

## Russian Border Guards Gone from Yerevan Airport

By Ani Avetisyan

Russian border guards can no longer be found at Yerevan’s Zvartnots International Airport, but Russia’s strategic presence elsewhere in Armenia seems set to continue for the foreseeable future, despite Armenia’s geopolitical turn away from the Kremlin toward the West.

For decades, Russian border guards had been stationed at Zvartnots and along Armenia’s borders with Turkey and Iran, a reflection of the once-solid Russian-Armenian strategic partnership. But bilateral ties have frayed following Azerbaijan’s reconquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Armenia is now trying to reduce the level of Russian influence over its political and economic affairs.

In March, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that his government had given Moscow until August 1 to remove the border guards from the airport, stating that Armenian personnel were perfectly capable of managing passport and customs controls independently. The Russian Foreign Ministry initially criticized the decision, but the two countries finalized the withdrawal timetable in May.

In addition, Russia has pulled back its “peacekeeping” troops and border guards from Armenia’s frontier with Azerbaijan. These forces had been deployed at Yerevan’s request during and after the 2020 fighting in Karabakh, which saw Azerbaijan recapture much of the territory. Armenia has also expressed its intent to withdraw from the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Despite these recent developments, Russia’s military presence in Armenia isn’t about to end anytime soon. Russian border guards are set to continue patrolling Armenia’s borders with Iran and Turkey, and Moscow also shows no

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## Four Medals for Armenian Athletes at Paris Olympics

PARIS (Combined Sources) — The Paris Olympic games are officially over and the athletes have returned home.

Team Armenia did so with two silver medals and one bronze.

The silvers were won by wrestler Artur Aleksanyan and gymnast Artur Davtyan, while wrestler Malkhas Amoyan won the bronze.

Artur Aleksanyan, a member of the Armenian Olympic team and a gold, silver, and bronze medalist of previous Olympic Games, as well as a multiple world and European champion, won the silver medal on August 7.



Wrestler Artur Aleksanyan

In the final of the Greco-Roman wrestling 97-kilogram weight category at the Champ-de-Mars Arena in Paris, Aleksanyan lost to Iran’s Mohammad Hadi Saravi with a score of 4:1.

Aleksanyan’s accomplishments are remarkable: Olympic Medals: Gold (Rio 2016), Silver (Tokyo 2020), Bronze (London 2012), World Championships: Four-time champion (2014, 2015, 2017, 2022) and European Championships: Seven-time champion (2012, 2013, 2014, 2018, 2020, 2023, 2024).

Amoyan won the bronze medal in the 77-kilogram weight category of Greco-Roman wrestling, defeating Aram Vardanyan, an Armenian wrestler competing for Uzbekistan, with a score of 6:5.

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## Armenia Praised For Implementing Key Reforms Under EU Agreement, as Russia Fumes

By Tatevik Lazarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A Brussels official has praised Armenia’s progress in implementing reforms in key areas under its existing agreement with the European Union.

In an interview with RFE/RL’s Armenian Service published on Friday, August 9, Peter Stano, lead spokesperson for the European Union’s Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said that the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) concluded

between Armenia and the EU in 2017 was important not only in stimulating democratic and political reforms, but also “reforms that bring more economic growth, better jobs, more investments, increasing of the living standards.”

“I can say that what we are seeing is that Armenia made progress in implementing reforms in key areas such as political reforms, in judiciary, rule of law, in particular taking forward the very important police reform. And we see that there are steps being done also in other areas which

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Peter Stano, lead spokesperson for the European Union’s Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, during an interview with RFE/RL Armenian Service correspondent Tatevik Lazarian

## Baku Said to Have Withdrawn Troops from Section of Demarcated Border with Armenia

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Azerbaijan has withdrawn its military from one section of the recently demarcated border with Armenia, according to the mayor of a local Armenian village who spoke to RFE/RL on August 7.

Tigran Harutyunyan, the administrative leader of Berkaber, a village in Armenia’s northeastern Tavush Province, said the withdrawal of the Azerbaijani military

from the vicinity of Qizilhacili — one of four former Azerbaijani villages that Armenia ceded control of as part of the border demarcation earlier this year — occurred about a month ago.

“They left quite a while ago. I believe it was in early July. They vacated their position, and now our border guards are stationed there,” Harutyunyan said.

For more than 30 years, the Azerbaijani side has controlled about 900 hectares of land belonging to Berkaber. It was decid-

ed that this area would not be demarcated during the process that took place in April and May.

The government released a map in April highlighting the sections where adjustments would be made, and the Azerbaijani military remained at one such section after the completion of the demarcation.

It had been agreed that “within a short but reasonable period of time,” Armenia and Azerbaijan would withdraw their forces and allow the deployment of border guards.

Residents of Berkaber have reported hearing explosions near their village and assumed they were caused by Armenian sappers working in the area.

The Armenian Defense Ministry said earlier that controlled explosions would take place on August 7 near Berkaber and Kirants, another village where the border demarcation took place, and advised local residents not to panic. It said there would be a total of 10 explosions to the northeast

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Yerevan State Team Wins Five Medals at Math Competition

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Three Primates Of North America Meet In Montreal

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Earthquake Recorded in Northwest Armenia

YEREVAN (news.am) — On August 12, at 02:02 local time, the seismological network of the Territorial Seismic Protection Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Armenia recorded an earthquake with a magnitude of 4.2, with an epicenter 9 kilometers northwest of the town of Martuni, at a depth of 10 kilometers.

The intensity of underground tremors in the epicentral zone was 5-6 points.

The earthquake was felt in the Gegharkunik region with an intensity of 5 points, in the Kotayk region with an intensity of 4 points, and in Yerevan with an intensity of 2-3 points.

ServiceTitan Ranks 6th in Forbes' Cloud Companies

YEREVAN (ARKA) — ServiceTitan, a company founded by Armenian entrepreneurs Ara Mahdessian and Vahe Kuzoyan, has secured the 6th spot on Forbes' list of the 100 best cloud companies.

ServiceTitan, a leading provider of software for home service businesses, is valued at \$7.4 billion. It has offices in Glendale, Atlanta and Yerevan.

Tourism Boom Continues

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — A total of 237,603 tourists visited Armenia in July 2024, the Tourism Committee said in a statement on August 9.

In July 2023 the number was 255,706.

In January-July 2024 most tourists came from Russia (42%), Georgia (13%), Iran (8%), the U.S. (2.5%) and India (2,3%).

32,000 Indians Issued Entry Visas to Armenia

YEREVAN (news.am) — The number of Indian citizens who were issued an entry visa to Armenia has increased during the first seven months of this year, according to data received from the Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Armenia.

A total of 31,924 Indian nationals were issued visas to Armenia during January-July 2024, which is 2,109 more than the same period last year.

During the first seven months of 2024, a total of 858 Indian citizens were given residence status in Armenia, of which 159 were on the basis of education, and 646—working.

A large flow of Indian nationals to Armenia was recorded last year. In particular, in 2023, a total of 67,609 Indian citizens were issued entry visas, while in 2022, 25,062 received visas.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the sharp increase in the number of Indian nationals who were issued an entry visa to Armenia last year was due to the legislative changes in 2022 in the process of issuing an entry visa to Armenia, when Indian citizens were given the opportunity to be issued an on-line entry visa to Armenia without any restrictions.

Vishaps, Cultural Landscape of Tirinkatar Added To UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July discussed and approved the application submitted by Armenia to include the Vishaps “Dragon Stones” and the Cultural Landscape of the Tirinkatar in the Aragatsotn region of Armenia in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (ESCS) of Armenia informs that the meeting is taking place on July 20-30 in the capital of India, New Delhi. Harutyun Vanyan, Head of the Department for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments of the Armenian MoESCS, is participating in the congress as the coordinator.

This is the fifth application registered by Armenia in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. The first 4 were registered in 1995. These are: The archaeological site of the city of Dvin, The basilica and archaeological site of Yererouk, The monastery of Noravank and the upper Amaghou Valley, The monasteries of Tatev and Tatevi Anapat and the adjacent areas of the Vorotan Valley (the lists can be found at the following link: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statements/am>).

The monasteries of Sanahin and Hag-



One of the Vishap “Dragon Stones”

pat, Echmiadzin Cathedral, churches and historical monument of Zvartnots, Geghard Monastery and upper Azat Valley have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List from Armenia.

Registration of a monument in the UN-

ESCO World Heritage Tentative List is a mandatory preliminary condition for the inclusion of new monuments in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Work in this direction is ongoing, and new applications will be announced periodically.

Armenian High Court Judge Faces Seven Years in Prison

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prosecutors in Armenia have demanded seven years in prison for a Constitutional Court judge charged with abuse of official powers related to alleged real estate fraud.

Hrair Tovmasyan, who was removed from his post as Constitutional Court chairman following a constitutional amendment effected in 2020, but continued to serve as a judge, rejects the accusations, claiming to have been warned by authorities to step down from the court or face criminal prosecution.

In December 2019, Tovmasyan was charged with using a front man to take over the premises of two notary offices and leas-

ing them to the notaries themselves while he served as justice minister.

If found guilty before December, Tovmasyan will have to serve his sentence. Although the statute of limitations for the alleged crime would apply after that, but the judge will still have to relinquish his current position, Prosecutor Arsen Margaryan explained to RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

“According to the law on the Constitutional Court, the issuance of an indictment, its entry into legal force, or even the cessation of criminal prosecution on a non-exculpatory basis is an obstacle to occupying the high position of a judge,” he said.

For years Tovmasyan's lawyers have argued that as a member of the Constitutional

Court elected under the 2005 Constitution, their client enjoys immunity from prosecution and can only be indicted with the consent of the Constitutional Court.

However, Prosecutor Margaryan contended that Tovmasyan's immunity does not apply to this criminal case, which is related to actions taken before he assumed his position as a judge.

“The crimes alleged are unrelated to the powers of the Constitutional Court. What is being incriminated is an alleged criminal act committed while he was serving as justice minister and did not enjoy immunity,” he explained.

Tovmasyan has made few comments about the criminal case over the past four years, and filming of court hearings has been prohibited at his request. At the beginning of the trial he denied the charges and described the persecution against him as politically motivated.

“I was warned about it six months ago. I was told that if I did not take X, Y, Z steps, I would be charged eventually, and those X, Y, Z steps meant resignation,” he claimed then.

Tovmasyan, a political ally of former President Serzh Sarkisian and author of the current Constitution, was elected chairman of the Constitutional Court in 2018, shortly before large-scale street protests led to Sarkisian's resignation and brought then opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan to power.

The new government of Prime Minister Pashinyan initiated a process of constitutional amendments that resulted in Tovmasyan's being removed from his position as chairman of the Constitutional Court in 2020. He, however, continued to serve as a judge. Three other judges of the Constitutional Court elected under the previous administration were also dismissed as a result of the same process.

Tovmasyan's lawyer Aram Orbelian, who is currently on vacation, did not immediately comment on the seven-year imprisonment demand made by the prosecutors at a court hearing last week.

Eurovision Young Musicians: Armenia's Nominee off to Norway

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Oboist Hayk Hekekyan, Armenia's delegate to Eurovision Young Musicians 2024, has travelled to Norway, Public TV Company reports.

Bodø, Norway, will be the stage for a celebration of young musical talents on August 17.

Eleven talented young musicians from Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Sweden, and Switzerland will compete for the coveted title.

Eurovision Young Musicians is a platform for young artists to shine on the international stage. By celebrating creativity, cultural diversity, and the universal language of music, the event aims to inspire and connect people across borders.



Hayk Hekekyan with his family





ARMENIA

# Armenia Sheds Little Light on Border Delimitation Talks with Azerbaijan

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian government on August 13 provided little clarity on its negotiations with Azerbaijan regarding border delimitation, with the office of Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan representing Yerevan in the process only reaffirming that these talks were ongoing.

In a written statement sent to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service one month after its request for comment on why Yerevan and Baku apparently failed to agree on a document setting the principles of border delimitation by July 1, as previously agreed, Grigoryan’s office did not provide a clear answer regarding the matter, instead citing a statement from last month, indicating that negotiations were continuing “in a constructive manner.”

“It is planned to complete these negotiations in the near future and then proceed to the demarcation of the remaining parts of the border, including enclaves and exclaves,” the statement added.

In May, Armenia and Azerbaijan completed a controversial border demarcation process involving several sections of the border between the Tavush region of Armenia and the Qazax district of Azerbaijan. The process, which began with a mutual agreement on April 19, resulted in Armenia ceding control of four villages that were previously part of Soviet Azerbaijan, as well as certain territories of Armenian villages, according to 1970s maps used in the process.

The move, which was criticized by the opposition as a unilateral concession, sparked local protests that escalated and eventually reached Yerevan, culminating in clashes between riot police and protesters outside the Armenian parliament on June 12.

In their joint statement before launching the process, Armenia and Azerbaijan announced that they would adopt by July 1 “regulations” for joint activities of their commissions dealing with the delimitation and demarcation of the nearly 1,000-kilometer-long border.

The regulations are supposed to lay out the principles for delineating the rest of the heavily militarized frontier. Armenian officials have said that these principles will lay the groundwork for Azerbaijan’s recognition of Armenia’s territorial integrity.

The two sides gave no reasons for their failure to meet the July 1 deadline. In virtually identical statements issued on that day they said they were continuing to negotiate “constructively” and planned to agree on the regulations “soon.”

The Armenian opposition interpreted that as a missed deadline and a failure of official Yerevan’s diplomacy to reach an agreement on full border demarcation despite territorial concessions.

Speaking to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on Tuesday, opposition lawmaker Tigran Abrahamyan pointed out the “unprecedented secrecy” surrounding the Armenian-Azerbaijani border negotiations at this stage. He noted that details are often revealed to the Armenian public either by



A pillar installed to mark the Armenian-Azerbaijani border at one of the sections near the Armenian village of Kirants during the demarcation process in April-May 2024.

Azerbaijani officials or by officials of intermediary countries.

“Naturally, under these conditions, when we look at the border demarcation process — especially its complex, problematic and nuanced issue — the Armenian authorities seek to limit the disclosure of relevant information as much as possible,” he said.

Abrahamyan claimed that the Armenian government had been concealing Azerbaijani demands for the return of four villages for an extended period. The opposition lawmaker alleged that this was part of a strategy to create the impression that Yerevan was actively addressing the issue of agricultural lands and pastures from 31 Armenian villages currently held by Azerbaijan, suggesting that the process was “reciprocal.”

“Time has shown — and I am sorry to say this — that in reality Azerbaijan had set clear demands, and the Armenian government packaged it with beautiful words process... and, in fact, made unilateral concessions under the name of a border demarcation process, Abrahamian said.

