

# Armenia Edits History Textbook After Russian Backlash

By Artak Khulian

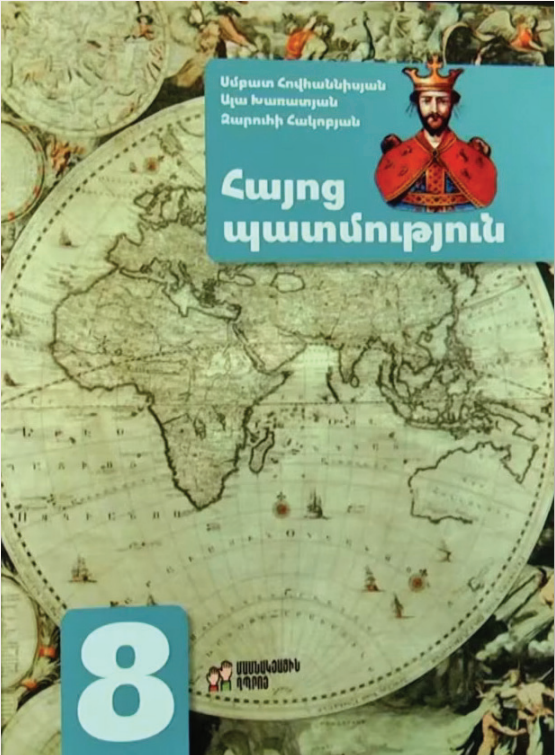
YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Hours after a harsh statement from Moscow regarding a passage in the new edition of an Armenian history textbook authorities in Yerevan announced that the text has already been edited.

The Russian Foreign Ministry stated on Thursday, August 15, that it expected the Armenian authorities to remove the term “annexation” used in the new 8th-grade history textbook in reference to the events in the South Caucasus in the early 19th centuries, when the territory of modern-day Armenia became part of the Russian Empire following the 1826-1828 Russo-Persian war.

“We expect that the Armenian authorities will not allow the transfer of such a textbook to schools and will not turn a blind eye to such unceremonious attempts to distort our common past,” the Russian ministry said.

Tamara Sargsyan, an official from Armenia’s Ministry of Education, told reporters on Friday, August 16, that a corrected version of the textbook will be distributed to schools. She said the disputed section will no longer use the phrase “annexation of Eastern Armenia to Russia.”

“It was proposed to revise that approach and the au-



thor has adjusted the wording to align with the curriculum for Armenian history,” Sargsyan said.

The official did not immediately link the change to the Russian reaction, but did not explain why the change had not been made earlier.

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# In Baku, Putin Offers To Help Broker Armenia-Azerbaijan Agreement

By Lusine Musayelian and Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Russia remains ready to help Armenia and Azerbaijan negotiate a peace treaty and delineate their border, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during a state visit to Baku on Monday, August 19.

Meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev, Putin stressed that Moscow wants to maintain its “historical involvement in the situation in the South Caucasus” and Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks, in particular, despite the widening war with Ukraine.

“If there is something we can do to pave the way for the signing of a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the delimitation, demarcation of the border, unblocking, as we have discussed with you many times, relevant areas in logistics and the economy , we would be very happy about that,” he told Aliyev in his opening remarks.

“Of course, after my visit to Azerbaijan, I will contact Prime Minister [Nikol] Pashinyan and tell him about the results of our negotiations,” added Putin.

Russia has repeatedly offered to resume its mediation of Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks over the past year, including in the aftermath of last month’s meeting of the foreign ministers of the two South Caucasus states hosted by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Armenia has essentially rejected these initiatives, underlining rising tensions in Russian-Armenian relations and its ongoing drift to the West.

“The Armenian authorities prefer to hold peace negotiations either without mediators or under the aegis of Western bodies,” said Armen Baghdasaryan, an Armenian political analyst. They are therefore bound to “politely decline” Putin’s offer as well, he said.

The authorities in Yerevan did not immediately react to Putin’s latest comments. Gagik Melkonyan, an outspoken lawmaker representing Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party, dismissed them. He claimed that the Russian leader traveled to Baku to discuss further anti-Armenian moves with Aliyev.

“They handed over Karabakh to Baku and are now reminding that Baku is in debt to them for that,” Melkonyan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “So I personally don’t expect anything good from that [Baku] meeting.”

Putin helped to stop the 2020 war in Karabakh by brokering a ceasefire agreement reached by Aliyev and Pashinyan. Moscow remained the main international mediator of Armenian-Azerbaijani talks held in the next two years. Its deepening rift with Pashinyan’s government has all but ended the Russian mediation of the negotiating process.

Unlike Yerevan, Baku has reacted positively to the Russian initiatives. Aliyev said on Monday that he is “very satisfied” with the current state of Russian-Azerbaijani relations.

# Yerevan-Based Editor Titizian to Speak on Fighting Misinformation Amid a Security Crisis at Talk in Watertown

WATERTOWN — Yerevan-based editor Maria Titizian will speak on “Fighting Misinformation Amid a Security Crisis: The Armenian Media Landscape” at the Baikar Building on Thursday, September 5, at 7:30 p.m. in an event sponsored by the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, the Tekeyan Cultural Association and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Topics.

Titizian is a Yerevan-based writer, journalist and educator with over 20 years of experience in the media industry. Her reporting has led her across Armenia, Artsakh, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. She has worked as an anchor at Armenia’s Public TV, served as associate

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Maria Titizian

# Principal Garine Palandjian Continues Mission of SSAES

By John Gigian  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

WATERTOWN — Garine Palandjian is preparing to begin her second year as principal of St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School (SSAES) this fall; she succeeded Houry Boyamian, who had been principal for 35 years.

In a recent interview, Palandjian said she hopes to weave together the traditions of the past while moving the school into the future as it approaches its 40th anniversary, which will be celebrated with a gala this fall.

“This community is lucky to have an institution where kids get to learn Armenian history,” Palandjian said. “I know it sounds cliché, but really, you get to learn the

Armenian language and the history, and so you get to learn about your identity. It sets the tone and helps kids become confident about who they are as Armenian-Americans.”

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Principal Garine Palandjian (left) presents Fr. Antranig Baljian of St. Stephen’s Armenian Church for his 30 years of service to the community, a diploma signed by the fifth-grade students.

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**Dutch Volunteers Help Build Center For Children With Special Needs**

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**MASSACHUSETTS**

**Armenian Art of Lettering Brings Children Closer to History of Church**

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**RECIPE**

**Spicy Bulgur and Nut Salad from Claudia Roden’s Mediterranean**

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### CSTO Says Obligations To Armenia Remain Unchanged

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Obligations to Armenia within the Collective Security Treaty organization (CSTO) remain unchanged, Mikael Agasandyan, Director of the First Department of the CIS countries of the Russian Foreign Ministry, told RIA Novosti on Monday, August 19.

According to Agasandyan, there are no alternative guarantors of stability for Armenia, except for the CSTO and Russia. “As for Armenia’s participation in the general work of the CSTO, the line of retreat from such interaction has now prevailed in Yerevan,” the official said.

“This position, as we see it, contradicts the interests of the people of Armenia and significantly weakens national security. Ultimately, there are no alternatives to the CSTO and Russia as guarantors of the republic’s stability. Mutual obligations within the Organization remain unchanged.”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in February that Armenia has frozen its participation in the CSTO because the bloc had failed the country.

### EU Mission Marks 3,000 Patrols at Border Areas

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — On Sunday, August 18, the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) marked 3 000 patrols to border areas. The patrol went up to 3 000 meters in the Jermuk area to observe and report on the situation on the ground.

EUMA conducts patrols from 6 forward operating bases in Yeghegnadzor, Kapan, Goris, Jermuk, Martuni and Ijevan.

EUMA was launched by the decision of EU Foreign Affairs Council on 20 February 2023, when it also started its operational activities.

### EU Rep Supports Bilateral Ceasefire Violation Efforts

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Toivo Klaar, the European Union (EU) Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, on August 17 reaffirmed his full support for Armenia’s proposal to create a bilateral mechanism for investigating ceasefire violations on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Klaar shared a post he made in June on the platform formerly known as Twitter in this regard, with the following comment attached: “I reiterate my full support for Yerevan’s proposal for a bilateral mechanism to investigate allegations of ceasefire violations.”

In an earlier post, Klaar welcomed Armenia’s proposal to create a bilateral mechanism to address alleged ceasefire violations on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to reduce tensions.

# ATP Director Honored with ‘Climate Change And Women in Armenia 2024’ Award

YEREVAN — In a moment of both personal triumph and broader significance for Armenia’s environmental future, Rousanne Arustamyan, the director of Armenia Tree Project (ATP) in Armenia, has been recognized with the “Climate Change and Women in Armenia 2024” Award. This honor, bestowed by the Women in Climate and Energy NGO, in collaboration with the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Environment, the UNDP and the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, highlights her contributions to climate change mitigation solutions.

The award ceremony, designed to celebrate and empower Armenian women’s roles in sustainable development and women-led solutions, marked a pivotal moment for Arustamyan and Armenia Tree Project, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The event featured multiple categories recognizing women across various facets of climate action, including Climate Change Adaptation Solutions, Climate Community Actions and Policies, Climate Issues and Solutions Coverage, Climate Education for All, Climate Finance and Innovation Solutions, and Youth in Climate Action. However, it was Arustamyan’s work in Climate Change Mitigation Solutions that earned her this distinguished accolade.

Rousanne Arustamyan’s journey with Armenia Tree Project began on June 1, 1998, when she joined the organization as an Admin and Finance Assistant. Over the years, her role evolved, as she steadily climbed the ranks within the organization. From gaining valuable experience in finance and administrative tasks, Arustamyan moved on to become the Finance Manager, where she took on greater responsibility in overseeing ATP’s financial operations and strategy. In her current role as Director of Armenia Tree Project in Armenia, Arustamyan has been instrumental in leading broader initiatives and shaping the overall direction of the organization. Each stage of Arustamyan’s career has pre-



Rousanne Arustamyan, ATP’s Armenia director, right, with Nune Sahaknyan, director of Women in Climate and Energy NGO. Arustamyan presented unique challenges and opportunities for growth, and she has met them with resilience, dedication, and a commitment to the mission of Armenia Tree Project.

As a woman in a leadership position, Arustamyan’s achievement is particularly significant. In a field where female leadership is often underrepresented, her recognition sets a powerful example for other women in Armenia and beyond. It underscores the vital role women play in the fight against climate change and in shaping sustainable development strategies for a better future. Winning the “Climate Change and Women in Armenia 2024” award in the category of Climate Change Mitigation Solutions is a testament to her hard work and unwavering belief in the power of community-driven environmental initiatives.

This award is also a tribute to Armenia Tree Project’s legacy as an organization founded by a woman, Carolyn Mugar, and currently led by another woman, Executive Director Jeanmarie Papelian. The organization’s commitment to empowering women in environmental leadership is exempli-

fied by Arustamyan’s success. Beyond her role as director at ATP, Arustamyan also helped found Armenia’s Forest Alliance, a coalition of environmental NGOs that advocates for forest protection, restoration, and afforestation in Armenia. Her participation on behalf of ATP in this alliance further demonstrates her deep commitment to preserving Armenia’s natural landscapes for future generations.

As ATP reflects on its 30 years of work in the region, Arustamyan’s recognition comes at a pivotal time. Over the past three decades, ATP has been a cornerstone in Armenia’s environmental efforts, planting millions of trees and working to restore the country’s degraded landscapes. The organization has not only focused on reforestation but has also adapted its strategies to address the evolving needs of both the land and the people of Armenia. From empowering local communities to implement sustainable practices to advocating for policies that protect Armenia’s natural resources, ATP continues to make significant strides in environmental conservation.

The “Climate Change and Women in Armenia 2024” Award is not just a recognition of Arustamyan’s past accomplishments but also a beacon of encouragement for her future endeavors. As Armenia Tree Project looks ahead to its next chapter, Arustamyan’s leadership will undoubtedly continue to inspire innovative solutions to the pressing environmental challenges facing Armenia and the world.

Arustamyan said, “I could not have won this award without the teamwork and hard work of my ATP colleagues over the past 30 years.”

In receiving this award, Rousanne Arustamyan has once again proven that the synergy between strong leadership, community involvement, and a steadfast commitment to environmental stewardship can yield powerful results. Her journey serves as a reminder of the critical role that women play in building a sustainable future, one tree at a time.

