Square” educational foundation) and Grigor Kerobyan (“Worldquant” LLC).



The winning Armenian participants

Vahan Baghdasaryan, Kamo Mirakyan and Areg Mkrtchyan, 12th-grade students of Shahinyan PhysMath Special School,

The Armenian team won two silver and three bronze medals at the 64th International Mathematics Olympiad.



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## Dr. Nubar Berberian 2024 Annual Awards



Dr. Nubar Berberian, intellectual, journalist, activist and editor of many ADL daily newspapers for more than 50 years passed away at the age of 94 in November 23, 2016. In his Will, Dr. Berberian directed his Trust Fund managers to appropriate awards every year to college students of Armenian descent worldwide who major in either International Law or Political Science.

### ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Eligible recipients are college students of Armenian descent who major in either International Law or Political Science.
- 2) Applicant must be enrolled in a full-time graduate program in a fully accredited college or university in the world.
- 3) Applicant must provide all of the information requested on the application form.
- 4) Applicant must submit a copy of his or her most recent college transcript.
- 5) Applicant is to include a small head-and-shoulders self-portrait.
- 6) Application could be received by requesting from [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com),
- 8) The deadline of receiving the applications is September 30, 2024.
- 9) The administrators and managers of the fund will vote the qualified winners in October, 2024 based on the merits of each applicant.
- 10) The winners will receive their awards in November, 2024
- 11) Winning applicants are not eligible to apply again.
- 12) This announcement is published in Armenian, English, French and Spanish.

July 10, 2024

**755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA, 02472,**