Opposition groups argue that the latest border demarcation has made Armenia potentially more vulnerable in the Tavush region in the event of another conflict with Azerbaijan, given the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from strategically important areas.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has dismissed this criticism, contending that the alternative to the border demarcation would have been another war for which Azerbaijan would have had a legitimate pretext. He has also maintained that local Armenian communities are now better protected from a legal standpoint than they were before the demarcation.

The Armenian government has said it hopes that the demarcation with Azerbaijan will continue also in other sections of the border, including those where Yerevan accuses Baku of having occupied Armenian territories following a series of incursions in 2021-2022.

## Baku Said to Have Withdrawn Troops from Section of Demarcated Border with Armenia

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of the villages but did not specify their purpose.

Harutyunyan told RFE/RL that the area from which the Azerbaijani military had been withdrawn might be undergoing demining.

“They left one post, but that gap is quite extensive and is currently being cleared,” Harutyunyan said.

Residents of Kirants, however, informed RFE/RL that the explosions near their village appeared to be part of some engineering work.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan faced intense criticism earlier this year for agreeing to the first-ever border demarcation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which involved a limited section. This demarcation resulted in

Armenia ceding control of the four villages as well as certain territories of Armenian villages based on 1970s maps used in the process.

The move sparked large-scale protests in Yerevan, with opposition groups also arguing that Armenia would be more vulnerable in the Tavush region if another war with Azerbaijan occurred, given that Armenian armed forces had to withdraw from strategically important areas.

Pashinyan has dismissed this criticism, contending that the alternative to the border demarcation would have been another war for which Azerbaijan would have had a legitimate pretext. He has also maintained that local Armenian communities are now better protected from a legal standpoint than they were before the demarcation.



Berkaber, the newly delimited border with Azerbaijan in May

# Russian Border Guards Gone from Yerevan’s Zvartnots Airport

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sign of leaving a military base near the city of Gyumri.

In a sign of Moscow’s vexation over Armenia’s recent efforts to improve relations with the European Union and United States, Russian officials in mid-July imposed a ban on the import of fresh fruits and vegetables from 16 Armenian entities.

Rosselkhoznadzor, Russia’s agricultural regulator, claimed that several batches of imported Armenian products exceeded permissible pesticide residue levels.

The Armenian Food Safety Inspection Body (FSIB) was notified of the ban in a letter publicized on July 17. The FSIB has pledged to intensify testing and investigate the 16 affected firms and individual entre-

preneurs. Bilateral discussions to resolve the matter are ongoing. Russian officials are expected to visit Armenia in late August to conduct joint inspections of production, processing, storage, and shipment sites for Russia-bound agricultural exports.

The economic impact of the ban is unclear. According to official data, Armenia’s exports of fruits and vegetables

amounted to \$182.5 million for all of 2023, and roughly \$70 million during the first five months of 2024, with over 90 percent of exports headed to Russia. Nearly 74,000 tons of Armenian fruits and vegetables, including apricots, apples and tomatoes, have been imported from Armenia since the beginning of the year, according to Rosselkhoznadzor.





ARMENIA



FemInno team and Volunteers during the conference

# FemInno Brings Celebration of Female Innovation to Yerevan

YEREVAN — On July 27-28, the organization FemInno held the biggest female innovation conference in Armenia and in the region for the third time. More than 50 speakers gathered under one roof during two days of talks and workshops and discussed the hottest topic of the technological world: Artificial intelligence and its impact on all spheres of life.

FemInno 2024 was opened with a speech by the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Zhanna Andreasyan, addressed to the conference participants and guests who arrived from more than 10 countries: USA, Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Netherlands, Georgia,

FemInno, Seda Papoyan, and the executive director of WCIT 2024, Hayk Karapetyan, signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

Among the guest speakers of the FemInno conference was Ida Tin representing Germany, who is the creator of the term femtech in 2016. Her Clue mobile app is the number one women’s health app in the world with over 15 million users in 180 countries.

Among the speakers were Sabrina Palme, the founder of Palqee from Great Britain, artificial intelligence researcher Eugenia Stamboliev from Austria, Armen Orujyan, the head of the Armenian FAST Foundation, under whose leadership the “AI Generation” program is implement-



Armen Orujyan



A panel discussion at the conference

etc. Andreasyan reaffirmed the importance of educational initiatives in the fields of STEM in Armenia. In her speech, she pointed out the positive impact of governmental standards in the field of public education in this direction.

During the opening of the conference, the new collaboration with the WCIT conference was also announced. The founder of

ed in public schools, one of the directors of world-famous Armenian startup Picsart - Madlene Minassian, Danish Nermeen Ghoniem, who is a member of the board of the Danish National Center for Artificial Intelligence, and many others.

Zarik Boghossian, one of the speakers of the conference, an American-Armenian, who is the founder of several successful

technology businesses and also an investor in many Armenian startups, shared his story leading to success and conveyed great inspiration to the hall.

This year, FemInno was hosted in one of the oldest buildings in Yerevan, the Arno Babajanyan concert hall, where talks, workshops, panel discussions and performances were held on all floors. The conference once more cooperated with such international organizations as UNDP and GIZ.

This year, the conference was joined by long-standing partners such as the international Align Technology, as well as new partners, including the Amundi-ACBA asset management company.

“We can already confidently say that every year at the end of July, thanks to FemInno, we are able to create an international celebration of women and innovation, which makes Armenia visible and interesting to the world in a new way. We reaffirm that in Armenia and everywhere, women have great potential in all levels of innovation,” said Seda Papoyan, the head

of FemInno.

Leading experts and managers of Armenian IT companies shared their experience on FemInno’s “Armenia” stage, including Irina Dumanyan, the head of Siemens Armenia, Suzanna Azoyan, the executive director of SADA Armenia, Arsen Baghdasaryan, the head of DataArt, and others. Industry experts in HR like Ani Meruzhan Margaryan, Lilit Gevorgyan, Lilit Papikyan, Narek Aslikyan and others shared their professional experience with the participants.

At the end of the FemInno 2024 conference, the organization’s annual scholarship program named after Sona Mnatsakanyan was summarized. 8 young girls received scholarships to pursue their educational goals in the fields of science and technology.

In the near future, the FemInno platform plans to bring its traveling conference format to New York, which they called a satellite. The previous FemInno “satellites” reached San Francisco and Sydney.



INTERNATIONAL

# Medals for Aleksanyan, Davtyan, Lalayan and Amoyan in Paris

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Amoyan, who is a gold medalist from the 2022 World Championship and a three-time European champion, achieved a significant milestone with his first Olympic appearance at Paris-2024.

Tokyo Olympic Games bronze medalist, world champion, two-time European champion, three-time World Cup winner, and European Games champion Artur Davtyan won an Olympic silver medal for the vault on August 4.

Davtyan scored 14.966 points in the sum of his two jumps in the Vault exercise, netting Armenia its first-ever silver medal at the Olympics.



Wrestler Malkhas Amoyan

Weightlifter Garik Karapetyan finished 4th in the men's 102kg category with a total result of 398kg. In snatch, Karapetyan lifted 180kg and then 186kg after a failed attempt. In clean and jerk, the Armenian weightlifter lifted 212kg and was twice unsuccessful with 218kg.

Decision Controversy

The Armenian National Olympic Committee has appealed the Aleksanyan-Saravi wrestling match ruling to the International Olympic Committee.

On August 9 Aleksanyan spoke out after his controversial final match. Visibly upset, at the medaling ceremony, he took off the silver medal as a sign of protest.

"I came here for gold," Aleksanyan told reporters. "But during the match you all saw what happened. At one point the Irani-

an wrestler was outside the mat with both legs. I saw that moment and I myself told the coaches to object. If you go out with both legs, I should have been rewarded one point. But instead, they gave two points to



Weightlifter Varazdat Lalayan

the Iranian athlete, and added one more for the objection. Everyone is asking me why I took off the medal, this is why! That one point was supposed to be mine and the final score was supposed to be 2:1 in my favor," Aleksanyan said, adding that he is disappointed by "refereeing injustice."

He said he's undecided about his future, but added "I am very disappointed by these injustices. I will remain in wrestling. I hope justice will be restored."

He added he noticed similar injustice against fellow Armenian wrestler Slavik Galstyan, which makes him believe that there were some "tensions" against the Armenian team.

Aleksanyan also thanked the Armenian fans who were present in the arena.

The Aleksanyan-Saravi match was referred by Ferenc Gyarmati (Romania). The judge was Nedyalko Kirov Kirezhev of

Bulgaria, and the Mat Chairman was Stanislav Sernek of Slovenia.

Deputy Minister of Sport of Armenia Karen Giloyan told reporters that the United World Wrestling, in written answers,

has claimed that the referees made the right decision. "But we are 100 percent right, this is a fact," Giloyan said. "The National Olympic Committee of Armenia, attaching the complaint of the Armenian Wrestling Federation, and the answer of the United World Wrestling, has appealed to the appeals commission of the International Olympic Committee."

"We had cases during the Olympic Games where similar episodes in other matches were treated very differently. We are more than convinced that Artur Aleksanyan wasn't supposed to lose this match. Let the appeals commission decide. We are going to demand our gold medal until the end, until the very last authority, until Lausanne," he said, referring to the seat of the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

(Stories from Armenpress and News.am were used to compile this report.)



Weightlifter Garik Karapetyan

INTERNATIONAL

## Ambassador to Vietnam Discusses Expanding Cooperation

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian Ambassador to Vietnam Suren Baghdasaryan this week briefed Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son on Armenian Government's Crossroads of Peace project.

During the meeting on Monday, August 12, the two discussed a range of issues related to expanding relations in the economic, political, educational, cultural, and other spheres. They emphasized the importance of mutual high-level visits for the dynamic development of bilateral relations.

Presenting Armenia's approaches regarding regional cooperation within the Crossroads of Peace project, Baghdasaryan highlighted the significance of strengthening relations with Vietnam in international and regional formats.

The meeting also covered topics such as visa liberalization for citizens of both countries, tourism promotion, and organization of direct flights between Armenia and Vietnam.

## Georgia Plans to Build New Highway to Armenia

TBILISI (Armenpress) — The Georgian government plans to start the construction of a 30-kilometer new Rustavi-Sadakhlo highway leading to the border with Armenia, local media reported.

The 4-lane highway will feature 11 bridges and crossings and will be built parallel to the current road, according to Novosti Gruzia.

The construction will cost 250 million euros (\$274 million). The project is funded by the European Investment Bank as part of the East-West international road project.

Local authorities are now expropriating land from owners in Marneuli for the project.

## Israel Orders All Off-Duty Soldiers to Return from Georgia and Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Iran Observer) — The Israeli military issued a directive on Sunday, August 11, ordering all off-duty soldiers who are currently in Georgia or Azerbaijan to return to Israel immediately, Israeli Kan news reported.

Both countries are near Iran, though only Azerbaijan shares a direct border with the Islamic Republic. Service members could presumably be in either country on vacation or to visit family.

The order comes as the Israel Defense Forces is placing limitations on servicemembers' travel abroad amid concerns that Iran could try to get to them as part of its retaliation for the assassination of the Hamas group's political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

On August 12, Israeli Air Force chief Maj. Gen. Tomer Bar barred servicemembers from traveling abroad, the military said.

The directive applied to career officers and NCOs, not conscripts.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Erdogan Continues to Anger Azerbaijan Over Nagorno-Karabakh War

By Levent Kenez

STOCKHOLM (Nordic Monitor) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan drew Baku's ire with his statements about Turkey's role in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, which concluded with Azerbaijan's victory. Erdogan continues to leverage Turkey's contribution for domestic political purposes.

During a party meeting in his hometown of Rize on Saturday, July 27, Erdogan, referring to Israel, said, "Just as we entered Karabakh, just as we entered Libya, we should do the same with Israel. There is nothing stopping us. We just need to be strong to take this step."

In response to Erdogan's remarks, an official from the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense spoke to local media, saying, "There is no basis for claims regarding the involvement of any country's military personnel in the battles for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty."

"President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly expressed his gratitude to the leadership of Turkey and Pakistan for their political support. The Azerbaijani Armed Forces suffered around 3,000 casualties during the war and 204 in a single anti-terror operation," the official added.

While Baku conveyed its message to Turkey through the media, the following day it formally expressed its concerns

through diplomatic channels. On July 29 Azerbaijan's ambassador to Ankara, Rashad Mammadov, met with Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Mehmet Kemal Bozay to address the issue.

However, it seems that Baku's concerns have not yet been addressed in Erdogan's statements. On Tuesday, July 30, while criticizing Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) during a meeting with his party's provincial chairmen in Ankara, Erdogan said, "In our struggle to liberate Karabakh after 30 years of occupation, we received the harshest criticism from the CHP leadership. It was the CHP members who raised the Armenians' baseless claims."

Azerbaijani Ambassador Mammadov then paid a visit to Deputy Foreign Minister Berris Ekinci on Wednesday, July 31. The specific agenda of their meeting remains uncertain, leaving open the possibility that it could be related to Turkey's purported role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The ambassador's two visits to the ministry within a three-day period have attracted attention. In an official statement it was revealed that they exchanged views on cooperation in the fields of energy and transport connectivity as well as collaboration on multilateral platforms, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Turkey's support for Azerbaijan during

the conflict is widely recognized, including logistical and intelligence assistance and the use of Turkish-made drones by the Azerbaijani military. Turkish drone manufacturer Baykar Makina, led by Haluk Bayraktar, was notably honored by Azerbaijani President Aliyev, who awarded the Garabagh Order to Bayraktar on June 15, 2021 for his role in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. President Aliyev had previously awarded the same honor to Erdogan's son-in-law Selçuk Bayraktar, co-owner of Baykar Makina, on April 1, 2021, praising the Bayraktar TB2 drones for their effectiveness in the conflict.

Additionally, on June 15, 2021, Erdogan and Aliyev met in Shusha (Shushi in Armenian), a city emblematic of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, to sign the "Shusha Declaration." This agreement, celebrated on Azerbaijan's national day, underscores the deepening military cooperation between the two countries and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. A key provision of the declaration is the commitment to mutual military assistance in the event of an attack or threat from a third state, highlighting the strategic alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Nordic Monitor previously reported that in 2018 leading Turkish defense contractor Aselsan signed an agreement with its Azerbaijani counterpart for the joint production

of communications facilities. Similarly, Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) signed a cooperation protocol with the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (AMEA) in September 2018 to combine efforts in the fields of defense and aviation. The same year, the Turkish Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKE) received a defense cooperation offer from Azerbaijan's Ministry of the Defense Industry, the state-run Anadolu news agency reported. Moreover, Turkey's Roketsan and Azerbaijani military-scientific enterprise Iglim have been working on developing a long-range missile system since 2009.