## Chelsea Clinton Joins Aurora Prize Selection Committee

BOSTON — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, dedicated to addressing on-the-ground humanitarian challenges around the world, has appointed Chelsea Clinton, vice chair of the Clinton Foundation, to the Selection Committee of the global Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity. Dr. Clinton is renowned for her efforts to improve lives, inspire emerging leaders around the world, and drive awareness and action around critical issues including health equity.

The Aurora Prize is a \$1-million award that recognizes individuals who risk their own lives to save the lives of others suffering due to violent conflict or atrocity crimes. The Aurora Prize Laureate receives a unique opportunity to continue the cycle of giving by using those funds to empower grassroots humanitarians.

“We are delighted to welcome Chelsea Clinton to the Aurora community. Her longstanding dedication to social change makes her a perfect addition to the Selection Committee, and I am looking forward to working alongside her to shine a light on heroic individuals risking their lives to help those in need,” said Lord Ara Darzi, Chair of Aurora Prize Selection Committee and Co-Director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London. “Chelsea brings a fresh perspective and deep expertise that will undoubtedly

enrich our discussions and ensure a wide range of viewpoints are considered during the selection process.”

A longtime public health advocate, Clinton also serves as vice chair of the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI). In addition to her foundation work, she has taught at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health and written several books including the number-one bestselling *She Persisted*. She is also the co-author of *The Book of Gutsy Women* and *Grandma’s Gardens* with Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton and of *Governing Global Health: Who Runs the World and Why* with Devi Sridhar.

“We all have a role to play in tackling our greatest global challenges,” said Chelsea Clinton, Vice Chair of the Clinton Foundation. “I am honored to join the 2024 Aurora Prize Selection Committee and to continue our partnership through the Clinton Global Initiative to support humanitarian leaders who are making a critical difference in the world.”

The 2024 Aurora Humanitarians short-listed for the 2024 Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity were named on September 18, 2023, at the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) annual meeting in New York City. The eighth Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity was awarded on May 9, 2024, to Dr. Denis Mukwege, a world-renowned



Dr. Chelsea Clinton

gynecological surgeon and human rights activist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Dr. Mukwege is the president of Panzi Hospital and Foundation in the DRC, which he founded in 1999 to address the systemic issue of maternal healthcare and maternal mortality. Amidst ongoing conflict and critical healthcare needs stemming from war, the hospital has become one of the world’s preeminent treatment centers for survivors of sexual violence in conflict.





ARMENIA

# Dutch Volunteers Spend Summer Vacation in Armenia Helping Build Center For Children With Special Needs

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A group of young Dutch volunteers are spending their summer vacations in an Armenian village helping to build a new educational and rehabilitation center for children with special needs.

The construction of this center in the village of Vahagni in Armenia’s Lori Province is being funded by an Armenian charity, but the volunteers from the Netherlands are also contributing their efforts.

Five dozen volunteers with diverse professional backgrounds — including teachers, programmers, nurses, social workers, agriculturists, builders — come from the village of Den Ham in the Netherlands. They say they are investing in the project through funds they managed to save by doing various jobs and selling items at a vintage market in their own village during the year.

“We basically do all sorts of chores throughout the entire year. People can text us using a special phone number. They can say, hey, we have a garden shed that needs new paint or we have grass that needs to be



Dutch volunteers help build an educational and rehabilitation center for children with special needs in the village of Vahagni, Lori Province, Armenia.

mowed. We go there and get paid for the work we do. That money goes into projects,” says Christy Jansen, a Dutch volunteer involved in the construction project in Armenia.

Another volunteer from Den Ham, Martin Plaggenmars, is in Armenia with his two children. He says that, in contrast to their vacation in France last summer, he wants them to experience some challenges this year. Although, he confesses, doing volunteer work in Armenia is “much more fun.”

“I want my children to see that the Dutch really have a very good standard of living, and I want them to give other people a good life. Last year we spent our vacation in France. Now this is also a holiday for us with a little bit of work, a little bit of fun, a lot of fun,” he says.

Mariam Antonian, head of the Astghik Charitable Foundation, emphasizes the ed-

ucational value of the work the volunteers from the Netherlands are doing in Armenia. “Because the parents of these children who live in a carefree environment all the time often find that they do not develop or grow up in the right way. It is very important for them to encounter difficulties and find ways to overcome them. “Overcoming challenges is a key factor in building a successful future,” she says.

The Dutch volunteers are staying in the half-constructed building in Vahagni, which is located approximately 15 kilometers to the northeast of the Lori provincial center of Vanadzor and around 80 kilometers from the capital Yerevan. They have adapted the rooms of this building, which is being transformed into a future educational and rehabilitation center for children, for their temporary stay.

“It’s not difficult. It’s a bit dusty. We

have a lot of dust and sand here, but otherwise, it’s fine. It’s a full experience for us,” Irna Huisjes, a volunteer living and working there, says.

The Astghik Charitable Foundation had purchased the building, which previously housed the village’s bakery, to convert it into the new center using European technologies.

“The new building will be like a thermos. It will retain warmth or coolness inside and won’t let it out. It is going to provide great efficiency. In Europe, they are doing these things a lot now as they realize how important it is to save electricity and not to rely on another country for natural gas,” Antonian explains.

Julian Petter, a professional builder from the Netherlands, says they brought with them most of the construction material needed for proper insulation, since, as he says, much of it is not available in Armenia. The man points out differences between Armenia and the Netherlands when it comes to construction.

“We are very strict on keeping everything as straight as possible. And with the lines here the walls are not straight. So that’s the hardest part for us. But I think this is the Armenian style of building. So that’s really nice to see how it works,” he says.

Vahagni, a village of about 1,000 residents, also has other benefits from the presence of the Dutch volunteers spending their summer vacation there. In-between their main activities, the volunteers also help locals paint fences and perform other tasks.

“I think this holiday is better than my holiday in France because now we’re working for other people and we’re helping other people,” Jesse Plaggenmars, a volunteer from the Netherlands, says.

## Armenia Edits History Textbook After Russian Backlash

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“It wasn’t so much a mistake as it was that the authors may not have considered the issue from that perspective,” the head of the Ministry’s Department of Public Education explained.

In its statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry criticized the textbook, saying that “questioning the special role of the Russian Empire, and later the USSR and Russia, in the formation of today’s Armenia means going against well-known facts.”

“It represents another shameless attempt to rewrite our common history in the best traditions of Western propaganda and political engineering, where white is called black, with the active participation of certain Armenian figures who are zealously trying to serve their patrons,” it claimed.

Russian Ambassador to Armenia Sergey Kopyrkin told reporters on Friday that he had not yet discussed the history textbook issue with Armenian officials. However, he pointed to the “moral aspect” of the issue, stressing the need for “respect for the memory of past generations.”

“There have been no substantive discussions on my part yet. It’s only the second day since my return from vacation, but I believe this is a topic worth discussing together,” the ambassador said.

The Russian ambassador today was attending an event commemorating the 197th anniversary of the heroic battle of Oshakan in Armavir. In 1827, the Russian-Armenian side won the Russo-Persian battle. Months later, on February 21, 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed, resulting in Persia ceding control of several areas in the South Caucasus, including the territory of modern-day Armenia, to the Russian Empire.

## US Embassy to Provide \$74,000 to Matenadaran for Preservation Of Rare Manuscripts from Nagorno Karabakh

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The US Embassy will provide \$74,000 through the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation to the Matenadaran – the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts – for preservation of rare manuscripts and archival documents produced in ancient Armenian monasteries in Nagorno-Karabakh.

US Ambassador to Armenia Kristina Kvien made the announcement during a visit to Yereruyk Basilica in Armenia’s Shirak region this week.

Kvien, along with Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport Zhanna Andreasyan, officials, and representatives of the Shirak region and Anipemza community, visited and toured the historic site of Yereruyk Basilica. This significant event underscored the United States’ commitment to supporting the preservation and restoration of Armenia’s rich cultural heritage, through the \$175,000 investment from the U.S. Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation to conserve this magnificent monument. “Our collaboration in cultural preservation highlights the strong partnership between our nations. Together, we are preserving history and fostering mutual understanding and respect,” said Kvien.

Yereruyk, an ancient basilica dating back to the 4th-5th centuries, stands as a testament to Armenia’s early Christian architecture and historical significance. The site, which has faced challenges due to natural and human

factors, is a focal point for preservation efforts aimed at safeguarding Armenia’s cultural legacy for future generations.

While in Yereruyk, Kvien announced an award of \$74,000 — through the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation — to the “Matenadaran” Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts for pres-

ervation projects since 2005. The Yereruyk initiative includes the fortification of the monument’s walls, replacement of eroded stones, installation of a drainage system to reroute water, improvement of the monument environment, and its preparation as an area for the exhibition of the existing monumental stones.



The Karabakh manuscript

ervation of rare manuscripts and archival documents produced in ancient Armenian monasteries in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Through the Ambassadors Fund, the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan has provided \$1.6 million in funding to support 15 conser-



Other recent AFCP projects for Armenia include, preservation of Sanahin Monastery in Lori Province, restoration of endangered frescoes at St. Hovhannes Church in Meghri, Syunik Province, and preservation of the Areni-1 Cave in Vayots Dzor.





INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Mkhitaryan Says He Wants to Play out Career with Inter

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Inter Milan veteran Henrikh Mkhitaryan is hoping he can end his career at the club, while discussing his new teammate Piotr Zielinski, SempreInter.com reported on August 17.

The Armenian weighed in on several matters in a new interview, beginning from last season’s historic Scudetto triumph.

“I had great emotions because it was my first league title in Europe,” he told DAZN (via FcInterNews).

“It was also the 20th Serie title for Inter and the second star. It was a great achievement. I am happy and proud to be part of this project and this family.”

The 35-year-old admitted his desire to end his career at Inter, but he realizes that it depends on the club’s decision.

Russia, Azerbaijan Start Producing Oil Tankers

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Russia and Azerbaijan have start producing modern river-sea tankers, Russian President Vladimir Putin said after talks with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on Monday, August 19, Tass reported.

“The Russian United Shipbuilding Corporation in cooperation with the Baku Shipbuilding Plant start producing modern river-sea class tankers for carriage of petroleum products. Their use, particularly on the Azov-Black Sea and Caspian routes, will make it possible to noticeably scale up deliveries of energy resources to global markets,” the Russian leader said.

Putin also noted joint plans of Russia and Azerbaijan on implementation of the North-South projects, which will make it possible “to approach coasts of the Indian Ocean and use these routes with mutual benefits and for the mutual interest.

Lukashenko Again Tears into Armenia

MOSCOW (news.am) — The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, said that some post-Soviet countries seek to get benefits from Russia without offering anything in return, during an interview on Rossiya (Russia) television, Gazeta.ru reported on August 16.

Also, Lukashenko made another anti-Armenian statement.

“Who needs Armenians besides us? No one. Let them [i.e. Armenians] develop their economy and decide with their resources. What France or [French President] Macron? Tomorrow he will not be [in power], and everyone will forget about Armenia,” Lukashenko said.

According to the president of Belarus, they are actually “in the same boat” as Russia.

“If it ‘capsizes,’ we will sink together. It is not worth hiding our allied relations. We do not behave like some other countries that only want to take from Russia without giving anything,” said Lukashenko.

Lavrov: Armenia’s Leadership Is Sabotaging Agreement On Communication through Syunik Province

MOSCOW (news.am, Armenpress) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on August 19 spoke to Channel One Russia Television, blaming Armenia for “sabotaging” agreements the country’s leadership signed.

The main thing is to follow the spirit and the letter of a series of tripartite agreements reached between the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in 2020-2022, he said.

“They [i.e. the aforesaid agreements] cover all aspects of the situation, as well as the matters that need to be resolved in order to resolve the issue once and for all and completely.

“We [Russia] are in favor of the early conclusion of the peace treaty [between Armenia and Azerbaijan] and the unblocking of [regional] communications. Unfortunately, as far as communications through the Syunik Province of Armenia are concerned, the leadership of Armenian

is sabotaging the agreement signed by Prime Minister Pashinyan. It is difficult to understand the meaning of such a position,” he said.

He added, “The foundation laid in the framework of trilateral meetings and documents fully preserves modernity,” Lavrov said.

In response, Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ani Badalyan said Lavrov’s claim that Armenia sabotages the agreement to unblock communications through the Syunik region is false.

“The false, clearly biased, often disrespectful comments of various officials of Russia’s Foreign Ministry regarding Armenia, unfortunately, are not new, and if you have noticed, it has been a while since we even reacted to them,” she said.

“However, we should say that yesterday’s statement by the Foreign Minister of Russia not only causes regret but also calls into question the constructive engagement

of the Russian Federation in the normalization process of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Foreign Minister of the state that once undertook a mediator’s mission, signed the November 9, 2020 Statement and deployed a peace-keeping contingent in the region based on it, cannot fail to see that there is not a single key provision of that Statement that is not irrevocably violated, despite Russia’s signature under the document and its participation and responsibility in the processes envisaged by it,” Badalyan said.

She added, “We also believe that the Foreign Minister of Russia is well aware that apart from public documents, Armenia is not a part of any other agreement and, therefore, cannot sabotage them.”

Badalyan noted that the country is emphasizing the “Crossroads of Peace” project presented by the Government of Armenia and that it is recognized among the international community

Lawmakers in Turkey Draw Blood in Brawl during Debate on Jailed Colleague

By Andrew Wilks

ISTANBUL (AP) — A brawl broke out among Turkish lawmakers Friday, August 16, during a heated debate over an opposition delegate currently jailed on what are widely considered to be politically motivated charges.

Televised footage showed Ahmet Sik, a representative from the same party as the imprisoned deputy, being approached and attacked by a lawmaker from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ruling party while speaking at the chamber’s podium. Sik had just called members of the ruling party a “terrorist organization.”

In a subsequent scuffle involving dozens of deputies, a female lawmaker was struck, leaving drops of blood on steps leading the speaker’s lectern. Another opposition member was also reportedly injured.

Physical tussles are not uncommon among Turkey’s lawmakers.

“It is a shameful situation,” said Ozgur Ozel, who heads the largest opposition party. “Instead of words flying in the air, fists are flying, there is blood on the ground. They are hitting women.”

The extraordinary session of the Turkish Grand National Assembly was called to debate the case of Can Atalay, who was elected from prison as a parliamentary deputy for the Workers’ Party of Turkey, or TIP, in last year’s election.

He had been sentenced the previous year to 18 years’ imprisonment for his role in anti-government protests in 2013, which challenged the rule of Erdogan, then Turkey’s prime minister.

Since being elected, Atalay has been fighting to take his seat in parliament, which comes with immunity from prosecution and would see him released from Marmara prison. He has said he would return to prison once his term ends.

Although he has achieved successful rulings from the Constitutional Court, these have been ignored by lower courts, sparking a judicial crisis and enflaming a sense of injustice among his supporters.

In its third ruling in Atalay’s favor, the Constitutional Court on August 1 said the decision to strip him of his parliamentary status was “null and void.”

Opposition parties then demanded a special session to discuss the case.

The conviction of Atalay and seven other defendants in the Gezi Park case led to widespread criticism from human rights groups and lawyers.

The main defendant, philanthropist Osman Kavala, was jailed for life without parole. The European Court of Human Rights has twice called for his release, saying his detention was arbitrary and based on political motives.

The Gezi Park protests began in the summer of 2013 with an environmental camp to stop the development of a central Istanbul park. The discontent soon spread to other cities as people protested against Erdogan’s increasingly authoritarian rule.

“Atalay’s personal freedom and security, as well as his right to be elected, which the Constitutional Court ruled to have been violated, should be restored,” Amnesty International’s Turkey office said Friday in a social media post.

The parliamentary session resumed after three hours, with both Sik and his assailant accepting reprimands from the parliament’s speaker.

Azerbaijan: Operations Restart at Controversial Gold Mine

Azerbaijani officials have green-lighted the resumption of operations at a controversial gold mine following a more than year-long hiatus due to public protests over pollution concerns.

Trouble at the mine near the village of Soyudlu in western Azerbaijan’s Gadabay District began in mid-2023, when its operator, Anglo Asian Mining, sought to build a second artificial lake to handle mine tailings. The announcement at that time provoked a fierce backlash from local residents. Security forces, in turn, used force to quash protests, including the widespread use of pepper spray-like substances against elderly demonstrators. Multiple arrests were also reported. Local residents opposed the planned expansion, saying lax standards in the storage of toxic waste created by mining operations was causing serious health problems and poisoning surrounding agricultural lands.

In addition to cracking down on local protesters, authorities locked down the area, hindering media coverage of the protests and their aftermath. At the same time,

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev criticized the mine operator’s practices and vowed that environmental standards would be upheld. Operations at the mine were put on hold.

That pause lasted just over a year.

On August 5, Anglo Asian Mining announced that it had received an authorization to restart operations, including the expansion of an existing pond containing toxic waste.

“We have also started mobilizing resources to restart flotation and agitation leaching processing and expect to recommence full production in approximately one week. This marks the end of a year-long disruption, and we look forward to normalizing production,” the company statement quotes CEO Reza Vaziri as saying.

Anglo Asian Mining is the country’s largest gold and copper producer and holds the rights to eight deposits across the country. Azerbaijan generated about \$162 million in gold exports in 2023, down roughly 14 percent over the previous year’s total of \$188 million. An investigative report published

by OCCRP in 2016 revealed that Aliyev’s daughters, Arzu and Leyla, had extensive interests at that time in Azerbaijan’s gold mining industry.

The renewed operations at the mine come as Aliyev’s administration is preparing to host the annual UN environmental summit, or COP29, in Baku. The mine near Soyudlu now threatens to become a focal point of undesired attention, at least from officials’ viewpoint, on the government’s environmental record, along with other contentious issues, including Baku’s vanishing green space and a growing water shortage in central Azerbaijan.

The announcement generated lots of heat on social media. One Facebook user commented on the news: “The health of the people is of no importance to the oppressive government. This is why the ordinary citizens were put in jail [in Soyudlu], so that when the construction works resume, people should remain in fear.”

“Visitors to COP29 should be taken to see the toxic waste lake too,” another wrote.





INTERNATIONAL

# Are There Israeli Military Forces in Azerbaijan, and Could Iran Strike Them? A Comment from Baku

BAKU (JAM News) — Recently, Israeli state television channel 11KAN reported that the Israeli military leadership had ordered its personnel, who for some reason were in Georgia and Azerbaijan, to leave these countries. The British publication *The Telegraph* subsequently reported that Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian had suggested striking secret Israeli bases in neighboring countries.

This series of news has raised two serious questions:

Are there Israeli military forces stationed in Azerbaijan and Georgia?

And could Iran actually strike these neighboring countries?

Azerbaijani political analysts believe that there are no Israeli military forces in Azerbaijan and that these statements are provocations intended to draw the South Caucasus countries into the Middle Eastern conflict.

### What Happened?

On Monday, August 12, 11KAN reported that the Israeli military leadership had ordered its personnel to leave Georgia and Azerbaijan. However, neither the Israeli military press office nor other Israeli media have referenced the actual order.

Several Israeli media outlets contacted the Israeli military press office for clarification but did not receive a clear response.

The Israeli military press office provided a brief reply to the Israeli site Vesty.co.il: “The Israel Defense Forces continually assesses the situation and updates information about the countries where soldiers are permitted entry.”

In other words, the military neither confirmed nor denied the information from 11KAN.

In response to a query from the Azerbaijani news agency Turan, the Israeli Embassy in Azerbaijan stated that they had no comment on the matter. The official Baku authorities have also not yet commented on the information from the Israeli site.

### Indirect Denial in Azerbaijan

Meanwhile, the Azerbaijan Media Development Agency has issued a statement noting:

“Recently, media outlets in certain countries, citing sources of questionable reliability, have spread misinformation about Azerbaijan that does not reflect reality and is aimed at misleading both the local and international public.”

The statement specifically mentions the channels Iran International, The Telegraph, and 11KAN.

“We declare that there are no foreign military contingents in Azerbaijan and firmly condemn the manipulation of information based on false data,” the statement reads.

It is noteworthy that the British publication *The Telegraph*, citing its own sources, reported that “IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) generals insist on direct strikes against Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities, with a focus on military bases to avoid civilian casualties. However, newly elected President Masoud Pezeshkian has suggested targeting secret Israeli bases in neighboring countries.”

Meanwhile, the United States has stated that Israel could be subjected to an attack by Iran this week.

### “Azerbaijan is not a battleground for other countries’ conflicts”

The increasing tension in the Middle

East has inevitably impacted the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, notes Elhan Shahinoglu, head of the Atlas Research Center:

“If the Iranian president suggested attacking Israeli positions in neighboring countries, he’d mention Azerbaijan, implying a planned attack on the Israeli embassy in our country. If Tehran seeks to implement such a plan, it would automatically escalate tensions in Azerbaijani-Iranian relations.

Azerbaijan is not a battleground for other countries’ conflicts.”

While discussions on this issue were ongoing, Israel’s state broadcaster Kan aired a report stating that the Israeli military had prohibited its personnel from staying in Azerbaijan and Georgia due to the threat of an Iranian attack.

According to the report, by order of the military leadership, Israelis serving for any reason in these two South Caucasian republics are required to return to their country immediately.

“This is a provocation. There are no Israeli military units or soldiers in Azerbaijan. With this provocative news, Israel’s state television has played into the hands of anti-Azerbaijani conservative circles and SEPAH generals in Iran.

They have been spreading myths about Israeli military presence in Azerbaijan for years. Now they will say, ‘See, even Israel has confirmed it.

Although Azerbaijan is not involved in the Middle Eastern tensions and the Iran-Israel conflict, they want to drag us into the turmoil. In this situation, the importance of Azerbaijan’s strategic alliance with Turkey is once again highlighted,” thinks Elhan Shahinoglu.

### “Israel has no need to maintain military bases in Azerbaijan”

This is not the first time Iran has accused Azerbaijan of supporting Zionists and allowing their presence on its territory, noted political analyst Khaleddin Ibrahimli in an interview with Turan:

“However, the fact that this accusation was made by the newly elected President Masoud Pezeshkian, who is of Turkic descent, suggests that the mullah regime brought him to power to unite the Turkic people around the government.

“It seems that having one Turk in the position of Rahbar (Ali Khamenei) was not enough to support the regime; they needed another Turk as president,” says Ibrahimli.

In his view, “the election of a Turkic-descendant president in Iran is part of a project with far-reaching goals, and Iran’s stance towards Azerbaijan may become even more radical. Tehran likely assumes that the election of Pezeshkian as president will not provoke a negative reaction neither from the Turkic people nor the Iranian armed forces.”

Ibrahimli also noted that Pezeshkian has not yet denied the report published in *The Telegraph*: “Until Pezeshkian denies the claim about the possibility of striking ‘secret Israeli bases in neighboring countries,’ the theory of Iran’s aggressive plans against Azerbaijan will remain relevant.”

Regarding the possibility of Azerbaijan’s cooperation with Israel, Ibrahimli expressed doubt about the existence of Israeli military bases in Azerbaijan.

“Any objective analysis shows that Israel has no need to maintain military bases in Azerbaijan, as Israel does not have significant issues with Iran, contrary to what might appear,” the expert concluded.

## Turkish Ambassador Says Israel and US Should Be Brought to Their Knees; Ankara Has no Objections to Harsh Retaliation by Iran

By Levent Kenez

STOCKHOLM (Nordic Monitor) — In an exclusive interview with Iran’s semi-official Tasnim News Agency, which is associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Turkey’s ambassador to Iran said Ankara cannot dictate how Iran should retaliate against Israel following the assassination of Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. However, he emphasized that the real answer lies in regional countries uniting to deliver a collective response that would bring Israel and the United States to their knees.

Speaking about the assassination, Turkish Ambassador to Iran Hicabi Kirlangic said Turkey has no advice to offer Iran regarding its planned retaliation against Israel, which Iran has blamed for the assassination. He added that there were no proposals from Turkey or other countries suggesting restraint, such as “be calm, be patient, avoid a military response, don’t respond too violently”

“Iran will make its own decision, that much is clear. It also appears determined, but we do not know what kind of response it will provide. Time will tell. Whether there will be a military response is also uncertain. What is clear is that the most effective response should be one that compels these aggressor countries to re-

treat and be brought to their knees,” he added.

The ambassador’s reference to aggressor countries clearly includes Israel and the United States along with their allies. Kirlangic also pointed out that the developments following Haniyeh’s assassination are not solely Iran’s responsibility but involve all the countries in the region. He questioned whether those who hosted Haniyeh or claimed to support the Palestinian cause would bear no responsibility in this matter.