Erdogan, known for his strong statements against Israeli military operations in Gaza, has faced criticism from opposition figures regarding the business dealings of his close associates with Israel. In response to the public outcry, Turkey imposed restrictions on the export of certain products to Israel in April 2024. However, the Erdogan government has been criticized by pro-Palestinian groups for allowing SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic) to transport Azerbaijani oil via pipelines to Turkey's southern port of Ceyhan and subsequently ship it to Israel.

On June 1, a group staged a protest outside SOCAR's office in Istanbul. The protesters were briefly detained and later released.

## Christian Solidarity Blasts Olympic Committee for Apology to Azerbaijan

PARIS — On Sunday, August 11, following the closing ceremony of the Paris Games, John Eibner, the president of Christian Solidarity International, criticized the International Olympic Committee for "providing political support for the perpetrators" of the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno Karabakh.

In June, CSI launched a campaign to #BanAzerbaijan from the 2024 Paris Games. The campaign was in response to the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno Karabakh's ancient Armenian Christian population last September, in a military campaign ordered by the president of Azerbaijan's national Olympic committee, who is also the dictator of Azerbaijan — Ilham Aliyev.

Despite the IOC's public commitment to "promoting human rights through sport," and its decision to ban the Russian and Belarusian national teams from participating in the Paris Games over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the IOC did not take any action against Azerbaijan after its ethnic cleansing campaign in Nagorno Karabakh.

On August 2, David MacLeod, the IOC's director of national Olympic committee relations, wrote to Azerbaijan's ministry of sport and its national Olympic committee, apologizing for a presenter from France 2 Television who referred to "the fall of Nagorno Karabakh" during the entry of the Armenian team. MacLeod assured Azerbaijan that "clear indications have been delivered to avoid any future references using similar terms."

"It is clear from this message that the IOC is using its influence to cover up the Aliyev regime's atrocity crimes in Nagorno Karabakh," Eibner said. "It is a shameful indication of the IOC's true priorities."

"CSI will continue to campaign for accountability for the architects of the Karabakh Genocide, for the right of Karabakh Armenians to return to their homeland and live there in freedom, and for the freedom of Armenian hostages still held by Azerbaijan, such as Vicken Euljekjian, Ruben Vardanyan, and David Babayan," Eibner pledged.

Eibner concluded by calling on Bach to "live up to your own values of Olympism, to reject the influence of malign, racist, anti-Christian dictatorships within the Olympic system, and to adopt a consistent approach to promoting human rights through sport."



Members of the winning team in Bulgarian

## Yerevan State University Team Wins Five Medals at Math Competition

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenian students won four gold and one silver medals at the International Mathematics Competition in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, on August 12, the ministry of education said.

A total of 401 students from 78 universities around the world participated in the competition.

The Armenian team was represented by Vahagn Hovhannisyan, Hayk Karapetyan, Arman Fahradyan, Ruben Hambardzumyan and Ham-

let Petrosyan from the Yerevan State University (YSU). Petrosyan won silver while his teammates won gold. The YSU team ranked 8th in the team ranking.

The team was led by Karen Keryan, who also coached them together with Vazgen Mikayelyan, Albert Gevorgyan and Tigran Hakobyan. Keryan and Hakobyan also authored two of the ten tasks of the competition.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Measles Cases across Europe, Including Armenia, Continue to Surge

YEREVAN (news.am) — Measles cases across Europe, including Armenia, continue to surge, with the number of measles cases recorded in Armenia this year have already reached the total number of cases reported throughout 2023. In 2023, 545 confirmed cases of measles have been registered in Armenia, 382 of which were children. As of 5 August, 2024, already 543 confirmed cases of measles have been registered in Armenia, 323 of which are children, UNICEF Armenia reported on Tuesday, August 13.

According to the latest available data, 56,634 measles cases and four deaths were officially reported across 45 out of 53 countries in the WHO European Region during the first three months of 2024. Throughout 2023, 61,070 cases and 13 deaths were reported by 41 countries. In Armenia, one death was recorded in 2023.

“Measles cases continue to rise both globally and in Armenia. The epidemic situation may become somewhat aggravated due to the tourism season. I am grateful to our international partners, particularly to UNICEF, with whom our joint campaigns contribute to raising

awareness among the population both on avoiding the complications from measles, as well as on the importance of measles vaccinations. This leaves a direct impact on reducing measles infection and mortality rates. I would like to stress that measles is not an ordinary rash, it is highly contagious and spreads quickly among unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated people. Parents of children who have not received their measles vaccine should contact their polyclinic and vaccinate their children. Previously unvaccinated and incompletely vaccinated persons are also subject to vaccination,” said Lena Nanushyan, First Deputy Minister of Health.

“An increase in measles cases is a clear sign of a breakdown in immunization coverage. As cases of measles continue to surge, we need urgent action to both strengthen health systems and implement effective public health measures to secure protection of all children from this dangerous but preventable disease,” said Christine Weigand, UNICEF Representative in Armenia. “In Armenia, we support the Ministry of Health with necessary capacity building of health-care professionals on childhood immuni-

zation, providing support in strengthening cold chain and technical equipment from the national level to ambulatories, and working through regional parental education centers to support present and expecting parents with evidence-based information on vaccines.”

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases in the world, spread when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. The virus remains active and contagious in the air or on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours. Any non-immune person can become infected. A prominent rash is the most visible symptom, while complications can include blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhea and related dehydration, ear infections and pneumonia.

Measles has a devastating effect on children’s health, with young children most at risk of severe complications. High rates of hospitalization and long-lasting weakening of children’s immune systems make children more vulnerable to other infectious diseases. More than half of those who contracted measles in the WHO European Region in 2023 were hospitalized, demonstrating the severe burden on individuals, fami-

lies and health care systems.

Measles cases are rising globally. In 2023, there were over 300,000 cases of measles worldwide and the numbers reported so far in 2024 indicate the total for the year will match or exceed the total in 2023. Importations of the virus between countries and continents occurs regularly, and outbreaks of this highly infectious disease will occur wherever the virus finds pockets of un- or under-vaccinated people.

UNICEF Armenia has teamed up with the Ministry of Health and the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention to implement a brief public activation starting in August 2024, ahead of the academic year on 1 September, to call upon parents to vaccinate their children who are due to receive their first or second dose of measles vaccination. The campaign will include in person engagement at Dalma Mall, complemented by digital activation through social media. For more information on measles visit: MMR Vaccine page.

Ministry of Health and UNICEF call upon all parents to take their children eligible to receive measles vaccination to their local polyclinic to get their life saving dose.

## Armenia Praised for Implementing Reforms Under EU Agreement

REFORMS, from page 1

are important. fight against corruption, for example, in the field of education, health, migration, civil protection. So this is very important and we can only encourage all the relevant stakeholders in Armenia to continue with a very, very good performance that is currently seen on the implementation of this agreement,” Stano said.

Armenia’s parliamentary opposition questions the democratic credentials of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s government, routinely criticizing it for a lack of reforms and alleged crackdown on political opponents, a claim rejected by government officials. Civil society groups also point to delays and shortcomings in implementing reforms, including those related to the police. Pashinyan and his allies have dismissed the criticism, asserting that the country has made significant strides in political and economic reforms since they came to power following the anti-government protests of 2018.

Stano noted that the new EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda that the 27-nation bloc is currently negotiating with Armenia is an update of the CEPA rather than a step towards potential EU accession.

“This is exactly the upgrade that would allow us more cooperation, that would expand the cooperation between the European Union and Armenia in all areas of mutual interest, because one of the principles of the European Union developing its relations with partners is to respond to the ambition of the partner. If we see, as we do in the case of Armenia, that there is willingness to do more in more areas and deeper and more intensively. And we respond to it,” Stano said.

He emphasized that the decision on Armenia’s future direction ultimately rests with the Armenian people.

“Everything when it comes to the future of a country is essentially in the hands of the people in that country. If Armenia decides that it wants to go one way and this way

should be closer to the European Union, then the country should walk this way, of course, in the framework of the proper processes. At this stage, I think it’s very premature to discuss any possibility of enlargement because we don’t have an application. So in order to be able to discuss the European future of a country... we first need to see that the process would have started. In this case, it has not started formally. So we haven’t seen any application. We are aware of the discussions on whether Armenia should submit an application or not. But again, this is something to be decided entirely by the Armenian people themselves,” he said.

Recently, several pro-Western groups in Armenia have called for a referendum on joining the EU to be held later this year. The Pashinyan government held a parliamentary hearing on the matter, but the political majority has not yet given the green light to such a referendum.

In an address to the European Parliament last October, Pashinyan stated that Armenia is “ready to be closer to the European Union as much as the European Union considers it possible.”

Last month, however, the Armenian leader voiced misgivings about the idea of a referendum on Armenia’s membership in the EU advocated by his political allies, suggesting that the Armenian government should clarify whether the EU is ready to admit the South Caucasus country before holding such a vote.

“If we hold a referendum today, we need to campaign,” Pashinyan told a conference in Yerevan on July 1. “When we campaign, people will ask us whether the EU wants that or not. They will tell me. You declared that Armenia is ready to be as close to the EU as the EU is ready. Now how ready is the EU? Can I answer that question today? No, I can’t.”

Stano emphasized that Armenia’s potential accession to the EU is not on the agenda in Brussels because, as he said, “Armenia

has not completed all the necessary domestic processes to be able to express itself whether it wants to join the EU or not, and whether it wants to submit the application or not.”

At the same time, the EU official clarified that Armenia’s potential path towards closer ties with the EU is independent of Georgia’s or other countries’ processes. “Every country has the right to decide which way they want to go and how they want to shape their future. In general, when we are talking about accession of different countries, there is absolutely no link between the countries themselves and their accession process,” he said. “So in this sense, even in the potential discussions or abstract discussions about a possible future of Armenia linked to the European Union, it would have nothing to do with Georgia or with Ukraine, or with Moldova. It would be linked only to Armenia, to the developments in Armenia, to the reforms in Armenia and to the relationship between Armenia and the European Union, no one else.”

### Moscow Again Lashes Out at West Over Armenia

Meanwhile, Russia again accused the West of promoting a “destructive agenda” for the South Caucasus, reiterating what a senior Foreign Ministry official in Moscow has described as “centuries-old ties” with Armenia and its people.

Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, on Thursday reacted to recent comments by US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O’Brien who said during a July 30 hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Washington was assisting Armenia’s political leadership in its efforts to “break with Russia.”

O’Brien also argued that “much of the population [of Armenia] wants to get further from Russia” after Moscow failed to guarantee Armenia’s security following the 2020

war with Azerbaijan and “turned its back as Azerbaijan retook the territory around Nagorno-Karabakh.”

In her response to a question posed by a state-funded Russian media outlet, Zakharova rejected these statements by the senior US official as unfounded. She stressed that “centuries-old ties between Russia and Armenia will withstand all the tests that the West puts them through.”

“The American official only reaffirmed what we regularly tell our partners, including in Yerevan, namely, that the West is promoting a destructive agenda in the South Caucasus, with the main goal of fragmenting the region and destroying Russia’s historical ties with its traditional allies and neighbors,” Zakharova claimed.

“Throughout history, we have repeatedly lent a shoulder to the brotherly Armenian people, and we intend to do so in the future,” she added.

This is not the first time Moscow officials have attempted to put a brave face on what has clearly been a rapidly deteriorating relationship between Russia and Armenia over security issues.

Armenia has effectively suspended its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization and is threatening to withdraw from the Moscow-led security grouping of six former Soviet nations altogether due to its failure to respond to repeated border incursions from Azerbaijan in 2021 and 2022. At the same time, Yerevan has strengthened its military ties with Western nations, including France and the United States. Armenia, a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, has also been more vocal recently about its potential bid to join the European Union.

A survey conducted by the Washington-based International Republican Institute in March showed that 66 percent of people in Armenia had a negative view of Russia, compared to 49 percent who felt the same way a year earlier.



# Community News

## USC Dornsife Institute Welcomes Maral Tavitian as Managing Director

LOS ANGELES — The USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies welcomed Maral Tavitian as the first managing director earlier this summer. She will collaborate with Director Dr. Shushan Karapetian to manage all aspects of program operations and develop a long-term strategy for the Institute's growth and impact.

"Our location within one of the world's preeminent research universities — in the global capital of the Armenian diaspora — gives us an incredible platform to attract top talent," Karapetian said. "I am thrilled to welcome someone of Maral's caliber for such a defining role at the Institute, consistently elevating our standards for excellence and professionalism."

Tavitian brings a multidisciplinary background that includes exemplary intellectual engagement at USC along with rich contributions to both



Maral Tavitian

Armenia and the global diaspora.

Tavitian earned a bachelor's degree in journalism in 2017 from USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, where she graduated as the Outstanding Print and Digital Journalism Scholar. She completed minors in entrepreneurship and human rights and was one of 10 students in the university's graduating class to receive the Renaissance Scholar Prize for exceptional scholarship in diverse fields of study.

Following her graduation, she worked in Armenia as a journalist for the media platform CivilNet, where she launched and hosted its flagship news program, "The Week in Armenia."

Tavitian returned to USC in 2019 to receive her juris doctorate from the Gould School of Law, where she dedicated herself to public interest legal work for underserved communities in Los Angeles. She was a member of the USC Immigration Clinic, vice president of the Armenian Law Students' Association, and received the Order of Aréte in recognition of her leadership and commitment to service. In 2022, she joined Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County as a fellow, where she provided comprehensive legal advocacy for refugee clients.

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U.S. Marine 1st Lt. Ara Melkonian and Air Force Capt. Alex Gharakanian, both serving as interpreters for the U.S. and Armenian forces, converse during Exercise Eagle Partner 24 at Armavir, Armenia, July 19, 2024. (Photo Credit: Pfc. Alexcia Rupert)V

## Bridging a Gap and Breaking Bread

### *U.S. Military Members of Armenian Descent Serve As Translators during Eagle Partner 24*

By Capt. Vira Miller

Among the hundreds of soldiers who participated in the second iteration of Eagle Partner, a bilateral exercise aimed at increasing readiness and interoperability between the US and Armenia, were nine US military members of Armenian descent who volunteered to serve as interpreters.

Exercises like Eagle Partner require extensive preparation, logistics, and resources, which is only possible through significant cross-nation communication. Interpreters bridge the language barrier and make exercises like this possible.

These nine service members came from different places, units, and backgrounds: the Army, Space Force, Marine Corps, and Air Force. There was a combat engineer, a combat medic, an attorney, a cavalry scout, and an electronic warfare officer, to name a few. They all stepped down from their primary jobs to come to Armenia and translate between the US and Armenian troops.

"Originally, I got a call from someone from the Army, and they asked me if I wanted to go on an exercise in Armenia as a translator," said U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Hovsep Chaparian. "At first, I thought they were joking, but it was true. So, I followed up, and they said we would be translating in the field. My day-to-day job at USMC is an office one, so any opportunity to go out and see what the military is doing in the field, I'm all about it."

US Army 2nd Lt. Andrew Rene Karazi, assigned to the 250th Expeditionary Military Intelligence Battalion, California Army National Guard, said, "I learned

see TRANSLATORS, page 12



US Soldiers, Marines, an Airman, and a Guardian pose for a picture at the opening ceremony of the Eagle Partner exercise at Vazgen Sargsyan Military School in Yerevan, Armenia, July 15, 2024. (Pfc. Alexcia Rupert photo)

## AIWA Holds Mission Armenia Conference

YEREVAN/WATERTOWN —

The Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) hosted its 9th international conference, "2024 Mission Armenia," in Yerevan from May 29 to June 4.

Centered around the theme "Local to Global, Uniting for Change," the Mission Armenia events included an opening reception where the launch of AIWA's Yerevan Affiliate was announced, a one-day symposium where visionaries and changemakers shared their expertise, a series of Women's Discussions for Change featuring candid conversations and mission trips. Mission Armenia events were centered around AIWA's core pillars of education, health and wellness, and economic empowerment for Armenian women.

AIWA held its annual meeting on May 30 at the Zabel Yessayan Center, a partner that provides agricultural research, education, and agribusiness opportunities for women. This trip was a highlight, especially given that the center is named for a prominent Armenian female academic and political activist.

On the same day, the successful launch of the AIWA Yerevan Affiliate took place, marking a meaningful addition to the organization. "Community engagement is crucial not only internally but also for connecting Armenians globally, which is essential for elevating all Armenian women," said Silva Katchiguian, AIWA president.

On May 31, the Mission Armenia Symposium took place at the Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan. The goal was to unify women with a dedicated focus on Armenia to deepen insights into Armenia's current landscape, engage with entities driving positive change across various spheres, and encourage further communication and collaboration between initiatives prioritizing the advancement of Armenian women's interests. Panels featured Ministers of the Republic of Armenia and accomplished female experts in various fields, including education, health and social welfare, business and entrepreneurship, advocacy, and human rights.

The speakers offered valuable insights and perspectives, sparking conversations that drive momentum for change and support women. Sheila Paylan, an international human rights lawyer and senior consultant at the United Nations, discussed women's rights and international law with Karma Ekmekji, a mediation advisor for UN Women. Lea Hakim, Senior Country Economist for Armenia at the World Bank, led a conversation with Sisian Boghossian, former head of the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Armenia, about the impact of diaspora engagement and efforts to create a new image for Armenia to boost tourism across all regions.

Conversations also focused on education, technology, entrepreneurship and women's roles in leading these

see AIWA, page 11





OBITUARIES

## Zaven Khanjian

### Longtime AMAA Executive Director

GLENDAL — The veteran executive director of the of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) passed away on Friday, August 9, in Glendale. He was 80.

The Board of Directors of the AMAA issued an announcement conveying the news.

“The AMAA mourns the passing of its executive director/CEO Zaven Khanjian, who served the organization in this position for 10 years with utmost care and dedication. In fact, his entire life was an example of service to his church, community, and the entire Armenian nation in our homeland of Armenia and in the diaspora,” said Dr. Nazareth Darakjian, president of the AMAA Board of Directors.

“He was a true leader, very much loved by the staff, Board members, and supporters of the organization. He was a man of vision, a great communicator, a multitasking writer and speaker. He was a kind person, a family man, and his many grandchildren were the light of his life. Above all, he was a man of unshakable faith and a true soldier of Christ. Mr. Khanjian’s passing is a great loss for the AMAA, the Armenian Evangelical Church, the Armenian nation, and all of humanity. May the Holy Spirit console his family and friends and may the Lord bless his memory until the end of time,” he added.

Born on July 31, 1944, and raised in Aleppo, Syria, he was one of five children of Armenian Genocide survivors Vasken and Verjin Khanjian. He grew up in the Armenian Evangelical Emmanuel Church and was an active member of its youth group.

Following his graduation from Aleppo College, he attended the American University of Beirut in Lebanon and in 1967 earned his bachelor’s degree in business administration. Soon after graduation he moved to the Persian Gulf and spent 13 years working in his profession, assum-

ing top positions in prestigious companies while creating “Little Armenias” together with like-minded Armenians in the area.

He married his devoted wife Sona Kelligian in 1973 and together they began their family of two sons and a daughter. In 1979, Zaven moved with his family to California and after working for a few years, went into the real estate business starting his own successful real estate company, Kanjyan Realty in Glendale in 1987.

Khanjian was appointed as Executive Director/CEO of the AMAA on September 1, 2014. During his 10-year tenure, he oversaw many milestones, including the opening of the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, the commemoration of the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide in 2015, a successful AMAA Centennial Capital Campaign, and the AMAA’s 100th Anniversary in 2018.

Over the years, Khanjian was an active member of the Greater Los Angeles Community, serving in leadership capacities at the Armenia Fund, the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America, the Merdinian Armenian Evangelical School, the United Armenian Congregational Church, Haigazian University of Beirut, the Glendale Family YMCA, the Salvation Army-Glendale Corps, American for Artsakh, the Armenian-American Real Estate Association and as chairman of the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund, raising over \$1 million.

He contributed volumes of bilingual articles to American Armenia media and was the author of three Armenian books: *Aysdune Kuget e Te Ims?* [Is This Your House or Mine?]; *Srdi yev Mdki Tsolker* [Reflections of the Mind and Soul]; and *Haleb Arachin Gayaran* [Memoirs of a Memorable Childhood].

Khanjian was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Medal of Gratitude from President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan on May 28, 2017, in Arme-



nia for his contributions toward strengthening Armenia-diaspora relations and preservation of the Armenian identity. On September 13, 2019, he was awarded the Honorary Member title from the Writers’ Union of Armenia for his books and articles on Armenia.

He was a member of the United Armenian Congregational Church in Los Angeles.

Khanjian leaves behind his wife Sona;

three children Vasken, Hrag and his wife Michelle, and Vana and her husband Armen Vartanian; five grandsons and one granddaughter; his brother and sisters, Laura Prather, Dicky Dodd and Dikran and Mariette Asdghig Khanjian. He was predeceased by his sister Anahid Terjimanian in April 2024.

The AMAA announced that it will hold a special memorial service in his honor.

## Joan Babigian

### Dedicated to Family

WALTHAM, Mass. — Joan Babigian (Tashjian) passed away peacefully surrounded by her three sons on August 4 at the age of 87. Joan was born in the Bronx and was the daughter of the late Thomas and Siranoush (Boyajian) Tashjian.

Joan moved from New York to Boston as a baby and was raised and grew up on Arlington Street in Watertown. She was a 1954 graduate of Watertown High School, where she excelled in field hockey. After high school, Joan began working at Star Market on Mt. Auburn Street in Cambridge where she handled the daily accounting.

In 1957 she met and married Garabed “Gary” Babigian. The couple was blessed with their first child Gary Babigian, Jr. on Christmas day in 1958. The young couple tragically lost “baby Gary” of spinal meningitis just 5 months later in May of 1959. Resiliently, Joan and Gary were blessed with twin boys, Thomas and Peter, later that year in December of 1959. Joan would forever remember this moment as a grace from God, wherein she always told people, “God took one away and gave us back two!”

The family was completed when their third son, Vasken, was born in 1968. Together the family lived and grew up in Waltham where Joan stayed home to take care of her family. As the kids grew older, Joan returned to work at H&R Block and became a manager and tax accountant, where she worked for over 30 years.

Joan and her husband Gary were devoted members of St. James Armenian Church in Watertown. They were charter members of the Mr. & Mrs. Group and Joan was past Superintendent of the Sahag Mesrob Armenian language school.

Joan also served in the past as president of the National Organization of Mothers of Twins Club (NOMOTC), a social organization which connected mothers of twins from all over the country. She would travel to various events, including the annual Conventions, and she made many lifelong friendships.

She loved to cook, with a particular focus on Armenian food, and she loved Armenian music, especially dancing to Armenian music.

The family liked to travel and enjoyed



many trips to Miami Beach in the early years, Las Vegas and Aruba in the later years.

She also enjoyed playing blackjack whenever at a casino and cherished her vacations in Aruba with the “Aruba Group.”

Joan was the wife of the late Garabed “Gary” Babigian who passed away in 2016, having enjoyed nearly 60 years of marriage together. She is survived by her three sons: Thomas Babigian and his wife Linda of Westford, Peter Babigian and his wife Gloria of Waltham and K. Vasken Babigian and his wife Christina of Waltham. She was the grandmother of Tiana Sessa and her husband Peter, Cayla Babigian and her fiancé Derek Mantey, Gary, Thomas, Matthew and Nicholas Babigian, Jessica Manoukian and LV Manoukian and his wife Diane. She was the doting great-grandmother to Blaise and Sienna Sessa and Sloane and Nazareth Manoukian. She was the sister of George Sarkisian and his late wife Starry. Also, she was a sister-in-law to the late Robert and Beatrice Townsend. Additionally, she leaves behind many loving cousins, nieces, nephews, relatives and dear friends.

Funeral services were held at St. James Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown on Friday, August 9, and interment followed at Newton Cemetery in Newton. Memorial donations may be made in her memory to St. James Armenian Apostolic Church.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Three Primates of North America Meet in Montreal

MONTREAL — Leaders of the three Armenian Church dioceses of North America held their latest meeting on Tuesday, August 6, at the headquarters of the Canadian Diocese in Montreal, Quebec.

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese; Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan, Primate of Canada; and Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese met to discuss mutual concerns ranging from spiritual matters to practical issues of church administration. The three Primates gather formally at least twice a year, in one of their respective diocesan centers.

Topics on the agenda included inter-diocesan clergy education, youth outreach and activities, the training of lay leaders, and plans to hold gatherings involving personnel from each of the three dioceses.

Regarding the latter objective, the bishops have decided to organize joint clergy education sessions in 2025, which will bring together the clergy throughout North America. Also, a proposed meeting of the three Primates and their Diocesan Council chairs will go forward in New York in September 2025.

Current and future activities of the worldwide Armenian Church Youth Or-



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan, and Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, leaders respectively of the Eastern, Canadian, and Western dioceses, at the headquarters of the Canadian Diocese in Montreal.



From left, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan and Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

ganization (or Pan-ACYO) were also reviewed, including the Pan-ACYO pilgrimage to Holy Echmiadzin scheduled for July 2025, under the blessing of Karekin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Fr. Zareh Zargarian, Vicar of the Canadian Diocese, and Fr. Komitas Mirzakhanian, pastor of Holy Cross Church in Laval (Quebec), joined the bishops for part of the meeting. At a welcome luncheon, clergy, parishioners, community and organizational leaders of the Canadian Diocese had a chance to offer their good wishes to the distinguished visitors among them.

This a special year in the life of the Canadian Diocese, which is marking the 40th anniversary of its establishment as a separate diocesan jurisdiction in 1984. Archbishop Hovnan and Bishop Mesrop expressed their warm congratulations to Bishop Abgar and his flock in honor of the milestone.

Finally, to conclude their meeting, the Primates offered solemn prayers for the peace and security of the homeland and the people of Armenia and Artsakh, as well as for the prosperity the Armenian Church, its Mother See, and its worldwide faithful.



## 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  
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Your donation is tax deductible.





COMMUNITY NEWS



Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.  
Central Board of Directors of  
the US and Canada

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.
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: 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,

AIWA Holds Mission  
Armenia Conference

AIWA, from page 8  
advancements. Anahit Avanesyan (Minister of Health), Narek Mkrtchyan (Minister of Labor and Social Affairs), and Zhanna Andreasyan (Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport), contributed valuable insights into policies, gaps, and opportunities for involvement.

One form of contribution and engagement — diaspora volunteering — has grown in Armenia. Arina Zohrabian, executive director of Armenia Volunteer Corps, emphasized the significance of individual action and encouraged everyone to become changemakers. “High engagement of youth and the diaspora is vital to elevating Armenia and supporting our community,” she said.

Co-authors Gayane Aghabalyan and Elmira Ayvazyan presented “The Making of Armenian WonderWoman,” featuring 38

On June 2, “Women’s Discussions for Change,” took place at the American University of Armenia, focusing on discussion and engagement with young Armenian women, regarding holistic approaches to women’s health and wellness in Armenia; accessibility and advocacy; the intersection of women, agriculture, and environmental sustainability; and women’s role in negotiation, diplomacy, and conflict resolution. These topics, especially advocacy and diplomacy, while not typically emphasized, are of great interest to the Yerevan Affiliate. Silva Katchigian shared, “Women’s involvement in leadership and power is crucial because of the value women bring in shaping peace and navigating international affairs. Women in high-power roles are essential for justice, security and success.”

On June 4, conference attendees met with local AIWA partners. The Empower-



AIWA Mission Armenia leadership

biographies of accomplished Armenian women. These inspiring stories reveal the achievements of notable women often overlooked, challenging social limitations and gender norms, and highlighting their importance in supporting and uplifting women. “The children’s book gives young women and girls strong Armenian figures to look up to as heroes,” said Alice Petrosian, AIWA Board Member and Mission Armenia Co-Chair.

Just like the remarkable women featured in *Armenian WonderWoman*, everyday heroes from Artsakh shared inspiring stories about how AIWA’s EmpowerPath Program has transformed their lives.

The event fulfilled AIWA’s mission to unite women through learning, networking, and engagement.

Path Project, one of AIWA’s recent initiatives, supports women from Artsakh by offering education resources in various fields, including technology, beauty, textiles, and food business. HubArtsakh, an AIWA partner where EmpowerPath training is conducted, was a key site for a mission trip that highlighted the program’s impact. During the visit, beneficiaries received certificates for completing their training. “The transformative power of education is evident in the EmpowerPath program, which has exceeded our expectations in helping the women of Artsakh achieve substantial growth and promising futures,” said Zela Astarjian, AIWA Vice President and Mission Armenia Co-Chair.

To learn more about AIWA, visit <https://aiwainternational.org/>.



AIWA Mission Armenia leadership





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian American Museum Leaders Council Launches Speaker Series with ServiceTitan’s Vahe Kuzoyan

GLENDALE — The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California in June launched the inaugural Young Leaders Council Speaker Series event featuring ServiceTitan President and Co-Founder Vahe Kuzoyan. Young professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs joined together to gain insights from one of the tech industry’s most influential leaders at the ServiceTitan headquarters.