“Of course, I want patience. Iran will make its decision with steadfastness and patience, and perhaps it will make the best decision. We cannot know that. We can only respect it,” he said.

The ambassador also stated that the lack of sufficient power to counter Israel due to the political systems in Islamic countries was not a positive sign. He noted that while Iran and Turkey are making significant efforts, Iran is currently leading in efforts to counter Israel. However, Iran must also consider and be cautious about its own borders, resources and territorial integrity.

He emphasized that responsibility should not fall solely on Iran, nor should Turkey be expected to respond while the remaining Islamic countries stay silent. “We need to view this situation as we would the Mongol invasions,” he said.

Kirlangic, who was appointed ambassador by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on February 23, 2023, previously had no experience in diplomacy. Prior to his appointment, he was an academic at Ankara University. Kirlangic served as a member of the Ministry of Education’s Children’s Publishing and Advisory Board and was a member of the Turkish Language Association’s Science Board. He was president of the Turkish Writers’ Union for two terms. Additionally, he was a founding member and board member of the Mevlana Studies Association. Kirlangic has also published books and articles in Farsi.

There has recently been a significant decrease in the number of career ambassadors in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to political appointments.

Meanwhile Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, after meeting with his Egyptian counterpart, Badr Abdelatty, in Cairo on August 5, condemned the ongoing pattern of regional conflict. He said, “... with the recent assassination of Hamas’s leader, there is once again a call for restraint. This pattern is no longer sustainable. It is no longer acceptable for the US to mitigate every wrongdoing of Israel. The owners [of Israel] must hold the leash firmly. The region can no longer tolerate further Israeli provocations.”

President Erdogan has described Hamas as “resistance fighters,” comparing them

to the Kuvay-i Milliye (Turkey’s National Forces), an irregular militia that played a crucial role in Turkey’s War of Independence following World War I.

“I am saying it very clearly and explicitly here. During the national struggle [for independence] in Turkey, what Kuvay-i Milliye was to Turkey, Hamas is exactly the same. We are aware, of course, that there is a price to pay for saying this. We know that it’s difficult to speak the truth ... during such a period. But let the whole world know this and comprehend it,” Erdogan declared on April 17.

Erdogan went so far as to threaten Israel with military action on behalf of Hamas. On July 31, during a party meeting in his hometown of Rize, he 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.”

Nordic Monitor released a report last week indicating that Turkey’s national weather agency, the General Directorate for Meteorology (MGM), has been supplying sophisticated weather data to Iran, which could be used for military operations. This poses a significant threat given Iran’s known support of global terrorism.

Interestingly, the same data has also been provided to NATO allies Germany, the UK and Italy and the NATO European Command (SHAPE), all of which have



# Community News

## UCLA Promise Armenian Institute Announces Grant And Fellowship Recipients

LOS ANGELES — The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA — The UCLA Promise Armenian Institute (PAI) is pleased to announce the selection of the following individuals to receive research support during 2024-2025. PAI grants and fellowships are designed to support research across all academic fields, with an emphasis on or connection to Armenia or Armenians.

### PAI Postdoctoral Fellowships

Samvel Grigoryan (PhD, Paul-Valéry University of Montpellier, 2021) will pursue a research project entitled, ‘Cancellaria Regni Armeniae’ and its Communication with the Foreign Courts and Actors”

Under the mentorship of Dr. Peter Cowe, the UCLA Narektsi Professor of Armenian Studies, Dr. Grigoryan will provide a systematic survey of the activity of the “Janc’lerut’iwn Hayoc” / “Cancellaria [Regni] Armeniae” (“[Royal] Chancellery of Armenia”), connecting chancelleries and document production in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. He will examine the manifestations of power, geopolitical reality, interstate relations, dependences and sovereign’s sacrality through wording, terminology, nomenclature and symbolism of royal charters. There will also be a focus on the creation of a digital database (titled “Jansler”) of the documents from the Royal Chancellery of Armenia.

Burcu Bugu (Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 2024) will pursue a research project entitled, “Contours of Belonging: Alevized Armenians in Dersim - Negotiating Identity, Memory, and Resistance”

Under the mentorship of Dr. Salih Can Açıksöz, associate professor in the UCLA Department of Anthropology, Dr. Bugu will examine the complex dynamics of identity and belonging among Alevized Armenians in Dersim, a region historically known to be a refuge for persecuted communities. Focusing on the intersection of Armenian and Alevi-Kurdish histories, Dr. Bugu will explore how Dersimi Armenians negotiate their ethno-religious identities in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide and subsequent massacres. She will also investigate the current activities of many Alevized Armenians, including reconversion to Christianity and establishment of connections with wider Armenian communities, in addition to exploring their impact on the transmission of cultural heritage.

### PAI Travel and Research Grants

Victor Agadjanian, PhD, (Distinguished Professor of Sociology, UCLA) will receive travel grant funds to pursue a research project entitled, “Male Labor Migration and Rural Women’s Health: Understanding Connections and Optimizing Actions.”

see GRANTS, page 7



Opening day at Aragats Summer Camp

## FAR’s Aragats Camp Offers Respite for Young Artsakh Refugees

YEREVAN/NEW YORK — For Arevik, 13, and Edita, 11, the summer camp at Aragats in Hankavan, Kotayk Province, run by the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), has been a place of recovery and a valuable platform for connecting with other displaced Artsakh children and peers from various regions of Armenia.

A few years ago, the sisters attended a summer camp in Artsakh. “It was a three-day outdoor camp where we did a lot of hiking, including a visit to the ‘Tatik-Papik’ statue in Stepanakert,” recalls Arevik, her eyes filled with emotion as she remembers the 12 happy and memorable years she spent in Artsakh.

The family once lived in Poghosagomer village in the Martakert region. Arevik used to dream of becoming a hairstylist to help villagers with different haircuts and styles. “Now, I want to become a doctor to heal the injured and prevent illnesses,” said Arevik, who excels in STEM subjects at Sisian Secondary School and aims to attend medical school.

Despite the fresh memories of Azerbaijani shelling and forced displacement, she remains unafraid. “I was coming home on September 19 when the bombing started. It was very loud, and I barely made it home. Mom took us to the basement, where we stayed overnight. The next day, our granny came, and we headed to Stepanakert for



five days before moving to Sisian, where we’ve been staying for months,” she noted, adding that their faith kept them strong.

The sisters, like thousands of other Artsakh children, missed school for a while but are now thriving academically. “One valuable lesson we learned at Aragats camp is to behave well and politely towards each other, respect one another, and be friendly,” said Edita. She admitted that Arevik often calms her down when she misbehaves. “We participated in physical and intellectual activities, like outdoor Olympiads, painting, and reading. I painted a girl’s portrait, and Edita drew a vase with fruit. I loved the Armenian dance ‘Khamkhama’ because it symbolizes unity and strength,” noted Arevik, while Edita added, “I liked ‘Papuri’ the most, a national Armenian dance we often performed at the camp.”

The Aragats Summer Camp started on June 24 and continued until July 26 in two shifts. A total of 317 FAR-supported children from different regions of Armenia, including orphans, children from low-income families, displaced kids from Artsakh, and Syrian Armenian children, enjoyed a two-week vacation filled with dance, patriotic songs, traditional games and learning about customs from various regions. Each day ended with a summary of the day’s events, joyful songs, dances, and a beloved disco night.

The children engaged in sports competitions, exhibitions of paintings and handicrafts, and expeditions. They found the visits and conversations with scientists from the Armenian National Science Education Foundation and the Armenian Society of Fellows. The camp provided them with fun, nutritious food, improved health, new friendships and lasting memories filled with warmth and joy.

To help continue efforts like the Aragats Summer Camp, visit FAR’s website, <https://www.farusa.org/>

## Celebrating Empathy On World Humanitarian Day

“A human can inspire another human. And that process, the identifying of people who can take it upon themselves through their stories and the narrative that comes around that, creates a symphony of empathy, as opposed to individual acts,” said Aurora Co-Founder Noubar Afeyan during a podcast recorded in partnership with Devex, the independent news organization dedicated to global development.

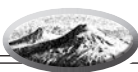
The podcast, released on World Humanitarian Day, on August 19, was led by Raj Kumar, president and editor-in-chief of Devex, and featured Noubar Afeyan, co-founder and chair of the Board of Directors of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering, and co-founder and chairman of Moderna; Alice Greenwald, Aurora Board Member, founder and principal of Memory Matters and former president and CEO of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum; and Mirza Dinnayi, 2019 Prize Laureate and co-founder and director of Air Bridge Iraq.

Afeyan also talked about the inspiration behind Aurora and the changes he and his fellow co-founders wanted to introduce to the humanitarian sphere with its launch. “The three of us [Afeyan, Ruben Vardanyan and Vartan Gregorian] conceived of a way to honor the memory of the victims of the Genocide, and more importantly, the people who saved the lives of those whose descendants we are,” remarked Dr. Afeyan. “We’ve really doubled down the community. We’ve gotten the people together. We’re learning from them. We think this is one complementary way to attract a generation of folks. At a time with both man-made and natural disasters – the pandemic, climate change – humanitarianism is going to be, unfortunately, in ever-growing demand, and we think that this Initiative can help people really prepare for the moment where you have the opportunity to save others.”

Dinnayi recalled receiving news of being nominated for the 2019 Aurora Prize at a very challenging time in his life, and how that gave him strength to go on. “They told me that I have been selected as one of the finalists, one of three finalists. I didn’t expect even that I would get the Prize. I just was happy because I was working very hard with the victims [of ISIS]. It was a period of my life where I said, “Yeah, I am completely destroyed because of all the traumatized people that I am dealing with.” And you don’t need to hear ‘thank you’ from the people, but you just need a kind of recognition, moral recognition. So, it was so important for me to have that,” explained Dinnayi, who was

see EMPATHY, page 7





COMMUNITY NEWS

Former Artsakh Rep. Avetisyan Appointed as Assembly’s New Research Director

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America this week announced the appointment of Robert Avetisyan as the organization’s new Director of Research and Analysis.

Avetisyan previously served as Permanent Representative of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR) to the United States from 2009 until 2023 in Washington, D.C., where he was the point of contact between Stepanakert and Washington, D.C., and helped maintain strong ties with Armenian Americans.

Avetisyan’s extensive career led to his engagement with high-level diplomats, elected officials, businessmen, and Armenian diasporan communities throughout the U.S. He has been an invited



speaker at major universities, including his alma mater Tufts University, as well as important community events such as the Armenian Genocide Commemoration in Times Square, New York.

Born in Stepanakert, Artsakh, Avetisyan holds a master’s degree in international relations from the Fletcher School

of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University), a master’s degree in international development policy from the Sanford School of Public Policy (Duke University), and a bachelor’s degree in philology from the Artsakh State University.

“I extend my deep appreciation to the Assembly Board and leadership and look forward to continuing my service towards a stronger and safer Armenian Homeland,” said Avetisyan.

“Robert’s extensive professional background, in-depth knowledge of the region and experience in politics, research, and diplomacy will certainly be a positive addition to the Assembly staff,” said Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny.

UCLA Promise Armenian Institute Announces Grant And Fellowship Recipients

GRANTS, from page 6

This project will link men’s international labor migration with “left-behind” women’s health in rural Armenia. It will examine how men’s migration, through its gendered effects on family resources, opportunities, and relationships, may facilitate or obstruct women’s demand for, access to, and utilization of two types of health services: reproductive healthcare and breast/gynecological cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. The findings will inform policies aimed at improving the health and well-being of migrants’ families.

Liza Mardoyan (Doctoral student, UCLA Department of Information Studies) will receive travel grant funds to pursue a research project entitled, “Knowledge Production via Print Culture in the Armenian Diasporic Community of Beirut, Lebanon.”

This project aims to elucidate how a forcibly displaced community produces and sustains knowledge in its native language in a diasporic setting by investigating the complex interplay between the establishment of schools and publishing houses and the resulting print culture. Motivated by the disappearance of Armenian publishing house archives, this study endeavors to preserve and construct the community’s history. The researcher aims to gather preliminary data through archival research and oral history interviews, shaping a comprehensive understanding of Armenian diasporic print culture.