Kuzoyan served as the keynote speaker at the Young Leaders Council Speaker Series event. During the event, he discussed his journey from co-founding the startup to scaling the industry-leading company to serve thousands of trade customers across the country. He provided invaluable advice on leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation, emphasizing the importance of strategic vision, resilience, and community support.

“It was a privilege to partner with the Armenian American Museum and host young professionals at ServiceTitan,” stated Kuzoyan. “The Young Leaders Council is playing a pivotal role in creating networking and educational opportunities for the young leaders in our community.”

The event concluded with a ques-

tion-and-answer session moderated by ServiceTitan’s Alene Aroustamian, who has been a longtime supporter of the museum project.

ServiceTitan is a leading technology company that has revolutionized the home and commercial service industries with its innovative software solutions. It has empowered thousands of service businesses to streamline operations, resulting in significant productivity boosts and revenue growth. Recognized as a leader in its field, ServiceTitan continues to set industry standards with its cutting-edge technology and exceptional customer support.

The Speaker Series event was organized by the Armenian American Museum Young Leaders Council. The Council promotes the mission of the museum, connects young professionals throughout the community, and empowers the next generation of leaders. The Speaker Series events aim to promote networking and education opportunities by connecting members to accomplished professionals across a wide range of industries.

“The ServiceTitan story and Vahe Kuzoyan’s journey are truly inspiring,” stated Young Leaders Council Chair Aleen Oha-



AAMCCC Young Leaders Council Speaker Series Team

nian. “We are grateful to ServiceTitan for hosting the kick-off event for the Young Leaders Council Speaker Series.”

The Armenian American Museum is a world-class educational and cultural institution that is currently under construction

in the museum campus at Glendale Central Park. The museum will offer a wide range of public programming through the Permanent Exhibition, Temporary Exhibitions, Auditorium, Learning Center, Demonstration Kitchen, Archives Center, and more.



AAMCCC Young Leaders Council Speaker Series Vahe Kuzoyan



AAMCCC Young Leaders Council Speaker Series Aleen Ohanian

## U.S. Military Members of Armenian Descent Serve as Translators During Eagle Partner 24

TRANSLATORS, from page 8  
about this exercise through Armenian friends online. Before coming here, I was interviewed to verify that I could speak Armenian fluently and later brought onto the mission.”

For some translators, this was their second time at Eagle Partner, and for others, this exercise was their first time visiting Armenia; however, their experiences are surprisingly alike.

US Air Force Capt. Alex Gharakanian, a B-52H electronic warfare officer, said, “Being from America, I never visited Armenia. It’s amazing just to come out here and share the culture. And it’s the same culture that I grew up with in the States.”

“Having never seen native Armenians and then interacting with each other and realizing how similar we are was very interesting to me,” he continued.

US Marine Corps Capt. Tamara Daugherty said, “I grew up in Glendale, California. Glendale has the biggest population of Armenians outside Armenia itself. I visited Armenia for the first time this year. When I got off the plane, and everyone was speaking Armenian, it wasn’t unnatural to me; it was something that I’m used to growing up in Glendale.”

Eagle Partner is a military exercise, but while troops conduct training, they also learn about each other’s cultures.

“Eagle Partner is important because it helps with interoperability with both nations when it comes to peacekeeping, but it also allows us to build partnership through American and Armenian units coming together, getting to know each other, and learning their cultures,” said Chaparian. “There has been a lot of cultural growth on both sides, and it is going to aid in interoperability down the line.”

Every interpreter has a story to share, from playing soccer and teaching Armenians how to play American football to hiking the mountains, trading patches, or enjoying food together.

US Marine Corps 1st Lt. Ara Melkonian said, “I met another soldier with the same last name, and we joked that we were brothers. Later, another Armenian asked me if I had any friends here, and I said I did not. Then, that person asked, ‘What about me? I thought we were brothers!’”

“It’s just good human nature; we can still laugh when a serious situation is going on, so it’s nice to break down some barriers every now and then,” continued Melkonian.

This iteration of the Eagle Partner had a

much bigger scale and scope than the last one, and many participants expressed that they hope the exercise continues to grow.

US Space Force 2nd Lt. Benjamin Armen Malian, 319th Combat Operations, said, “This time, I was excited to see the faces that we met last year and see how they have changed, meet new people that have come in and see how far we can go continuing this relationship between Amer-

ica and Armenia.”

Exercise Eagle Partner 24 occurred between July 15 to 24, 2024, and focused on improving interoperability between the US and Armenia through training in peacekeeping and stability operations. The exercise was made possible through the nine US interpreters’ dedicated efforts.

(This article originally appeared on the US Army website in July.)

### USC Dornsife Institute Welcomes Maral Tavitian as Managing Director

USC, from page 8

Tavitian brings to the Institute her expertise in journalism and law, coupled with a deep knowledge of USC and the university network stemming from her extensive involvements as a student and alum.

Tavitian’s appointment is part of a larger push to grow the Institute’s team with specialized roles that will amplify the scope and impact of Armenian Studies. The recent developments in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) underscored the need for this type of long-term strategic planning and professionalization of academic work related to the contemporary Armenian experience.

“I am honored to assume this role at a pivotal moment for the Institute and the global Armenian nation,” Tavitian said. “I look forward to working under Dr. Karapetian’s visionary leadership to scale the Institute as a model for excellence in research, education, and programming at USC and worldwide.”





# Arts & Culture

## Armine (Amie) Minassian

*A Long Road Full of Culture*



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN — I have been in contact with Armine (Amie) Minassian, a makeup artist, cultural figure of the American-Armenian community, actress and poet since 1996.

New York-based Armine was born in 1940, in Khoysan, an Armenian village in Iran. After finishing school in New Julfa, she taught in local Armenian schools for four years. Since 1968, she has lived in the US, where she attended various courses at Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations, the University of the State of New York and elsewhere. She collaborated with New York Ballet, Metropolitan Opera, theater, television and cinema, working with a number of famous actors and actresses. Her credits include working on “Woman’s Day” (1978), “A System Devoured” (1999), “Mixed Signals” (2001), “People on the Bridge” (2014) and other films. Minassian has taught at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. She is a member of the American and International Theater Association, as well as a member of Armenian unions of New York for decades, carrying out lively public and cultural activities.

My conversation with Armine Minassian took place at her Yerevan apartment.

**Dear Armine, I have written about you several times in the past years, this time I want to present your life path in your own words. Let’s start our conversation from the very beginning. What memories do you have of your native village?**

It is known that in the 17th century, Shah Abbas brought Armenians by force and placed them in 38 villages of Peria Province in Persia, eight of which were purely Armenian. One of them was my birthplace Khoysan, which I remember very often, as I have always loved village life. As far as I know, today there are very few Armenians in Khoysan, and some villages do not exist at all. I was born and raised in the village, I was 10 years old when my father took me to see MINASSIAN, page 16



A painting from the Bahador exhibition (photo Karine Armen)

## Elif Shafak

‘As a Writer in Turkey, You Can Be Attacked, Put on Trial, Imprisoned’

By Claire Armitstead

LONDON (*The Guardian*) — In Elif Shafak’s latest novel, a single raindrop rises and falls through millennia. In Nineveh, in the seventh century BC, it lands on the scalp of Ashurbanipal, a king whose obsession with building a great library saves the Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh from destruction for blasphemy; in 19th-century Constantinople, it lands on Arthur, who has just arrived on an official mission to find a missing section of the epic, depicting a pre-biblical flood. It reappears as the last drop of water in a bottle that terrified 21st-century Yazidis carry with them on their flight from slaughter into the parched mountains of Iraq.

The ninth novel the Turkish author has written in English and her 13th overall, *There Are Rivers in the Sky* is a story of “three characters, two rivers and one poem,” she says. The rivers are the Thames and the Tigris, and the poem is Gilgamesh. But Shafak wanted to make a drop of water the unifying motif, she explains, because “when we talk about climate crisis we’re talking about a crisis of fresh water, which affects everyone, but in some parts of the world it’s particularly bad. Seven of the most water-stressed nations are in the Middle East and north Africa, and it has massive consequences for women and impoverished people.”

We’re talking in the study of Shafak’s London home, where books of every genre tower in bookcases over a large leather-topped desk, beneath which a little white dog called Romeo makes himself comfortable. “I do a crazy amount of research,” Shafak says. “You know, I was in academia for a long time, in political science, women’s and cultural studies. That interdisciplinary knowledge is something that I really treasure, and I don’t like it when people put it into separate boxes. I love novels that are full of ideas, multiplicity, nuances, layers – this really speaks to my heart. So there’s a lot of research, but there’s also a lot of imagination and intuition.”

When we meet, it is the end of the school term, and both Shafak’s teenage children are hanging around, having just finished important exams. But an aura of serenity emanates from the household, as well as from Shafak herself. The surfaces are uncluttered. She glides in with glasses of tea and large slices of homemade cake, before settling down to explain her dismay about the state of the world and her belief that fiction is one of its last democratic spaces.

It’s not that Shafak is averse to other forms of discourse. Her novels are interspersed with works of nonfiction, most recently an elegant meditation on the impact of social media, *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division*. She has delivered three Ted Talks, written multiple newspaper opinion columns, and gives regular updates to her 1.6 million followers on X (formerly Twitter). She also has her own weekly Substack, titled “Unmapped Storylands,” to mop up anecdotes and insights from her personal diaries. These range from neglected historical characters she has discovered to musings on the idiosyncrasies of language, and writers’ tips (“Do not spill tea on keyboard”).

see SHAFAK, page 14

## The Underrated Ingredient Every Home Cook Should Have on Hand, According to Geoffrey Zakarian

By Danielle DeAngelis

Whether you know him from *Chopped*, *Iron Chef America*, *The Kitchen* or other Food Network series, it’s clear in each endeavor that chef Geoffrey Zakarian is passionate about flavor. But good cooking isn’t just about the ingredients; every chef swears by quality cookware. That’s why Zakarian partnered with Dash to create the (fittingly named) [Zakarian by Dash](#) cookware line.

EatingWell got to chat with Zakarian all about the line in this exclusive Q&A. Learn more about his favorite products—plus his go-to pantry staples, the underrated ingredient he uses every day and more—below.

**EatingWell: What makes the Zakarian by Dash kitchenware line unique from other cookware lines?**

Zakarian: I teamed up with Dash because we share one common goal: to make home cooking easier and more efficient. From my 40-plus years’ experience of cooking in the kitchen and using a broad range of products from various brands, I wanted to create a line of high-quality cookware and kitchen tools that were practical for everyday at-home use, no matter the cook’s level of expertise. Each product is crafted with a chef’s mentality and professional kitchen expertise, featuring nonstick stainless-steel and cast-iron pans, premium German-steel cutlery and innovative tools.

**EatingWell: What’s a product from the line you can’t stop using right now?**

Zakarian: I truly use them all, but the one I reach for daily is the Nonstick Cast-Iron Fry Pan.1 The heat retention is unmatched, there is no seasoning required and cleanup is a breeze. It’s oven- and grill-safe and compatible with gas, electric and induction stovetops. From eggs and bacon at breakfast to the perfect steak or peach cobbler, it’s a versatile pan that you will use year-round.

**EatingWell: In your opinion, what’s an underrated ingredient that you think all home cooks should have in their kitchens?**

Zakarian: Dijon mustard! It’s a Zakarian household favorite and an ingredient that’s in our daily rotation. It acts as an emulsifier in vinaigrettes and sauces, adds acidity and punch to chicken or tuna salad, and is even the secret ingredient in my perfect grilled cheese.

**EatingWell: Do you have a favorite seasonal recipe that you have been making all summer long?**

Zakarian: For me, summer is all about making the most of what I find at the farmers’ market. Summer dinners are typically simple grilled proteins and a bounty of vegetable-forward dishes with plenty of fresh herbs and good olive oil. From perfectly thin zucchini crudo to a chilled

see ZAKARIAN, page 15





## Elif Shafak: ‘As a Writer in Turkey, You Can Be Attacked, Put on Trial, Imprisoned’

SHAFAK, from page 13

But the novels are central. “In many ways,” she says, “I think fiction is the antidote to our extremely polarized and fractured times. It’s a place where we can still hold nuanced conversations, have multiple thoughts at the same time, open up difficult issues and calmly ruminate. And also do some slow thinking, because we’re always rushing into judgments. It’s about empathy, trying to put yourself in the shoes of another person, to become that person for a few hours over a few days. I think that’s a very good and humbling exercise for the soul.”

Her own novels occupy a charmed space, where romance meets religion (Three Daughters of Eve), the political traumas of Cyprus are observed by a fig tree (The Island of Missing Trees) and an entire novel is narrated from a rubbish bin by a murdered Istanbul sex worker (the Booker-shortlisted *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*).

“I’m interested in mixing east and west, folk story with the European canon. I want my fiction to be bridge-building, but my heart always goes towards the peripheries – to people whose stories we don’t hear about, truths that have been erased,” Shafak says. “In some ways this is my own journey, because of the way my life evolved. None of us belongs in a single box but I have a multiplicity.”

Shafak spent her early years with her grandmother, after her parents split up and her philosopher father disappeared from her life for 20 years. Unusually for a Turkish woman of her generation in a conservative neighborhood of Ankara, her mother went back to university to complete the degree she had dropped out of to get married.

Her grandmother, says Shafak, was “a bit of a healer,” who would melt lead to ward off the evil eye, and was also a storyteller, “so I’m very deeply versed in the oral culture of Anatolia”. At the age of eight, Shafak started writing a diary. “But real life was so boring that I had almost nothing to say, and so I started to write about people who didn’t exist and things that hadn’t happened. It was a very quick journey from diaries into short stories, and from that moment onwards, I kept writing, always.”

When she was 10, life suddenly became more challenging. Her mother graduated with multiple languages, landed a job with the foreign ministry – and her first posting was Spain. “It was a huge culture shock for me to be zoomed into this very international, posh school in the middle of Madrid, where I was the only Turkish student,” Shafak recalls. “I had to learn Spanish very fast. I had to learn English very fast, and I really cherished that experience. To be able to read Don Quixote in Spanish; to suddenly discover that there’s a vast literature in English that I could now access – that was the brilliant part. The difficult part was keeping up with the other kids. I was a massive introvert and I was bullied at school a lot.”

*Writing in another language gave me the distance to look at where I came from*

Although Spanish was her second language, English became her safe space, in which she wrote poems and kept up her diary. Many years later, after publishing her early novels in Turkish, she made the decision to switch over entirely to English. “There came a moment in my life when I felt so suffocated,” she says. “But that was a very scary thing to do, because you’re nobody. You have to start from scratch again. At the same time, paradoxically, it was liberating, because being a novelist in Turkey is really hard, and being a woman is even harder. Everything you say, everything you write, can be attacked, targeted; you can be

put on trial, exiled, imprisoned – words are heavy, you know. Writing in another language gave me the cognitive distance that I needed to be able to take a closer look at where I come from.”

The second novel that she published in English, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, dealt with the Armenian Genocide of 1915, which the Turkish state still does not acknowledge. It was longlisted for the women’s prize in the UK but found a different sort of notoriety in Turkey itself, where she was prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness”. Though she was

was really unsettling. There were groups on the streets spitting at my picture and burning EU flags. I was accused of insulting Turkishness, even though nobody knew what that meant. And it was quite surreal, because the words of fictional characters were taken out of the novel and used as evidence in the courtroom, as a result of which my Turkish lawyer had to defend my Armenian fictional characters.”

She is keen not to paint a completely dark picture, “because I also received so much love from readers in Turkey”. But, she adds, “I think that scarred me in many ways. In terms of authorities, it’s very difficult to be a novelist in Turkey, especially the way I write, because I do question the silences in our history.”

*There Are Rivers in the Sky* goes into battle once again on two fronts that are unlikely to win Shafak friends among the powers-that-be across the Middle East. The first is against the dam-building of Turkey’s President Erdoğan, which led to the flooding of the ancient cave city of Hasankeyf on the Tigris, in Turkey’s predominantly Kurdish south-east region. Up to 80,000 people who had lived there were displaced, in what a local activist group described in 2020 as an “apocalypse”.

“This entire area is so precious, because of its history, but also its ecology. For a dam, which lasts only 50 years, they’ve destroyed thousands of years of cultural value and artefacts,” she says. “Also, when you build dams, it alters the flow of the water downriver, and affects other countries as well. So we need international solutions. We need countries to act together, rather than just one country taking the water for themselves.”

The second injustice it confronts is the persecution of the Yazidi people, a religious minority who have faced centuries of massacres across the Middle East. Fleeing the flooding of their valley, the characters

of Narin and her grandmother blunder into the 2014 genocide by Islamic State in Iraq, when more than 5,000 were killed and thousands of women and children were taken prisoner and forced into sexual slavery.

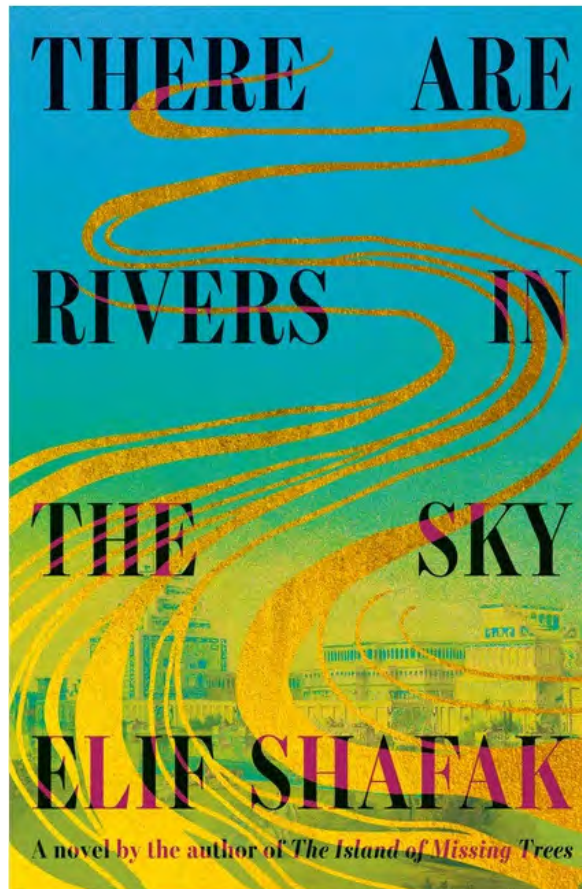
“The Yazidis are one of the most maligned, misunderstood and mistreated minorities by almost every culture or religion surrounding them throughout history, and they are a very delicate, vulnerable, beautiful community,” Shafak says. “I want to talk about this, because, as we’re speaking, there may be close to 3,000 Yazidi women and girls still missing. And many of these women are held captive in – quote unquote – ordinary households in Turkey, in Syria, in Iraq, in Saudi Arabia.”

Just a few years ago, one Yazidi girl was rescued from a house in the Ankara neighborhood where Shafak herself grew up. “So I keep thinking, you know, just a few streets away from my grandmother’s home, in another ordinary house, a girl has been held captive and suffered horrific cruelties. How is it possible that people don’t see?” she asks. “How is it possible that they are so numb? There’s a lot we still need to talk about, because the genocide is not over yet.”

Underlying all the storylines are highly topical questions about colonial history and the ownership of cultural artefacts. As she was writing the novel, the temperature of the debate suddenly rose, with the scandals about alleged thefts from the British Museum in London and the provenance of objects at the New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“To whom does cultural heritage belong?” Shafak asks. “It’s a particularly important issue for many of us coming from the non-western world. Of course, it belongs to all humanity. But at the same time, it belongs to the minorities of the region, which we never talk about. It’s very complicated. There are multiple layers, you know. That’s why I wanted to write this novel – to tackle it.”

(*There Are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shafak will be published on 8 August by Viking. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com).)



later acquitted at the request of the prosecutor, she was also investigated for obscenity for *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, and for an earlier novel, *The Gaze*. Neither of those cases has been resolved, as a result of which she has now gone into voluntary exile from her homeland.

“For me,” she says, “the biggest turning point was being put on trial after *The Bastard of Istanbul*. I was pregnant at the time. And by coincidence, I was acquitted the day after I gave birth. The whole year

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of Boston and the Shahbazian  
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ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



(Photo courtesy of Lost Recipes Found at [www.lostrecipesfound.com](http://www.lostrecipesfound.com))

## Ancho-Braised Lamb Shanks

“Everyone has a childhood memory of a special recipe eaten at home, at grandma’s house or at a restaurant, that made a lasting and permanent impression. Forever after, the thought of that one dish lingers, ready to be triggered by a related sight, smell, or taste, long after we enjoyed the original preparation. The point is, we all have special recipes we’ve loved and lost,” says Monica Kass Rogers, a longtime journalist, writer, photographer and home cook. “How serendipitous to rediscover them. Coming around this Lost Recipes Found corner, I hope you do. It is a recipe revivalist site, where many food memories matter...”

Monica’s research into the revival of vintage recipes for the Chicago Tribune was so compelling that it became her blog, [lostrecipesfound.com](http://lostrecipesfound.com). Her work has appeared in *Bon Appetit*, *Food & Wine*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *Newcity*, as well as a book by Rizzoli. “My book collaboration with Chef John Coletta, *Risotto & Beyond*, was published by Rizzoli on March 13, 2018. I wrote the text for the book based on interviews with John and with rice experts while in Italy photographing some of the imagery. The book won 1st place in the Italian category and 2nd place in the rice category, Gourmand International Cookbook Awards. After testing all 100 recipes for the book, I learned more about Italian rice than I dreamed possible.”

She says, “Writing has given me the privilege to learn about food from the many chefs and restaurateurs who have made careers of this challenging work. In every instance, history, family and culture contributed to the dishes these professionals love most, giving each a lovely narrative – the story to the taste. You will find those stories, recipes, visuals, and hopefully, some connection to the food memories that matter too. Some of these recipes are my own. Some are adapted from vintage cookbooks. Others are creations based on vintage recipes they love. Before publishing to my site, I test, prepare and photograph each dish using natural light. I have collected dozens of recipes, photos and stories ready to go and will be posting them as I can each week.”

“Monica has photographed a broad range of food, from Spanakopita Tri-

gles (Spinach Sorrel + Cheese Pies), Brown Derby Cobb Salad, Hershey’s Chocolate Syrup Brownies with Chocolate Frosting, and Lemony Olive Oil Tea Cakes (with Italian olive oil), to the reader’s requested Beef Bourguignon, first published in the Chicago Tribune in 1954, and both publishes the images on the web, and often makes custom prints for gallery walls.”

“Served with Israeli couscous (or Armenian rice pilaf), rich gravy and a sauce of preserved lemon, mint, garlic and Greek yogurt, these ancho-spiced lamb shanks make a meal full of bright flavors,” she adds.

### INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cloves garlic, unpeeled
- 4 lamb shanks, 16 to 20 ounces each
- 2 tablespoons canola or grape seed oil
- 1 to 2 tablespoons salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly cracked black pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 large white onion, roughly chopped
- 1 large carrot, roughly chopped
- 2 ribs celery, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 1 gallon veal or beef stock
- 4 whole dried ancho chilies\*
- 1 package Israeli couscous
- 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 2 teaspoons finely minced preserved lemons
- 3 teaspoons fresh chopped mint
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons lemon zest
- Arugula or radish sprouts, optional

\*The Ancho chili is the dried version of the Poblano chili.

### PREPARATION:

Heat oven to 325°F. Place garlic cloves with 1 teaspoon water in a foil packet in oven. Roast, 20-30 minutes until garlic cloves are soft.

Stir salt, pepper and cumin together in a small bowl. Rub mixture into the lamb shanks. Heat oil in a large, heavy skillet. Cook lamb shanks, in batches if necessary, until well browned on all sides, 12 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate.

In the same skillet, sauté onion, carrot and celery until softened and golden brown, 10 minutes. Remove garlic cloves from oven; squeeze pulp from skins. Add garlic to skillet. Pour in wine; cook, stirring up browned bits from the pan as it reduces. Add as much beef stock as will fit in the pan along with bay leaf; heat to boiling.

Place the lamb shanks in a very large roasting pan. Pour hot stock and vegetables over the meat. Wearing gloves, snip the stems off ancho chilies, remove seeds; add ancho chilies to pan. Heat remaining beef or veal stock until boiling; add to the roasting pan. Cover roasting pan tightly with foil; roast in 325°F oven, 4 hours. Remove pan from oven; cool shanks and vegetables in braising liquid. Refrigerate until well chilled, or overnight.

To serve:

Heat oven to 350°F. Skim fat from the pan. Remove the shanks. Strain out the vegetables from the braising liquid. On your stovetop, In an oven-proof pan over medium heat, reduce braising liquid by one-third. Add shanks to the pan; place in oven.

Spoon braising liquid over shanks every 5 minutes until shanks are heated through and glazed with the braising liquid. Meanwhile, toast couscous in a hot skillet until golden brown. Cook couscous in well-salted boiling water following package directions. Season to taste with salt pepper and a little butter. Mix yogurt, preserved lemons, mint and garlic together to make a sauce garnish. To plate, place a mound of couscous in a serving dish, top with a lamb shank. Spoon braising sauce over all. Garnish with a dollop of yogurt sauce, finely grated lemon zest and a sprinkling of fresh sprouts.

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## The Underrated Ingredient Every Home Cook Should Have on Hand, According to Geoffrey Zakarian

ZAKARIAN, from page 13  
corn soup or even a simple blueberry galette, the produce available during summer really shines.

**EatingWell: What are your top 3 pantry staples that you always have on hand?**

Zakarian: One, a variety of good olive oils. If your pantry is well-stocked, you only need a few ingredients from the store to make dinner happen. Along with a great Greek extra-virgin olive oil for cooking, I keep cold-pressed citrus and herb olive oil on hand as well to drizzle on just before serving. The citrus oils are even exceptional-tasting drizzled on ice cream. Second is chardonnay vinegar. Almost everything I make, I use Forum chardonnay vinegar. It’s a bright, sweet Spanish vinegar that adds acidity and balance to vinaigrettes, soups, dips, braised meats and condiments. Last is smoked Maldon salt. I make sure I always have smoked Maldon salt on hand. I use it for the crunch and subtle smoky flavor it lends when added to eggs, fish, grilled meat or vegetables just before serving. Keeping this in your pantry at home is an easy way to ele-

vate your cooking and up the flavor!

**EatingWell: Your favorite vegetable and favorite way to prepare it?**

Zakarian: During the summer, I really enjoy grilling my vegetables. The most efficient way to grill vegetables is in large or whole pieces, such as whole Japanese eggplant, halved zucchini, whole tomatoes, bell peppers, etc. If you need to grill smaller pieces, place them on skewers so that you don’t have to flip them piece by piece. If you’re using skewers, place only one type of vegetable on each skewer rather than mixing them. Every vegetable has a different cook time, so you can control your end result better this way. I recommend using the Zakarian by Dash Nonstick Cast-Iron Grill Topper, which is perfect for searing vegetables.

**EatingWell: What does “eating well” mean to you?**

Zakarian: Good, real ingredients, prepared simply.

(This interview originally appeared in EatingWell on July 26.)





# Armine (Amie) Minassian: A Long Road Full of Culture

MINASSIAN, from page 13

New Julfa to go to school, but every summer we returned to the village. We had a big, beautiful white donkey, no one could sit on it. He didn't like a weak person to sit on him, but he let me. However, once I annoyed the donkey, it knocked me to the ground, and the packsaddle fell on my head (laughs).

My grandfather Galust was one of the well-off people of the village; he was engaged in agriculture, owning large fields, grape and apricot orchards. During the harvest, six people came and worked for him. I loved the wheat fields, the ears swayed in the wind as if they were talking to each other. I used to go to the fields to drive the sparrows away from eating our grain.

**Years ago, in Yerevan I met your father, philologist Levon Minasyan, who authored many important volumes on history and literature of Iranian-Armenian community. What kind of person was he?**

My father was the only male child of his parents, he studied at the Armenian school of Nor Julfa, he got married at the age of 18, because his mother wanted to have grandchildren. My parents had eight children, and when we were bothering my grandmother, they used to say to her, "Nani, did you want a grandchild, well, here you are grandkids" (laughs).

My father always loved literature, history, manuscripts. In the attic of our village house was his office with a rich library. In the morning he had breakfast, then he separated and spent the whole day with writing. My father published many

books about the Armenians of Iran and left a very rich archive, which I brought with great difficulty, going to New Julfa twice, and handed it over to the Museum of Literature and Art of Armenia.

I must say that many people from abroad came to our house in Nor Julfa - from Tehran, Beirut, also from Armenia: poets Hamo Sahyan, Vahagn Davtyan, many others. At that time, there was a lively Armenian life in Nor Julfa, which, unfortunately, almost no longer exists.