Celebrating Empathy on World Humanitarian Day

EMPATHY, from page 6

awarded the Aurora Prize in 2019 for his outstanding efforts to help the most vulnerable members of the Yazidi community during numerous conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

Speaking of making a choice to be “an upstander, not just a bystander,” Greenwald brought up the story of this year’s Aurora Prize Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege, a world-renowned gynecological surgeon and human rights activist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). “He has worked to provide healing and recovery for women, not just medically, but in every facet of their lives, psychologically, emotionally, socially, economically. It’s about bringing people back to full, their

full humanity after a trauma of unthinkable proportions,” said Ms. Greenwald. “I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Mukwege some years ago in Yerevan, Armenia. I asked him, somewhat naively, “Denis, how did you get into this line of work?” And he looked at me, stopped in his tracks, and he said, “Alice, everyone has a mother.” And that’s all he said. That’s the core of what Aurora is about. That is the core of what the humanitarian impulse is about. It’s recognizing what we share in common as human beings, not what divides us.”

As the discussion drew to a close, Kumar revisited Afeyan’s powerful concept of moving from “a deficit of empathy to a symphony of empathy,” and commended Aurora for embodying a spirit of in-

novation in the humanitarian field. “It’s probably my bias as an entrepreneur, but I tend to think that development in the humanitarian community could use a little bit more disruption. And I think one of the things that’s so exciting listening to all of you talk about Aurora is it’s a disruptive idea. This is a community of people who really aim to do good things in the world. I think about people who work at UN agencies and big international NGOs. These are people who’ve dedicated their lives to doing important and good work, and yet they too are frustrated by the way the system works. And a new idea, a fresh idea, a more expansive idea is something a lot of people will embrace and want to engage with,” noted Kumar.

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



**Tekeyan Cultural Association**  
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**Friday, September 6, 2024 at 7:30 PM**  
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117 South Louise Street, Glendale, CA 91205

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Bayramian Publishes Novel, *Les Certitudes de Michel*

*Les Certitudes de Michel* by Vicken Bayramian is a tour de force of modern literature, a novel that not only captivates with its poignant narrative but also immerses readers in a stylistic brilliance that is both breathtaking and deeply moving. Set against the harrowing backdrop of the Lebanese Civil War, this novel is a profound exploration of the human spirit, resilience, and the transformative power of love and personal growth.

Bayramian's novel unfolds with the precision and sensitivity of an artist who intimately understands both the tumult of conflict and the intricacies of the human soul. The story's setting — Beirut, during one of its darkest times — serves as both a literal and metaphorical landscape. The city's ruins and its fractured society become a poignant reflection of Michel's own internal struggles and aspirations. Through the chaos and destruction, Bayramian crafts a narrative that is as hauntingly beautiful as it is heart-wrenching.

At the heart of this novel is Michel, a character whose journey from certainty to a quest for unattainable freedom mirrors the broader socio-political upheavals surrounding him. Bayramian's portrayal of Michel's emotional and intellectual evolution is both nuanced and compelling. Michel's experiences during the war, coupled with his rigorous, solitary pursuit of a law degree in Paris, create a rich tapestry of personal and philosophical growth. These elements are deftly woven together to highlight the stark contrasts between his past certitudes and his evolving quest for meaning and freedom.

The novel's depiction of love is equally profound and beautifully rendered. Michel's romance, unfolding amid the ruins of Beirut, is not merely a subplot but a central force that drives his character development. Bayramian captures the intensity and fragility of love in such a way that it becomes both a sanctuary and a catalyst for change. The love story is imbued with a sense of tragic beauty that resonates deeply, underscoring the notion that even in the

midst of devastation, the human heart remains a powerful source of hope and transformation.

Bayramian's stylistic prowess is evident throughout the novel. His prose is lyrical and evocative, filled with vivid imagery and a rhythmic cadence that enhances the emotional weight of the story. The novel's structure — alternating between Michel's past experiences and his present struggles — creates a dynamic narrative flow that keeps readers engaged and deeply invested in his journey. The author's ability to blend poetic language with raw, honest emotion results in a reading experience that is both intellectually stimulating and profoundly affecting.

Furthermore, *Les Certitudes de Michel* pays homage to influential thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Kahlil Gibran. Bayramian's philosophical underpinnings are subtly interwoven into the narrative, reflecting Nietzsche's exploration of existential themes and Gibran's contemplations on love and human nature. This homage enriches the novel's thematic complexity, offering readers a multifaceted exploration of freedom, destiny, and the search for personal truth.

Bayramian's *Les Certitudes de Michel* is a remarkable achievement that stands out not only for its poignant and evocative storytelling but also for its profound philosophical and emotional depth. It is a novel that invites readers to reflect on the nature of certainty, freedom, and the transformative power of love against the backdrop of personal and collective turmoil. Bayramian's masterful narrative and stylistic elegance make this book an essential read for anyone seeking a deeply moving and intellectually rewarding literary experience.

Available now in the original French on Amazon.com, cover picture by Vahe Berberian. All royalties will be paid to the children of the Artsakh war. The English version of the novel will be available in September and the Eastern Armenian version before the end of 2024.



## Evanston's Narek Bell Choir Performs in Armenia

YEREVAN — During a concert in Yerevan's prestigious Arno Babajanian Concert Hall, titled "Komitas: Musician and Poet," an ensemble of young musicians from the Eastern Diocese contributed to a celebration of the musical and poetic legacy of one of Armenia's most cherished figures.

The Narek Bell Choir of St. James of Nisibis Church (Evanston, IL), under the direction of pastor Fr. Hovhan Khoja-Eynatyan, were featured performers in the July 2 event, which was part of an ambitious concert series conceived by singer-songwriter Vahan Artsruni, celebrating the 155th anniversary of Komitas Vardapet.

The concert featured a blend of Komitas' original compositions as well as innovative interpretations of his legacy, by such acclaimed artists as Anna Mayilyan (an "Honored Artist of the Republic of Armenia"); and Vahan Artsruni and the world-renowned KVart Ensemble, who presented excerpts from Artsruni's "Komitas: Ten Revelations" song series. The Narek Bell Choir performed Komitas' spiritual and secular music as arranged by Fr. Khoja-Eynatyan, himself a distinguished musician and educator.

A focal point of the event was the exhibition of the painting "Komitas" by Valentin Podpomogov, displayed in the concert hall's foyer. The exhibition marked the 100th anniversary of the painter's birth, and the painting (which served as the heart of the concert poster) added a profound visual dimension to the evening's homage to Komitas.

This remarkable opportunity was made possible by the participation of Bell Choir members in this summer's ACYOA Juniors Armenia Service Program, led by Fr. Hratch Sargsyan (pastor of the Diocese's St. Gregory of Narek parish in Cleveland, OH). During their time in the homeland, the young bell ringers engaged in various service activities while sharing the healing power of music with people across Armenia. Performances they gave in Gyumri's Center for Children with Disabilities, at Camp Aragats, and in Yerevan's Arabakir Senior Center, touched the hearts and lifted the spirits of audience members.



**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](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com),
- 8) The deadline of receiving the applications is September 30, 2024.
- 9) The administrators and managers of the fund will vote the qualified winners in October, 2024 based on the merits of each applicant.
- 10) The winners will receive their awards in November, 2024
- 11) Winning applicants are not eligible to apply again.
- 12) This announcement is published in Armenian, English, French and Spanish.

July 10, 2024

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





COMMUNITY NEWS

Society for Armenian Studies to Mark 50th Anniversary with Conference at Harvard, NAASR

FRESNO — The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) is set to celebrate a significant milestone, its 50th anniversary, with a three-day international conference at Harvard University and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) on September 13-15, 2024. The SAS was founded in 1974 by esteemed scholars Richard Hovannisian, Robert Thomson, Nina Garsoïan, Dickran Kouymjian, and Avedis Sanjian.

Entitled “Armenian Studies: Evolving Connections and Conversations” the conference is co-sponsored by The Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies (Harvard University); The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (Belmont, MA); The Promise Armenian Institute (University of California, Los Angeles); The Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History (University of California, Los Angeles); The Narekatsi Chair in Armenian Studies (University of California, Los Angeles); The Armenian Studies Program (California State University, Fresno); The Institute for Armenian Studies (University of Southern California); The Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies (Clark University); The Center for Armenian Studies (University of California, Irvine);

The Center for Armenian Studies (University of Michigan, Dearborn); The Institute of Armenian Studies (University of Southern California); The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (Belmont, MA); The Armenian Studies Program (University of California, Berkeley); and The Armenian Research Center (University of Michigan, Dearborn).

Over fifty scholars from Armenia, Turkey, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, England, Australia, and the United States will participate in the three-day conference. The conference will deal with connections and conversation in Armenian Studies that include—but are not limited to—the study of diaspora, migration, and forced displacement; collective violence, trauma, memory, and genocide; race and ethnicity; women, gender, and sexuality; environment; transnational and global mobility of people and ideas; art, architecture, and material culture; print and other established and emerging foci.

“The Society of Armenian Studies was founded upon the conviction of the vital need to cultivate and support scholars and students of Armenian Studies,” said Prof. Christina Maranci, the President of SAS and the holder of the Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies at Harvard University.” “The 50th anniversary is a moment not

only to celebrate how far we have come but also to reflect on where we stand and to explore directions for the future of the field,” she continued.

The first day of the conference includes a reflection on the Society’s fifty-year history and recognition of the contributions of eminent scholars who have passed away. These scholars include Robert Thomson, Avedis Sanjian, Robert Hewsen, Nina Garsoïan, Sirarpie Der Nersessian, Lucy Der Manuelian, George Bournoutian, Anahide Ter Minassian, Louise Nalbandian, Richard G. Hovannisian, Dennis Papazian, and Vahakn N. Dadrian.

On the occasion of its 50th Anniversary, the Society will also award The Society of Armenian Studies (SAS) Lifetime Achievement Award to Stepan Astourian, Anny Bakalian, Levon Chorbajian, Roberta Ervine, Jirair Libaridian, Krikor Maksoudian, Levon Marashlian, Rubina Peroomian, and Abraham Terian in recognition and appreciation for their outstanding service and contribution to the field of Armenian Studies.

“This is a huge milestone in the history of SAS,” said Prof. Bedross Der Matossian, Chair of the Organizing Committee of the conference and Past President of SAS. “The breadth, the scope, and the multidisciplinary approaches of the papers to be

delivered at the conference demonstrate how SAS has evolved from a handful of scholars to become the most important academic society in the Western Hemisphere with cutting-edge approaches to Armenian Studies,” he continued.

The Society of Armenian Studies is an international body, composed of scholars and students, whose aims are to promote the study of Armenian culture and society, including history, language, literature, and social, political and economic questions.

For those interested in joining or seeking more information on SAS, they can visit [www.societyforarmenianstudies.com](http://www.societyforarmenianstudies.com). Membership in the Society offers a wealth of benefits, including access to a global network of scholars, opportunities to present research, and updates on the latest developments in Armenian studies.

The panels at Harvard will be held in the Sackler Lecture Hall, 485 Broadway, Cambridge, Mass., and the panels at NAASR will be held in the NAASR Headquarters, 395 Concord Ave, Belmont, MA.

For the complete conference program, please click on SAS 50th Anniversary Conference.

The conference is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact Prof. Bedross Der Matossian at [bdermatossian2@unl.edu](mailto:bdermatossian2@unl.edu).

OBITUARY

Shushan Teager  
Dedicated to Learning, Active in NAASR

BELMONT, Mass. — Shushan Yeni-Komshian Teager died on August 6, 2024. She was 93.

She was born in 1931 in Beirut, Lebanon, to Helen and Dr. Hovsep Yeni-Komshian, the oldest of five children.

She grew up speaking Armenian, English, French and Turkish, none of which

served her well when she started primary school at the British Syrian Training College (BSTC), a missionary run school where classes were taught in Arabic.

In 1949, she left Lebanon to enroll at Wellesley College where she earned a BS in Chemistry in 1952 with the goal of attending medical school. In that era, however,



acceptance was not an easy task for either women or foreign students, so she pivoted, enrolling at MIT where she earned a degree in chemical engineering, and more importantly met her future husband, Herbert M. Teager through a fateful meeting at the MIT Armenian Students Association. For him, it was love at first heated discussion. For her, some convincing was in order, but not much. They married in 1953. For a brief time, she worked in Cambridge, developing compounds to seal bottled beverages, after which she and her husband moved to Valejo, Calif., where he served as a lieutenant in the United States Navy, and she was employed as his chief civilian assistant.

Together they pioneered the use of computers in the construction of nuclear submarines, most notably, the USS Sargo (SSN-583). It marked the beginning of a professional partnership that lasted over three decades.

After Herbert completed his military service, the couple moved to Watertown, Mass., where they started a family. Shushan managed to balance the demands of raising two boys while working beside her husband as a research associate first at MIT, and later at Boston University Medical Center, where he was a professor in chief of the Bio-Medical Engineering

Department. It was her responsibility not just to help with his research in speech and hearing, but also to keep his laboratory afloat financially through meticulous editing of grant applications and scientific papers. She also managed to make time to take on consulting work, writing computer programs for research in sickle cell anemia.

In 1990, tragedy struck with the loss of her husband. Shushan pivoted yet again, traveling extensively, attending classes in Armenian studies at Harvard, and becoming more involved with the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), where she served on the board. In her second career, she mounted exhibits of Armenian handiwork, researched Pre-Christian Armenian traditions, wrote scholarly papers, and eventually published a book, *The Krajians of Aintab*, a history of her mother’s family from the 1700s to the present. In 2004, she welcomed the first of her two grandchildren into the family, and in her inimitable fashion, immersed herself in shaping their educational growth from day one.

Shushan did not limit sharing her passion for learning to just her family. From her earliest days in Lebanon, where her schooling was in a language that no one spoke at home to the very end of her life, where she took tremendous joy building her Farsi vocabulary at the local Persian coffee shop while drinking espresso and savoring almond cookies, her love of learning was both contagious and inspirational. She shared that love with everyone she met, and hopefully left those around her a little happier, and a lot smarter.

She is survived by her siblings, Margo Kaiser, Grace Yeni-Komshian, Haig Yeni-Komshian, and Annie Gubser; her sons, Stephen and Daniel, daughters-in-law Gail Franck and Maria Mahdasian Teager, and her grandchildren Lucinée and Van Teager.

A celebration of life service will be held at the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church in Cambridge on Sunday September 29, at 2 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to NAASR, the Holy Trinity Armenian Church or the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Principal Garine Palandjian Continues Mission of SSAES

PALANDJIAN, from page 1

Palandjian has an extensive educational background, with an undergraduate degree in elementary education from Rhode Island College, a master's in comparative international education from Lehigh University, and a PhD in education policy and evaluation from Arizona State University.

She also studied different aspects of education in Armenia, such as the shift after independence. In addition, she also worked at the American University of Armenia in Yerevan.

"Looking at Armenian education was always my focus," she said, adding that she was "trying to understand some of the shifts from the Soviet to the post-Soviet space, as well as how our teachers were trained in Armenia," Palandjian said. "What's education like in Armenia? What do they view and how do they view Armenian identity? How do they teach these? I mean, just a lot, a whole lot of ideas and interests there."

## Following a Veteran Principal

SSAES has two sections, nursery and K-5, with a total of 145 students enrolled this fall.

Palandjian's first year, she said, was spent figuring out the direction the school needed to go in, and what the job ahead required.

As chance would have it, Palandjian said, she started when the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE), an accrediting organization for elite private schools, was doing its 10-year re-evaluation of the school. St. Stephen's had already been accredited by AISNE; every decade, they do another review of, as Palandjian put it, "where are we in terms of quality of education, health, building, everything you can imagine, governance, the board, parents, education, students, alumni, everything."

"It was an opportunity for me to learn where we are, what the next steps are and some of their recommendations for improving our education and the quality of the



Principal Garine Palandjian pictured speaking at the end-of-the-year Hantes last June.

school. That has been part of my roadmap, to use their recommendations, because it ensures that our students have a certain quality of education," she added.

There was a lot of good news. Noted Palandjian, "One of the biggest things I understood from that analysis was that they view our school as a sense of community and safety. Growing up in the Armenian community, that's the priority for a lot of families, so that their classmates and their best friends become people that are their lifelong friends, some of them their partners."

To further understand the issues facing the school and community, Palandjian put together a committee within the school to dissect the issues ahead and find out what needed to be done in the future.

"I did a SWOT [Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats] analysis with the community... There were a couple of parents, all the stakeholders, and alumni. I met with each individual stakeholder group to see what they had seen," Palandjian said, and to also assess what the school's strengths were.

St. Stephen's is located in a part of Massachusetts surrounded by top-ranking public school systems. In previous decades, there were other Armenian elementary schools in the area, such as the Armenian Sisters Academy in Lexington, but they have since closed. St. Stephen's has continued to thrive with a high retention rate amongst its student body. Palandjian said the full experience the school offers can't be matched by a public school.

"You do have the American curriculum here; we follow the Massachusetts curriculum framework. But the added benefit about this place is that it's got the Armenian component," she said.

The school continues to try and improve, offering new

opportunities for its students. This year, new after-school activities have been added. Zumba and yoga classes are now offered and a Lego club and digital music program have been proposed. A 3-D printer will be available for students to execute their designs.

"I can't take the credit for introducing new afterschool programs. As a result of a collaborative effort, our staff and community members helped us introduce new programs or brought back activities that had been offered in the past ... We are excited about the possibilities and hope to continue offering engaging and fun activities for our students," Palandjian said.

The effort has been rewarding, she said.

"The part that I enjoy is just when the kids come and share what they've learned or when they come and say hi to me and are excited about what's going on in school," Palandjian said. "You take great pride knowing that at the end of the day when their parents come, the students say, we did this today, and they're so proud to talk about it. There's nothing more rewarding than hearing that. So just knowing that our kids are happy and successful and healthy and safe. That's my most rewarding part."

## Armenia Trip

One of the big-picture events the school routinely does is the annual trip to Armenia for the graduating 5th-grade class, something that has been built up since they entered the school as toddlers.

"When they [the students] start in the preschool building, they're told when you graduate, you go to the homeland [Armenia]. There's even a day, in the preschool, the kids pretend they're on a plane, and visually the teachers try to make their experience like they're going to Armenia," Palandjian said.

"So when you're learning that from a young age and getting to experience this schooling experience from preschool to fifth grade, you're built up to that point, it's so exciting right now this upcoming fifth grade, they're starting their fundraising initiatives. They have to get help to offset their cost for this trip, which they've been talking about, thinking about since preschool," she explained. To this end, the class usually holds many fundraisers.

*continued on next page*



From left, former St. Stephen's Armenian Church Board member Astor Guzelian, former Principal Houry Boyamian, Garine Palandjian, and Chairman of the SSAES Board Michael Guzelian

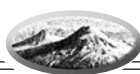


Students lined up outside on the first day of school.



Group prayer in sendoff before Armenia Trip.





## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

Furthermore, Palandjian detailed the cultural significance the trip has for young Armenians beyond simply a fun vacation.

“There’s a very different feeling than just reading something and being in person. So I would say that’s one of the huge reasons we do it. You get to know and see what our current Armenia is, where it is, and also where it is at this

there is a point where we will be able to go back. Not just us, but the Armenians of Artsakh ... this is not just about our field trip. It’s about our cultural and historical legacy.”

#### 40th Celebration Gala

To mark its 40th anniversary, the school will hold a gala to celebrate the school’s history and legacy, and honor Boyamian, on November 16, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cambridge.



Principal Garine Palandjian (far left) with students at the Armenian Heritage Park in Boston last April.

stage,” Palandjian said.

Amidst the excitement of seeing the motherland for the students, there is the reality of the situation in Artsakh, which Azerbaijan currently occupies, eliminating one of the most sentimental parts of the trip.

She added, “It is unfortunate that we can’t go back to Artsakh right now ... hopefully this isn’t the end, and

but everybody is very different,” Palandjian said. “I’m trying to target and appeal to everybody, but then I have to stay true to my mission, and the mission of the school is what I try to stick to as my guiding force.”

For more information on the school, visit <https://ssaes.org/>. For more information on the upcoming gala honoring, visit <https://ssaes.square.site/>

“The school has a lot to celebrate, and having a moment like a gala gives us the opportunity to just look back and celebrate,” Palandjian said. “The primary thing is to honor Mrs. Houry Boyamian’s retirement, and then considering the 40th anniversary is coming at the same time, it’s a moment to celebrate the school.”

Palandjian detailed what the goal of the school is, and how they hope to bring the Armenian community together going forward.

“I think everybody in the community has their perception of what it means to be Armenian. Everybody thinks that that’s such a universal or homogenous definition,

## Yerevan-Based Editor Titizian to Speak on Fighting Misinformation Amid a Security Crisis

TITIZIAN, from page 1

editor of the US-based *Armenian Reporter*, was managing editor at Civilnet and is the founding editor-in-chief of EVN Report, an English-language e-magazine. Titizian has appeared on Al Jazeera, BBC and other global networks to discuss events taking place in Armenia and Artsakh. For the past decade, she has been a lecturer in the English and Communications Department at the American University of Armenia and assisted the university to develop a Masters of Journalism program to be launched in 2025.

Her talk will tackle a variety of topics in fighting misinformation. Establishing effective mechanisms to combat misinformation amid ongoing hybrid warfare and persistent security crises can be challenging for any country, especially for small states. In Armenia, a transitional democracy seeking to consolidate its political system, the population is struggling with post-war trauma while having to confront constant threats by hostile, non-democratic neighbors. The prevalence of fake news and coordinated disinformation campaigns — both external and internal — has impacted perceptions about security, while public trust in the media is at record-low levels in the country. Strategies and policies are being implemented to combat false narratives, but how effective are they in a polarized society and when decontextualized news and information on social media platforms are pervasive?

In addition, the talk will discuss the possible guardrails against misinformation to build a more resilient and informed society, especially in the context of the ongoing security crisis in Armenia. She will address key events in recent history, including the 2020 Artsakh War and Azerbaijan’s subsequent incursions into Armenia, the 2023 ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Russia’s hybrid threats against Armenia.

Admission is complementary. Please RSVP to [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com). The Baikar Building address is 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Please enter through the door on the side street, Norseman Avenue.

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# Arts & Culture

## ‘Whatever Dreams They Had’

Documentary Comes to Public TV on Sept. 28

DETROIT — In this deeply personal and powerful exploration, an Armenian-Syrian immigrant and Catholic priest devotes his life to helping Syrian refugees resettle here in the US, cultivating hope, friendship and a sense of belonging in the community, despite the myriad of challenges they must face. This new documentary, presented by Detroit PBS and distributed by The National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA), premieres on PBS SoCal on Sept. 14, 2024 and on public television stations across the United States beginning Saturday, September 28, (check local listings).

Millions of Syrians have been displaced since the time of the Armenian Genocide and more recently since the country’s armed conflict escalated into a full-scale civil war more than a decade ago. This widespread displacement has led to a humanitarian crisis, but for those asylees fortunate enough, there is hope here in the United States.



Karoun with Fr. Armenag

Fr. Armenag Bedrossian is beloved by his Armenian Catholic parish and his immigrant community in Los Angeles. His cell phone never stops ringing with requests for help. Going beyond his daily parish responsibilities, he is entrenched in immigrant communities to understand the cultural values, beliefs and needs of the immigrants he aids, even to the extent of pursuing a graduate degree in Islamic Studies.

“My filmmaking partner, Joseph Myers, and I created “Whatever Dreams They Had” to share the story of how one person’s actions can have a significant impact on other people’s lives,” said the film’s producer and co-director, Stephanie Ayanian of Storyshop. “The obstacles that individuals and families face as they try to build a safer and better life for themselves are overwhelming. Fr. Armenag is trying to make a difference and his example of how one person can help is inspiring.”

Throughout the documentary, we learn about the refugees who have fled their homes to escape violence. They leave everything behind to build a new life in a new, foreign country while facing monumental hurdles. Many don’t speak English, only their native tongue, and are at a loss of how to circumvent the challenges of finding a place to live, work and education. But in Los Angeles, Fr. Armenag is a godsend.

see DREAMS, page 14



Fr. Garabed Kocharian with Tamar, one of the young participants

## Armenian Art of Lettering Brings Children Closer to History of Church

By Robin Garabedian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WORCESTER — It’s hard to deny that there’s a lot of ugliness in the world right now. More specifically, with the news out of Armenia, it can be hard not to feel that grief, fear, and pain are the true essence of being Armenian. One recent program presented a different, positive point of view. I, and many others from Worcester and the surrounding area, had the opportunity to attend Father Garabed Kochakian’s youth workshop, “The Art of Armenian Lettering,” on May 11.