**How did it happen that an Armenian girl from Iran went to America alone and made a successful career?**

In New Julfa, I founded the Union of Armenian girl scouts. In 1968, the American Girl Scouts Association issued an invitation to Iran's scouts to send one of their members to the United States, the World Girl Scout Association. I had wanted to leave Persia since I was young, and fortunately, I was chosen to participate in that agreement. My English was very limited, so I did not put the Armenian-English dictionary down on the plane. Everyone thought I was reading the Holy Book. "No, this is my husband," I joked. I was supposed to leave the US in three months. I went to Germany, then returned to the US with one suitcase, where I had no relatives. During the day I worked as a waitress, and at night I attended classes at the Midway/Paris Beauty School. It was difficult, but I never went after easy things. I settled in America, attended various schools and courses, graduated from university and even taught at the university for 30 years.

**Please tell us about your acting ac-**

**tivities.**

I went on stage in New Julfa when I was only 8 years old. Then I worked in Armenian theater groups of New York as an actress in the theater groups of Hamazkayin Union, Armenian Radio Hour and Union of Alumni of Esayan College. I played in "How Difficult it Was to Die," "Vardananank," "Great Silence," "The Passenger" and other plays. I was also a make-up artist. In 1995, I received a theater director's certificate from Queens College in New York, where I made my directorial debut, the production of Herand Markarian's drama "Mirrors" in English.

**And how did you enter the field of make-up?**

I have always loved make-up, which gives a person a new appearance, creates a new look. At the Midway-Paris Beauty School, I met a make-up artist working in film and television, who offered me the same job. I said, "Oh my God, that's exactly what I want to do!" After passing special exams, I started working in films and television. I always tried to be the best! I was always loved by the actors and they wanted me to work with them again.

**You have worked with many celebrities from the fields of show business and politics. Can you single out anyone or any fascinating story related to them?**

I cannot, as working with everyone was a pleasure for me. Among those people were Susan Sarandon, Celeste Holm, Nana Mouskouri, Helen Hayes, Bill Cosby, Kathleen Turner, Isabella Rossellini, Cynthia Harris, Michael Douglas, Plácido Domingo, Bon Jovi, Sarah Brightman, Billy Joel, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Kofi

Annan, Ivana Trump... Some did not know that I am Armenian, but some did. For example, Plácido Domingo always hugged me and said: "My Armenian friend!" I also did make-up for Armenian actors and singers who came to the US: Ofelia Hambardzumyan, Hovhannes Badalyan, Khoren Abrahamyan, Ruben Matevosyan and many others.

**You have been photographing and filming events of Armenian cultural life in the East Coast of the USA for many years, creating a rich archive. What do you intend to do with it?**

I have already given some part to the Museum of Literature and Art of Armenia; I intend to give the rest to an Armenian center in the USA. I hope that there will be people interested in these archives, one day they will discover how this handful of people tried to preserve their arts and culture in New York.

**In recent years, you have also been busy with literary works.**

I have always loved literature, cooperating with the Diaspora and Armenian press with articles and poems. In 2017, I published two poetry collections in Yerevan: "Paths of the Motherland" and "Paths of Love." And now I am preparing to publish a volume presenting the 30-year activity of the National Union of New York. I also intend to write my biography; I don't know yet whether in Armenian or English.

**I think in English, so that there will be more readers.**

Yes, perhaps. We must always keep the awareness about our people, our culture bright and awake!

An evening dedicated to

**MAESTRO HAMPARTZOOM BERBERIAN**

On the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the  
Tekeyan Cultural Association in the United States





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**Friday, September 6, 2024 at 7:30 PM**  
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ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CANADA

**OCTOBER 4-5 — 2024 Convention of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada** at the Tekeyan Center in Montreal, with Friday night reception, Saturday meetings for delegates and members, and banquet for Abaka Saturday 7:30 p.m. Details, hotel and registration cost forthcoming.

MASSACHUSETTS

**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](mailto: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.hyepointearmernianchurch.org](http://www.hyepointearmernianchurch.org) or call (978) 372-5688.

**SEPTEMBER 9 — St. James Men’s Club** is kicking off the season with a joint meeting with the Trinity Men’s Union at the Holy Trinity Church, 145 Brattle St., Cambridge. Guest speaker will be Jim Kalustian to discuss the Armenian Heritage Park, all are welcome. Monday, mezza 5.45 p.m., dinner 6.45 p.m. Losh, Kheyma or combo meal is \$20. Please call the church office to rsvp. 617-354-0632

**SEPTEMBER 12 — Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and the Shahbazian Foundation** invite you to a lecture on “The Development and Future of Artificial Intelligence (and AI in Armenia)” featuring Prof. Joseph Shahbazian and Harry Glorikian, author of The Future You: How Artificial Intelligence Can Help You Get Healthier, Stress Less, and Live Longer . Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown (or via Zoom), RSVP at [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com), Zoom link <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/86485218660?pwd=caBEqHO04LdBPMtBmZd972JvJfSDai.1>

**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-PNXZnPT06OmVjYmIzOTQ2NGMxMjg4NTM0YmFjZjI2M2JmYzE2N2Fk&-showall=1> For additional ticketing inquires:617-923-0100, [tickets@mosesianarts.org](mailto:tickets@mosesianarts.org)

**SEPTEMBER 15 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church**, under the patronage of Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg Mikael

Mouradian, will celebrate the Feast of Exaltation of the Cross. Sunday, 10.30 a.m. at the church, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Followed by a luncheon at the Oakley Country Club, 410 Belmont St., Watertown. Master of Ceremonies Maral Der Torossian, Keynote Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and entertainment from singer Miriam and musician Vasken Habib and DJ Ryno. Donation \$125 adult, \$95 youth and \$75 child. Reservations by calling parish office at 617-489-2280 or emailing [holycrossbostonma@gmail.com](mailto:holycrossbostonma@gmail.com)

**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. Event held at 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 20 — Classical Music Concert**, Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic Street, Arlington, Sunday, 4 p.m. Alessandra Pompili, Piano; Christina Gulans, Cello. Works by: Knarik Ghazarossian, Komitas, Emanuel Melik Aslanian, Stephan Elmas, Alan Hovhaness, Diane Goolkasian-Rahbee, Arno Babajanian.

**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 14 — Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs Armenian**, Bayside, NY, will hold its annual “Armenia Way Festival” on Saturday, from 12 noon to 7 p.m., on the church property and its surroundings (209-15 Horace Harding Expy., Bayside). Enjoy Armenian food, homemade desserts, street vendors, raffles, games for kids, live music and more. Rain or shine. For information, call the church at (718) 225-0235 or visit [holy-martyrs.org](http://holy-martyrs.org).

**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.

‘Echoes of Armenia’ Concert to Take Place at Mosesian Center

WATERTOWN — A concert on Saturday, September 14, at the Mosesian Center in at 7:30 p.m., will take the audience on a tour of Armenian folk music from the Armenian Highlands to the Diaspora. Titled “Echoes of Armenia,” the concert will feature oud master John Berberian and Armadi Tsayn, as well as the Persian ensemble RazAvaz.

At a time when the preservation of Armenian culture is more important than ever, the program will celebrate the generational transfer of Armenian folk music from the ancestral lands.

John Berberian is an oud virtuoso born in the United States to Armenian immigrant

parents. His father was an accomplished oud player, as well as instrument maker. He first recorded traditional oud music while he was a student at Columbia University in the early 1960s. He subsequently recorded for a variety of labels including MGM, RCA, Roulette, Verve and Mainstream Records. Notable albums in his discography include “Expressions East” (1964), “Oud Artistry” (1965), “Music of the Middle East” (1966) and “Middle Eastern Rock” (1969), which fuse traditional Middle Eastern folk with psychedelic rock and jazz.

Armadi Tsayn, which means “Sounds/Voice of the Roots” in Armenian, will be accompanying Berberian with an ensemble of talented young musicians. The group pays homage to the rich musical heritage of Western Armenia and the captivating melodies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

This contemporary folk ensemble, founded by Alek Surenian and Sam Sjostedt, both of whom studied under Berberian, is making a name for itself thanks to its blend of traditional melodies and modern influences. Armadi Tsayn has played in major cities including Boston, Worcester, New York City, Los Angeles, Toronto and Yerevan.

Band Members are: Sam Sjostedt – Oud; Alireza Khodayari – Tar; Michael Kamalian – Clarinet; Grigori Balasanyan – Pia-



From left, Alek Surenian, Sam Sjostedt, Michael Kamalian and Grigori Balasanyan of Armadi Tsayn



From left, Filippo Goller, Ali Arshi, Mehrpouya Davenshar and Omar Bahr of RazAvaz

no; Filippo Goller - Bass and Alek Surenian - Percussion

RazAvaz, a contemporary Persian ensemble based in Boston, will perform an opening set before Berberian and Armadi Tsayn take the stage. Their fusion of classical Persian folk with modern influences creates an atmospheric and ethereal sound-

scape, inviting listeners to immerse themselves fully in their music.

Band Members are: Ali Arshi - Tar and Vocals; Mehrpouya Davenshar – Kamancha; Baba Taba – Oud; Filippo Goller - Bass and Omar Bahr – Percussion.

For tickets, visit [www.mosesianarts.org](http://www.mosesianarts.org) or write to [tickets@mosesianarts.org](mailto:tickets@mosesianarts.org)



Oud Legend John Berberian





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— SINCE 1932 —



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COMMENTARY

# The Volatile Middle East and Vacationing Yerevan

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Recent events in the Middle East have escalated tensions, particularly between Iran and Israel, raising concerns about a potential major regional war of unprecedented scale. The visit of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington was notable, as he received a high-level reception and strong congressional support, asserting that the interests of the USA and Israel align — an attack on Israel is regarded as an attack on the USA. After the prime minister returned from Washington, the Israeli Mossad assassinated Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh by detonating an explosive device planted in advance in his bedroom at the Iranian government official residence in Tehran.

It is hard to say whether Netanyahu received support in Washington or if he simply went to inform that Israel is preparing for a large-scale war against Iran. However, events in the Middle East intensified as a result of all this. The assassination of Haniyeh was the type of action in response to which Iran could not avoid delivering a retaliatory strike. The Biden Administration reportedly told members of Congress on August 5 that an Iranian strike may occur as soon as August 5 or 6. Reportedly, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken separately told counterparts at the G7 on August 4 that Iran might begin its attack in the next two to three days. This means that Washington is also expecting some action in the region.

President Joe Biden and Vice President Harris Kamala were told by their national security team on Monday, August 5 that it is still unclear when Iran and Hezbollah are likely to launch an attack against Israel and what specifically the attack might entail. According to the White House, during the Situation Room meeting Biden and Harris were updated about several US soldiers who were seriously injured in a rocket attack on Monday by pro-Iranian militias on a the Al Asad Airbase in Iraq. The US is already somewhat involved in this conflict, yet the Biden administration is striving to deescalate tensions and avoid direct engagement. This includes collaborating with regional partners such as the leaders of Jordan, Qatar, and Egypt.

The situation is also of great concern to Moscow. Sergei Shoigu, the secretary of Russia’s Security Council, was immediately sent to Iran. He met with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, as well as with the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, and with the chief of staff of the Iranian Armed Forces. Of course, Moscow has several reasons for concern. Specifically, a Russian military contingent is stationed in Syria, and

Moscow is trying to understand the potential impact of Iran’s strike on Russian forces, especially if the strikes against Israel come from Lebanon and Syria. In this situation, Israel could also strike back against Syria and Lebanon.

Notably, Lebanon is already preparing for possible Israeli strikes, and self-defense actions are being carried out, including in the Armenian neighborhoods of Beirut. Secretary of the Russian Security Council Sergey Shoigu has left Tehran and headed to Baku, according to the Telegram channel of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. According to the channel, he went to the capital of Azerbaijan to warn them against interference. It is notable that this assignment of Vladimir Putin was given not to Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov but to Shoigu, the former minister of defense and newly appointed secretary of the National Security Council. This indicates that Moscow believes the situation has reached a point where diplomacy may not be particularly effective.

Of course, there are serious reasons for concern in Yerevan regarding all this. The concerns are not limited to just the Armenians living in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The potential for escalation could make processes uncontrollable not only in the Middle East but also in the South Caucasus. It is known that Baku has not yet abandoned its demands for the Zangezur Corridor, and there is continuous talk about it both in Baku and Ankara. This project, which could effectively divide Armenia into two parts and potentially deploy foreign security forces, turning it into an extraterritorial unit, faces significant opposition from Iran, which directly states that such a project contradicts Iran’s interests. Baku may exploit the situation, as Iran’s attention is fixed on Israel, leaving it unable to sufficiently respond to any Azerbaijani provocations. Consequently, Azerbaijan could consider attacking Armenia to secure the corridor. Historically, Azerbaijan has been seen as a potential provocateur against Iran, and this scenario might escalate Azerbaijani actions if deterrents are lacking and if instigating states are involved.

Against this backdrop, Armenia is in a holiday mode. The Armenian prime minister is cycling through various European countries and the capital, Yerevan, enjoying his vacation and summertime.

(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.)

## Türkiye: Ten Years of State Hostility Towards the Press under President Erdogan

*The following column was released by the organization Reporters without Borders (RSF, its French acronym), on its website, rsf.org.*

Five journalists killed, 131 imprisoned, 77 convicted of “insulting the president” and hundreds prosecuted for their work – Reporters Without Borders (RSF) presents its damning assessment of Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s 10 years as Türkiye’s president. Press freedom must be restored.

Over the past decade, President Erdogan has established a hyper-presidential system that has undermined press freedom and media pluralism. RSF’s damning evaluation highlights the scale of the crusade waged by the man who is due to continue as Türkiye’s president until 2028 after winning a third term in May 2023.

“Independent journalism is now clearly in danger of extinction as a result of this oppressive decade. Exploitation of the judicial system and public broadcasting, and the stranglehold on media ownership and regulatory institutions, have jeopardised the right to news and information, without which the rule of law cannot exist. Türkiye

must awake from this nightmare and turn a new page. We call on the president to take swift action and to carry out in-depth reform to protect independent journalists and guarantee the right to information in the country,” said Erol Onderoglu, RSF’s representative in Türkiye.

**A total of 150 reporters attacked during Gezi protests: the start of impunity**

Erdogan’s authoritarian attitude and hostility towards journalists began before his reign as president. When Erdogan was prime minister, the Gezi anti-government protests in Istanbul in the spring and summer of 2013 were marked by an unprecedented surge in violence against media professionals. From May to September 2013, more than 150 journalists were attacked by police with complete impunity in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. This crack-down foreshadowed the impunity that accompanied Erdogan’s new authoritarian approach to governance. Only three journalists were compensated for the damages they suffered.

**Over 85% of national media con-**

**trolled by the government**

Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) were already very influential when he became prime minister in 2002. Erdogan proceeded to create a financial system that seized media companies struggling to repay their debts to the state, and ultimately allocated these outlets to private sector companies allied with the government. Today, more than 85% of private sector national media are controlled by companies that support the government or are bound to it by shared strategic interests.

Erdogan’s grip on the media – which also includes close control over the state TV and radio broadcaster TRT and the National Broadcasting Council (RTÜK) – contributed to his third presidential election victory in May 2023, at the end of a campaign clearly tainted by biased media coverage.

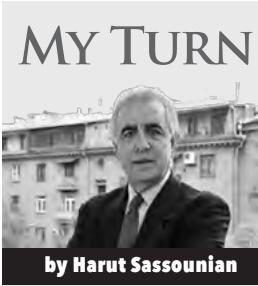
**Arrests and trials used to restrict reporting**

Judicial harassment is one of the government’s favorite methods to intimidate see HOSTILITY, page 20





COMMENTARY



MY TURN  
Erdogan Is Said to Have Divine Attributes: ‘Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely’

In his article in the Nordic Monitor, Abdullah Bozkurt wrote about Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shrouding himself with the attributes of God or Allah. Erdogan’s subservient inner circle reinforces that self-aggrandizing and exaggerated view of himself by claiming that he has divine powers. The article is titled, “Turkey’s president suffers from a God complex, revered for attributes belonging to Allah and the Prophet.”

Bozkurt starts his article by describing Erdogan as “a leader who believes he possesses superior abilities and apparently suffers from a God complex.... Erdogan has decimated the opposition, imprisoned his critics and opponents, consolidated all levers of power in his hands, destroyed checks and balances and become the sole decision-maker on all matters in his own country. His inflated view of his abilities and infallibility, coupled with the presence of yes-men surrounding him, reinforces his narcissistic personality and shores up his superiority complex. He considers himself the caliph, the leader of the entire Muslim community worldwide, and therefore believes he deserves special consideration.”

Bozkurt recalls that after Erdogan’s party’s (AKP) defeat in the March 2024 Parliamentary elections, he said on April 17: “Ladies and gentlemen! Let everyone see and know this: Nothing is over until we say it’s over.” This innocent sounding statement turns out to have “shocking ramifications... in the context of political Islamic circles, [challenging] the divine will of Allah, one of the six main pillars of Islam, which means Allah is the ultimate decision-maker and everything happens only according to His divine will. The remark reflects Erdogan’s inner thinking as he has become accustomed to being the final arbiter in Turkish matters after a long rule of near-absolute power. Erdogan did not utter these words in a vacuum; he has a long track record of seeing himself in such a godly manner. The worshipful praise from his followers has certainly contributed to shaping the president’s psyche.”

While speaking at a campaign rally in March 2024, Erdogan said, “We have come for mercy, not for wrath. Our mercy will prevail over our wrath.” By describing his government’s reaction to his critics and opponents in such a manner, Erdogan made “a direct reference to Allah’s unique attribute in the conventional Islamic school of thought, which was described in a saying of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad: ‘When Allah decreed the creation, He pledged Himself by writing in His Book which is laid down with Him: My Mercy prevails over My Wrath.’ Milli Gazete, the newspaper of the opposition Islamic political Saadet Party wrote: Erdogan “associating himself with the attributes of Allah astonished the audience.”

Erdogan’s associates and senior member of his ruling party, engaging in sycophancy, make exaggerated statements reinforcing his claim of possessing superior powers. Here are some of the examples Bozkurt provided:

“In July 2011, the AKP’s then-Bursa deputy Huseyin Shahin stated after talking and visiting Erdogan that ‘even touching our esteemed Prime Minister [Erdogan], I believe, is an act of worship. I’m saying this because even his presence energizes us.’”

“Fevai Arslan, another lawmaker from Erdogan’s ruling AKP, said in January 2014, ‘There is Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a leader who embodies all the attributes of Allah. They wanted to thwart him.’”

“Zulfu Tolga Aghar, a long-time AKP lawmaker, likened Erdogan to God in a speech he made in August 2019, stating, ‘When we are told about the President, it feels like we are being told about Allah.’”

“Addressing some 1,500-party faithful in November 2009, Ismail Hakki Eser, the AKP’s then-Aydin provincial office head, told the crowd, ‘Let no one doubt the love and respect our people under this roof have for our Prime Minister [Erdogan]. We are devoted to our Prime Minister; he is like a second prophet to us.’”

“Former EU affairs minister Egemen Baghish declared several cities to be holy, akin to the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medina, in February 2013, saying, ‘Rize, Istanbul and Siirt are holy cities because these three cities have been instrumental in the birth of the greatest leader in the history of the Republic of Turkey.’ Rize is Erdogan’s family’s home province, while Istanbul is where he was brought up and entered politics. Siirt, his wife’s home province, is the constituency where he was elected to parliament for the first time in a March 2003 repeat election. Despite being incriminated in a multi-million dollar graft scheme, Erdogan stood by Baghish and appointed him ambassador to the Czech Republic.”

“Some went as far as saying that Erdogan surpassed the Islamic Prophet. Efkani Ala, then interior minister, said, ‘Prophet Muhammad was overtaken by pride, so God warned him. We, on the other hand, will not be tempted by pride.’ Ala’s successor, Suleyman Soyulu, claimed in December 2021 that the work of the Erdogan government was the work of Allah. ‘Don’t just look at what we do. We don’t do it by ourselves. We believe that it is Allah who makes us do it.’”

“In February 2010, Oktay Saral, an AKP politician who governed the Of district of Trabzon province, called for the worship of Erdogan and said that a prayer of gratitude, similar to Muslim rituals for God, must be performed because Erdogan is the blessed leader of the Islamic world.”

“Some of Erdogan’s deputies likened his speeches to the Sunnah, which refers to the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad and is considered to be the second authoritative source of knowledge for Muslims after the holy Quran.”

Bozkurt added: “There have been dozens of instances of God-like attributions made for Erdogan during his more than two decades of rule in Turkey. None of them were challenged by Erdogan himself, who appeared to enjoy such praise. In his self-perception, perhaps he feels like a god or a God-chosen messenger who came to power to lead Muslims all over the world.”

“Compounding matters further is that President Erdogan is surrounded by yes-men and women who worship him and dare not utter views that would displease him. The profile of people he has chosen to include in his inner circle paints a picture of those who shy away from critical thinking and avoid challenging views in the governance of the country. In reality, Erdogan is nothing but a thug, a narcissistic dictator who abuses religion for his political ambitions while enriching his family members and associates with billions of dollars through pervasive corruption in his administration and profits from all sorts of illicit business activities and criminal enterprises,” Bozkurt concluded.

US-Armenia Ties Stronger Than Ever, Including at Local Level

By Ambassador Nina Hachigian

In June, I traveled to Armenia where the State Department hosted the U.S.-Armenia Local Democracy Forum, the first-ever forum of its kind. This event showed well the potential for city and state diplomacy and helps explain why the Secretary of State created my new role and team. This forum was also just one element of the Biden Administration’s commitment to making the U.S.-Armenia relationship deeper and broader at a time when the Armenian people and government very much want to develop their new democracy.

We brought mayors, city and state officials from California, Kansas, Michigan, Montana and Pennsylvania to meet with their Armenian counterparts. Some sister-city and sister-region relationships had been established over the decades, but we inaugurated three new pairs with Helena, MT, Oakland County, MI, and Scranton, PA. Over two days, we discussed the fundamental role of local leaders in democracy—delivering services without corruption, defending free speech and rights of members of minorities, transparency in procurement, and more. Special Representative Sarah Morgenthau was on hand to discuss commercial ties. As local leaders often do when they get together, they also spoke of the more particular challenges in their communities and shared solutions with each other. This is the magic of local-level partnership—good, practical ideas can travel around the world and back to make life better for regular people.

Nearly all the U.S. delegates went to visit their partner cities or regions before or after the Forum. The incredible hospitality and warmth of their Armenian counterparts overwhelmed these local American leaders. They were truly touched by the local Armenian officials’ generosity and enthusiasm.

The most important part is yet to come, of course, as the eight pairs outline future steps in cooperation. Some concrete ideas are already in place. The Mayor of Glendale, for example, plans to bring over a group of city experts in skills her Armenian partners most need. The mayor of Helena is inviting his partner mayor from Stepanavan to Montana to continue their conversation on opportunities for future collaboration.

This forum to bolster local-level connections, so helpful to enhance a country-to-country relationship, contributed to an overall effort of the Biden Administration to strengthen and deepen ties with Armenia to an unprecedented degree.

Early in his presidency, President Biden became the first American president to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide of 1915. But the emphasis is now on Armenia’s future as a sovereign democracy in a peaceful region. In 2018, the Armenian people brought a new democratic, reformist government into power after the peaceful “Velvet Revolution.” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has since been elected twice in free and fair elections (the second time after losing territory Armenia had occupied for 30 years) a clear sign that Armenian people want to stay on the path of democracy.

The pace of US-Armenia activity is impressive, which I got to see firsthand as I attended an annual U.S.-Armenia dialogue, where some 30 officials on each side discussed a broad range of cooperative activity from commercial ties to public safety and energy security.

Recent steps the Biden Administration has taken also

include Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s joint conference with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Armenian officials in April to discuss additional assistance for Armenian resilience, and Deputy Secretary Verma conducting the highest-level visit by the State Department since Secretary Clinton visited in 2012 (he opened the local democracy forum with Armenia’s President Khachaturyan). The Administration has also raised the level of the U.S.-Armenia relationship to a “strategic partnership,” conducted the first bilateral joint military exercises since 2008, and significantly increased U.S. development assistance, including to help the people who fled Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijani military action displaced them from land ethnic Armenians had lived on for thousands of years. Administrator Samantha Power visited for the second time this July, including to Syunik, and announced \$11.9 million in new aid for digital transformation, food security, communication, and risk mitigation, on top of the over \$65 million the United States government has announced already this year.

The administration supports Armenia and Azerbaijan’s process toward signing a peace treaty and welcomes initiatives like Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” that support greater regional connections. Bringing peace and economic integration to the South Caucasus will be transformative for a region and people that have faced decades of conflict.

The big annual climate conference, COP29, will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November. With the eyes of the international community focused on this region, we can hope for a binding agreement that puts strife behind and economic prosperity and peace ahead.

(Ambassador Nina Hachigian is the first Special Representative for City and State Diplomacy at the U.S. Department of State.)





COMMENTARY

# Türkiye: Ten Years of State Hostility Towards The Press under President Erdogan

HOSTILITY, from page 18

journalists and prevent media coverage of the state’s authoritarianism, corruption, political cronyism, or Kurdish issues, and to prevent investigative reporters from uncovering stories that could embarrass the government and its allies. Of the 131 journalists detained since Erdogan became president in 2014, at least 40 have been convicted.

Türkiye became the world’s biggest prison for journalists in 2018, during the state of emergency imposed after a coup attempt in July 2016. Mass arbitrary arrests were carried out across many media outlets, including the daily newspapers Cumhuriyet, Sözcü, Özgür Gündem, and Zaman.

Four journalists are currently detained in Türkiye, which is the lowest figure in decades after a let-up in mass arrests of media personnel. But judicial harassment of the media is still widespread. Media professionals subjected to judicial proceedings leading to arrests in recent years have included investigative journalists, TV presenters, and determined reporters such as Tolga Sardan, Merdan Yanardag, Baris Pehlivan, Abdurrahman Gök, and Furkan Karabay.

The most common charges brought against media personnel include spreading “propaganda for a terrorist organisation” and “exposing a counter-terrorist official to the threat of terrorist organisations” under the terrorism law (TMK), or “insulting a public official,” “insulting the president,” and “denigrating state institutions” under the criminal code (TCK).

According to the tally kept by news site and RSF partner Bianet.org., over the past 10 years, a total of 77 journalists have been fined or given prison sentences (in some cases suspended) for “insulting the president” in articles, editorials, or comments posted or

shared on social media.

Erol Onderoglu, RSF’s Türkiye representative, is a co-defendant in a criminal case alongside fellow journalist Ahmet Nesin and human rights defender Sebnem Korur Fincanci, that has dragged on for more than eight years. They are charged with propaganda in favour of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) for participating in a journalistic solidarity campaign in support of Özgür Gündem, a pro-Kurdish newspaper that was forcibly closed under the state of emergency in 2016. Their acquittals were overturned in October 2020 after being publicly criticised by Erdogan.

The Erdogan administration’s persecution of journalists recognises no borders. For years after fleeing abroad, journalists such as Erk Acarer, Hayko Bagdat, and Fehim Tastekin have been subjected to judicial proceedings or administrative reprisals in connection with their journalism.

Can Dünder, the former editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper Cumhuriyet (Republic), was personally threatened by Erdogan, forced to flee into exile abroad and sentenced in absentia to 27 and a half years in prison for a 2015 story headlined “İşte Erdoğan’ın yok dediği silahlar” (“Here are the weapons that Erdogan says do not exist”). Erdogan responded: “The person who wrote this exclusive article will pay dearly. I won’t let him get away with it.”

**Online platforms blocked**

Social media platforms have also been censored by the Erdogan administration. Instagram was rendered inaccessible on 2 August on the grounds of “catalog offenses” such as child abuse and drug use. The access ban, announced without any explanations, is based on Article 8 of the Internet Law, which allows content

or websites to be made inaccessible on a number of grounds, including “pornography,” “sale of products endangering health,” “incitement to suicide” or “offence to the memory of the founder of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.”

But the ban was imposed after Instagram restricted access to Erdogan’s condolences messages for the death of the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Wikipedia was blocked in Türkiye for three years beginning in 2017 over content and articles allegedly complicit with jihadist organisations in Syria., Twitter was blocked in March 2014 over audio recordings implicating Turkish politicians.

**Five journalists killed**

Türkiye’s media had been spared political assassinations since the murder in 2007 of Hrant Dink, an Armenian-Turkish journalist who founded and edited the dual-language weekly Agos. But five journalists have been murdered since Erdogan became president – three Syrian journalists who had fled the civil war that began in Syria in 2011 and two journalists located in the cities of Bursa and Kocaeli.

When Erdogan became president in 2014, Türkiye was ranked 154th out of 180 countries in RSF’s World Press Freedom Index. It fell to 165th in 2023, and ranks 158th in the 2024 Index.

Key figures from Erdogan’s ten years as president:

- Five journalists killed
- 131 journalists detained (for more than 48 hours), 40 of whom were convicted
- 77 journalists convicted of “insulting the president”
- 85% of national media controlled by the government
- Three major social media platforms blocked (Instagram, Wikipedia, Twitter)



Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada

# 2024 Convention

of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada



## October 4-5

**Tekeyan Center in Montreal**  
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Friday Hospitality Night  
Saturday Meetings for Delegates and Members  
Saturday 7:30 p.m. Abaka Banquet and Armenian Pop Music Program

*Details, hotel and registration cost forthcoming*