Our connections to each other are also through our language and alphabet – and how those things have been deployed in a uniquely Armenian form of calligraphy. Armenian calligraphy has a long and rich history. For nearly 2,000 years, from the time of the adoption of Christianity in Armenia in 301 AD to the invention of the printing press in 1440 AD in Germany, all books were handwritten. Before the technology of printing arrived in Armenia, the monks copied into Armenian letters the Bible and other sacred and secular texts. They would paint the first letter of each line in opening paragraphs with unique shapes known as *trchnagir* (birds), *dzaghgagir* (flowers), *gentangir* (animals), *tsnagir* (fish), and even *martagir* (people). Monks would mix their own paints with vinegar, egg yolks and pulverized powder from ores and vegetation, then use goose and duck feathers for pens, create brushes to paint from sable or kitten fur, and make paper by stretching and cutting lamb skin.

Kochakian is one of many experts knowledgeable on this topic, an iconographer himself, and has offered numerous painting workshops for both youth and adult audiences where he guides participants in reproducing their own versions of this medieval art form of lettering.

His workshop in Worcester was a joint effort with a committee called HyeLights (I am one of five members). Every two years, HyeLights produces a show with the area’s youth that features music, dance and stories, both historical and contemporary, and this year, the creative arts. The program featured St. Nersess Shnorhali and the larger landscape he inhabited, as well as information on Artsakh (Karabakh) and famous Armenians such as Aram Khachaturian, Raffi Cavoukian and Andrea Martin.

Under the directorship of Linda Bullock, the founder of HyeLights, the group initially planned the workshop and simply wanted to do something different with available resources. However, when it became clear that the expertise of Kochakian dovetailed with the group’s focus, the workshop went ahead.

Much of St. Nersess Shnorhali’s life and work was devoted to the creative arts and musical reforms that simplified the text of religious poetic hymnody, which brought these texts closer to the style of Armenian folk music and therefore more accessible to the masses. He himself was a defender of sacred art as a component to the Christian faith identity. St. Nersess didn’t want just priests and bishops to understand Armenian religious identity; he believed this information should be for all Armenians everywhere.

One of the ways this mission was supported through the letters that Kochakian taught attendees to reproduce were also a tool of learning for everyday Armenians in past centuries: the idea was to embellish and beautify the words of the Bible and capture a reader’s attention in ways plain calligraphy cannot. Even more

see CALLIGRAPHY, page 17

## Reagan, Nixon Speechwriter Ken Khachigian To Speak at Fresno State

FRESNO — Ken Khachigian, trusted speechwriter and confidant to Presidents Nixon and Reagan, will discuss his new book, *Behind Closed Doors: In the Room with Reagan & Nixon*, on Thursday, September 5, at 6:30 p.m. in the Satellite Student Union, 2485 E. San Ramon Ave, at Fresno State. The event is free to attend. A discussion and question and answer will be followed by a book signing.

The event is sponsored by Valley Children’s Hospital, The Office of the President, The Maddy Institute, the Armenian Studies Program, and the Institute for Media and Public Trust at Fresno State.

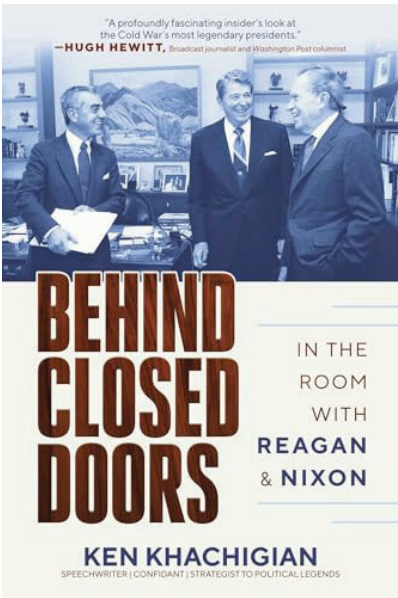


Khachigian’s book will be available for purchase upon registration. While registration is not required, those who would like to purchase a book should use this link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fresno-state-presents-an-evening-with-ken-khachigian-author-strategist-registration-970242951787>. Organizers cannot guarantee availability unless books are purchased in advance.

Khachigian was Ronald Reagan’s favorite speechwriter, trusted political adviser, and “go-to” counsel for the President and First Lady in campaigns and political crisis. As chief speechwriter, Khachigian shaped many of Reagan’s most prominent addresses beginning with the first In-

augural. In 1985, when the President was confronted with his first personal crisis, Khachigian wrote what has been called the “greatest speech of Reagan’s career” at Bergen Belsen.

He served in President Richard Nixon’s White House and as a principal aide to Nixon as the former President emerged from Watergate. In those days of Nixon’s comeback, he assisted with Nixon’s memoirs and led the preparation for the historic interviews with David Frost.







## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Ten Years On — This Yazidi Genocide Documentary Film Examines ISIS Atrocities

By Bared Maronian and Jackie Abramian

“ISIS attacked us because they said we weren’t true believers. They said we didn’t believe in God — but that’s just not true. We have our own faith, our way of worshipping the divine. It’s different sure, but that doesn’t make it wrong. They tried to erase us, force us to convert, to forget our language, everything that made us Yazidi, but they failed,” said former Yazidi slave, Faiza Qasim, featured in a new documentary, “10 Years On: The Yazidi Genocide.”

The documentary unwraps the 2014 ISIS genocide against Iraq’s 400,000 Yazidi community in Sinjar — a religious community, indigenous to Mesopotamia since the 12th century. An episode of the Faces of Persecution: Exploring Global Religious Oppressions documentary mini-series, “10 Years On” is a harrowing visual journey of ISIS executions of Yazidi men and boys and the enslavement of nearly 7,000 women and girls forcibly converted and transferred throughout Iraq and Syria. Profiling former slaves’ courageous escapes, and unyielding religious belief honors the 2,700 Yazidi women still enslaved by ISIS.

Interviews with religious historians, regional experts, and activists including Matthew Travis Barber (University of Chicago), human rights lawyer Knox Thames (Pepperdine University, Author: Ending Persecution), Mirza Dinnayi (Luftbrücke Irak), and Pastor William Devlin (Widows & Orphans Foundation) provide historical backdrops, reveal rare scenes of ISIS

in a crowded Iraqi refugee camp, her spirits remain unbroken.

“Forty-five-year-old men raped 12-year-old girls in brutal ways and sold them to other ISIS men. When we asked [ISIS] why they were treating us like this, they said we were infidels,” she said.

ISIS declared Yazidis “apostates,” Knox Thames explained, because the Yazidi “system of beliefs and view of ever-after” is dissimilar to “other Abrahamic faiths.”

ting over 1,000 victimized Yazidi women and children in Germany, he dedicated his \$1 million Aurora prize to build Sinjar’s House of Co-Existence. Ironically, in 2023, the Aurora Prize co-founder Ruben Vardanyan — kidnapped and imprisoned by Azerbaijan amid an ethnic cleansing of 120,000 Indigenous Christian Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) — is profiled in another episode, GENOCIDE 2.0: Artsakh Ethnic Cleansing.

Survivor Layima Hajee Bashar — enslaved at 15, sold



Faiza Qasim visiting a Yazidi temple



Faiza Qasim

brutalities against tens of thousands of Yazidis trapped on 4,800-foot-high Mt. Sinjar, and unveils sacred Yazidi religious practices.

Faiza Qasim, just 10 years old when enslaved by ISIS alongside her mother and younger brothers, was sold multiple times before escaping. Resettling in Canada, her life remains on hold as she cares for her ailing mother. In a heartbreaking return to her hometown of Hardan (Iraq) now in rubble, she found her family home, and relived lurid memories of the 15 abducted family members who remain missing.

“They enslaved me — the scars they left defined them not me. I’m still a Yazidi. My faith is what keeps me going. I won’t be afraid to pray anymore. I’ll raise my voice, tell the stories of my people to let everyone know that the Yazidi spirit can’t be broken,” Qasim affirmed visiting her Yazidi temple.

Hala Safil, kidnapped at 16 and thrust into sexual slavery, detailed her harrowing escape after years of being raped, resold and brutalized. Struggling to rebuild her life

Matthew Travis Barber argued against such theological justifications, explaining that ISIS’ true motivations — expanding strategic territorial control, seizing Yazidi wealth, and sexual selfishness — led to “mass sexual enslavement that involved the kidnapping of over three and a half thousand women and girls” citing similar theological justifications by the Ottomans in prior centuries.

Barber, who was conducting research in Iraq as the genocide unfolded, witnessed Yazidis’ desperate measures — as suicides and death by starvation ensued atop Mt. Sinjar. While the U.S. intervention

prevented the worsening, geopolitical games against the empowered former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki’s “despotic actions” delayed the intervention, Barber said.

Following Pastor Devlin’s visit to northern Iraq refugee camps where hundreds of thousands of Yazidis remain trapped, revealed desperate living conditions. Providing prayers to the forgotten refugees, he urged the public to visit Yazidi refugee camps “desperately needing hope and love” to offer support and encouragement.

Air Bridge Iraq’s co-founder and a 2019 Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity Laureate, Mirza Dinnayi, detailed his death-defying helicopter rescues of Yazidis trapped on Mt. Sinjar. After surviving a crash and reset-

four times, and blinded in one eye while fleeing, offered a heartbreaking speech accepting the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought award she shared with survivor and future Nobel Peace Prize winner, Nadia Murad.

While the Yazda Foundation leads mass grave exhumation, 80 mass graves remain unexhumed, and two-thirds of Yazidis still live in camps as thousands linger in ISIS captivity — some believed to be among the 60,000 in Syria’s al-Hol camp.

“If that is true, it is tragic that we’ve abandoned the victims with their victimizers in this camp and thrown away the key,” said Knox Thames.

10 YEARS ON: The Yazidi Genocide documentary, made possible with support from the Cultural Impact Foundation in collaboration with the Vahe Fattal Foundation, is distributed worldwide by Java Films. Organizations interested in educational/community screenings can contact: jackie@globalcadence.org.

(Bared Maronian is a four-time Emmy award-winning documentary filmmaker with over 20 years of broadcast, film, and multi-media production experience. He is the director/producer of the Faces of Persecution educational documentary mini-series. Jackie Abramian is a veteran corporate communications strategist and a regular magazine contributor. She is the documentary’s writer/producer. This is their fourth documentary collaboration. This piece originally appeared on the online site of Newsweek, on July 26.)



Mirza Dinnayi



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# French Actor Alain Delon's Armenian Connection

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

The very last role played by Alain Delon was in a movie directed by an Armenian moviemaker, Sarik Andreasyan.

In “Happy New Year, Moms” (2012) by Andreasyan, the French megastar Delon acted as himself, Alain Delon. In this film, a doctor, played by a Russian-Armenian actor, tells the son of a French-language schoolteacher about his mother's pro-



Alain Delon at the Armenian Genocide monument in Yerevan

gressing fatal sickness. The son decided to take his mother to Paris for vacation, which technically was a farewell-trip for the unsuspecting mother. In a high-profile

In 1980, together with French and Swiss counterparts, Soviet moviemakers released a movie about the attempt of Nazi Germany to assassinate the Soviet, US, and English leaders at their meeting in Tehran, Iran, in 1943, during World War II. In this more fictional than factual motion picture, Delon acted as a French detective named Foche. French-Armenian Georges Garvarents was commissioned to prepare the score for this film, and his brother-in-law Charles Aznavour's “Une Vie d'Amour” [A Life of Love], later to become a viral song, was featured in the film.

Delon came to Armenia in December 2012 to the premiere of “Happy New Year, Moms” by Andreasyan. “I decided to act in that film because love for one's mother is a wonderful subject,” the movie star told reporters.

In Armenia, Delon visited Tsitsernakaberd, the Armenian Genocide Memorial, and met President Serzh Sargsyan and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. The actor remarked, “Why didn't my dear friend Aznavour ever tell me that I was so popular in Armenia?”

After the news about Delon's death became known, the current French Ambassador to Armenia, Olivier Decottignies, noted



Alain Delon at the left of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II

Parisian restaurant, the mother and son accidentally meet Delon, who was 76 years old at the time. When dancing with the schoolteacher, Delon said, “I never forget that the time flows faster in Paris, and I always tried to enjoy every minute of my life in this city.” It makes sense to recall this symbolic statement by the prominent actor now, as the movie-star Delon died peacefully at his home in Douchy, France, on August 18. He was 88.

Armenia historically developed close ties with France, which perhaps contributed to the popularity of French artists, actors, or authors in Armenia and its diaspora. The Armenian Ministry of Culture issued a statement about Delon's death, and the Armenian Film Society of Glendale, Calif., as well as many news outlets and social media featured the sad news extensively. One reason for Delon's popularity in Armenia was Delon's personal Armenian connections. He was very close to the French-Armenian singer and actor Charles Aznavour.

In 1963, the 28-year-old, still in the early stages of his acting career, starred in the movie “Any Number Can Win [titled in French “Mélodie en sous-sol”] by the French-Armenian filmmaker Henry Verneuil (Ashot Malakian). In 1969, he acted in “The Sicilian Clan” by Verneuil.

*Le Monde*, one of the major newspapers in France, published a picture of Verneuil and Delon in an obituary about Delon's death, while the French organization Classic Film & Série posted a group photo of them and other actors on its X (Twitter) account.

on his X (Twitter) account: “Alain Delon always had special sentiments for Armenia.”

(See an accompanying video report at [mirrorspectator.com](https://mirrorspectator.com).)

## ‘Whatever Dreams They Had’ Documentary Comes to Public TV on Sept. 28

DREAMS, from page 12

“Jesus is for everybody you know,” said Fr. Armenag. “He was always with the sick, with the depressed, with the injured, with the widow and the orphans — reaching others — different cultures, different people. I need to be unlimited; Jesus was unlimited.”

The film chronicles Fr. Armenag's efforts to help a young Armenian-Syrian woman who is being treated for hand cancer and how he befriends and aids a

As he says, “Different religion? I don't care — treat me like I'm a human being and that's itself is a miracle.”

### About Detroit PBS

Detroit PBS is Michigan's only community-licensed public television station, operating independently of any educational institution or governmental entity. With more than 2 million weekly viewers across its five TV channels, Detroit PBS is the state's largest and most-watched public television station,



Fr. Armenag Bedrossian with pigeons

refugee woman with no relatives whatsoever in the US to apply for a permit to reside permanently in the US

He works tirelessly against a backdrop of his own personal sorrow, sharing the stories of how some of his family members have been killed at the hands of ISIS while others are refugees scattered across the globe and some remain in Syria living under threat. Every day he wrestles with sadness, regrets and fatigue. He fills his waking hours in devout prayer and providing outreach to those in need. Through his humanitarianism, tolerance and compassion, Fr. Armenag sets an example of what it means to be an authentic Christian and a true humanitarian.

reaching the most diverse public television audience in America.

The National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) is a professional association representing 304 member stations in 49 states, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia.

Storyshop, LLC develops educational documentaries and outreach initiatives to raise awareness of societal issues and encourage action. Their 2020 documentary featuring the stories of Armenians in America 100 years after the Armenian Genocide, “What Will Become of Us,” screened on public television stations across the US and in film festivals, including The Black Maria Film Festival.

**Tekeyan Cultural Association  
of Boston and the Shahbazian  
Foundation presents**

## 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, September 12, 7:30 p.m.**

**Baika Building  
755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown**

**via Zoom** <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/86485218660?pwd=caBEqHO04LdBPMtBmZd972JvJvSDai.1>

**RSVP at [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com)**





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



## Spicy Bulgur and Nut Salad from Claudia Roden’s Mediterranean

“Born in 1936 to an ancient Syrian-Jewish family in Cairo, Claudia Roden studied in London to become a painter before becoming engrossed by the stories and recipes of Britain’s expatriate Egyptian community. Thanks to a nanny from Italy (whose village is now in Slovenia), her first languages were Italian and French. She began teaching Middle Eastern cooking from her home, hosting the BBC series “Claudia Roden’s Mediterranean Cookery” and becoming a prolific food journalist and cookbook author. She is best known as the author of Middle Eastern cookbooks including *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, a cookbook first published in 1968 that remains an important influence on top chefs around the world, *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food*, and *Arabesque—Sumptuous Food from Morocco, Turkey and Lebanon* and *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey From Samarkand to New York*, which won a James Beard award.”

“In London, she shared a flat with her brothers Ellis Douek and Zaki Douek. While preparing meals for her brothers, she started to experiment with cooking. She remembered family recipes from Alphandary, pies with aubergine and spinach, and mint and lamb. Both were foods not often cooked in London in that period and so finding ingredients in London was an adventure. She did not return to Egypt for a quarter of a century, well after her family and most of Cairo’s



Much of Ms. Roden’s work has been an attempt to reconstruct the lost scents, sounds, tastes and feelings that flowered on the Cairo terrace of her childhood. Credit...Lauren Fleishman for The New York Times

Jewish community had been expelled; many of her books reflect her longing for the close communal culture that was lost, especially as expressed in the culinary arts and social occasions associated with them.”

“In *Claudia Roden’s Mediterranean*, readers will join her on a culinary journey across the Mediterranean, all from the comfort of your own dinner table. Widely credited with revolutionizing Western attitudes to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food, Claudia is a living legend. Though best known for her deep dives into cuisines, in this timeless collection of simple, beautiful recipes, she shares the food she loves and cooks for friends and family. You’ll find tried-and-true favorites from France, Greece, and Spain to Egypt, Turkey, and Morocco, inspired by Claudia’s decades of travel and research throughout the region. The many flavors of the Mediterranean are highlighted in dishes such as Chicken with Apricots and Pistachios, Vegetable Couscous, Eggplant in a Spicy Honey Sauce with Soft Goat Cheese, Bean Stew with Chorizo and Bacon, Plum Clafoutis, and so many more.”

“From appetizers to desserts, Claudia distills a life’s worth of traveling and eating her way through the Mediterranean, presenting a selection of the recipes that she cooks the most often because they bring the most joy.”

“This is a Syrian dish, my family called it ‘bazargan’ because all the ingredients could be bought at the spice bazaar in Aleppo. It is substantial and filling and amazingly rich and tasty, with a variety of nuts, spices, and aromatics. It is easy to make for a lot of people, can be prepared in advance, and keeps perfectly well for days. There is no cooking because bulgur is wheat that has been boiled, dried, and then ‘cracked’ – it only needs soaking in boiling water, while all the aromatic ingredients are beaten together as a dressing. Serve as a first course with Greek yogurt or labneh. It can be served in a large bowl or rolled into balls the size of a walnut and cupped in Little Gem lettuce leaves,” says Ms. Roden. “Bazargan is traditionally eaten together with other meze; but it is filling and satisfying, so we often eat it as main course during summer lunches, accompanied by a simple tomato or cucumber salad.”

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups bulgur
- 1 2/3 cups lightly salted boiling water
- 7 tablespoons mild extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses
- Salt
- Juice of 2 or 3 lemons
- 1/4 cup tomato paste
- 1 to 1 1/2 tablespoons harissa or other hot pepper paste, to taste
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 cup walnuts, lightly toasted
- 3/4 cup hazelnuts, lightly toasted
- 5 tablespoons pistachios, lightly toasted
- 7 tablespoons pine nuts, lightly toasted
- 1 large bunch flat-leaf parsley leaves, chopped
- Pomegranate seeds for garnish (optional)

PREPARATION:

Put the bulgur in a large bowl and pour the boiling water over it. Let soak for 30 minutes, until the grains are very tender. Stir occasionally so that the water is absorbed evenly.

Combine the olive oil with the pomegranate molasses and season with salt. Add the lemon juice, tomato paste, harissa, cumin, coriander, and allspice and beat vigorously with a fork until well blended. Pour over the bulgur and mix very well. Taste and add more salt if necessary. Coarsely chop the walnuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios. Add them to the bulgur, stir in the pine nuts and parsley; mix well. If you like, garnish with pomegranate seeds before serving.

Reprinted from *Claudia Roden’s Mediterranean: Treasured Recipes from a Lifetime of Travel* by Claudia Roden, copyright © 2021. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House. Photo courtesy of Ten Speed Press. As featured in edibleLA. See: <https://www.ediblela.com/news/spicy-bulgur-and-nut-salad>

### Muhammara (Walnut and pomegranate paste)

“This walnut and pomegranate paste is a stunning deep-red color, and the flavor is rich and mildly hot. Use it as a dip or spread, with bread or grilled fish or chicken. Recipe from *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food* by Claudia Roden. Aleppo pepper will add richness to many dishes, from butternut gratin to flatbreads with spiced chicken, lentil soup to lamb kibbeh, bulgur pilaf to collard greens. Mix it into egg salad, or sprinkle it on pizza, too.”

INGREDIENTS:

- 1-1/4 cups shelled walnuts
- 1-1/2 to 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 slice whole wheat bread, crust removed, lightly toasted
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses
- 1 teaspoon Aleppo pepper (or a pinch of mild chile pepper)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- Kosher salt, to taste

PREPARATION:

Blend all ingredients to a rough (not too smooth) paste in the food processor. Serves 6-8.





ARTS & CULTURE

# Books

## Kristin Anahit Cass’s *Reparations of the Heart* Imagines A Peaceful Alternative Vision of the World

By Arpi Sarafian  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

While major upheavals such as the recent fall of Art-sakh or the destruction of Gaza and the millions of persons displaced globally continue to threaten humankind, Kristin Anahit Cass offers the world images of peace and of solidarity. The artist’s *Reparations of the Heart: Toward a SWANA Futurity* (Fifth Wheel Press, 2024), an assembly of photographs, commentaries and short narratives inspired by her ancestors’ culture, debunks the myth that it is possible to annihilate a people and erase their ancient customs. In fact, by reappropriating the past Cass subverts the all-too-popular notion she has been brain-stormed with her entire life as the offspring of Genocide survivors — that to survive their trauma the forcibly dis-

One portrait features her son Hrant as a young member of a wedding party of her family in Kharberd, creating a connection to roots, to who they are and where they came from. Another portrait foregrounds the “Healing Power of Za’atar,” the herb and spice mixture popular throughout Lebanon, Syria and other countries in the Mediterranean region. Whatever the theme of the different pieces, the objects and the relics displayed — the water jug and coffee set — inevitably evoke intimacy and closeness. It was with coffee — *soorj* — and coffee cup readings that these photographic sessions came together, jokes Cass: “We connected, we conversed, we collaborated.” What ultimately emerges is the sense of joy in being together. When at the “meet the author” event at the Armenian Arts Center in Glendale, organized by ABRIL bookstore, the artist was asked why she chose the SWANA frame-



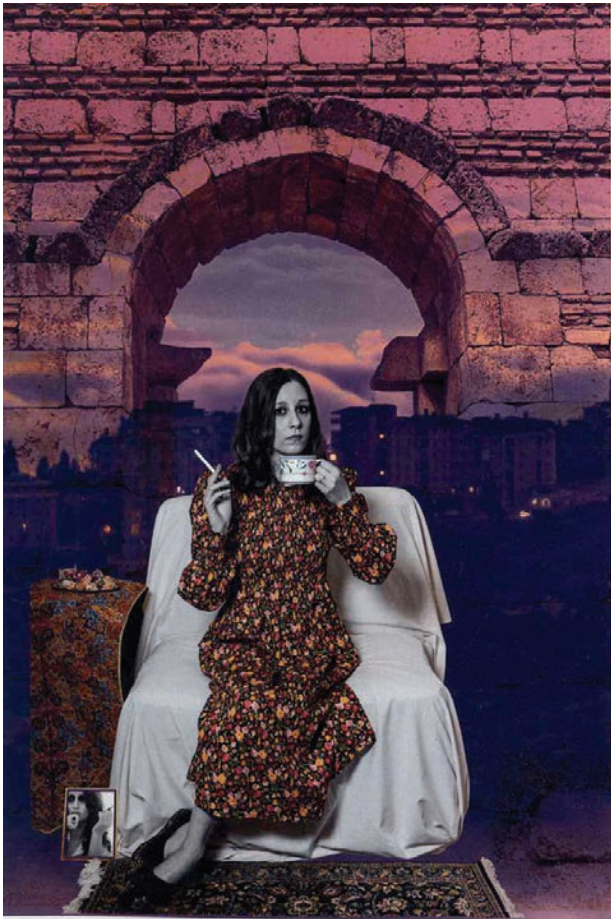
“The Story of Azad Prime”

placed need to assimilate themselves completely. The fictional world Cass creates suggests that reviving the ancestral home may in fact be the way for refugees to survive in alien lands. The artist’s is a call for connection with our past. Her photographs are for the most part emblematic constructions bringing ancient culture into a modern space, with black and white portraying the past and color the present. The heirloom garments the characters wear in these compositions and the traditional foods they cook while they “assimilate” show that one can continue to embrace the culture even when one is far from the ancestral land.



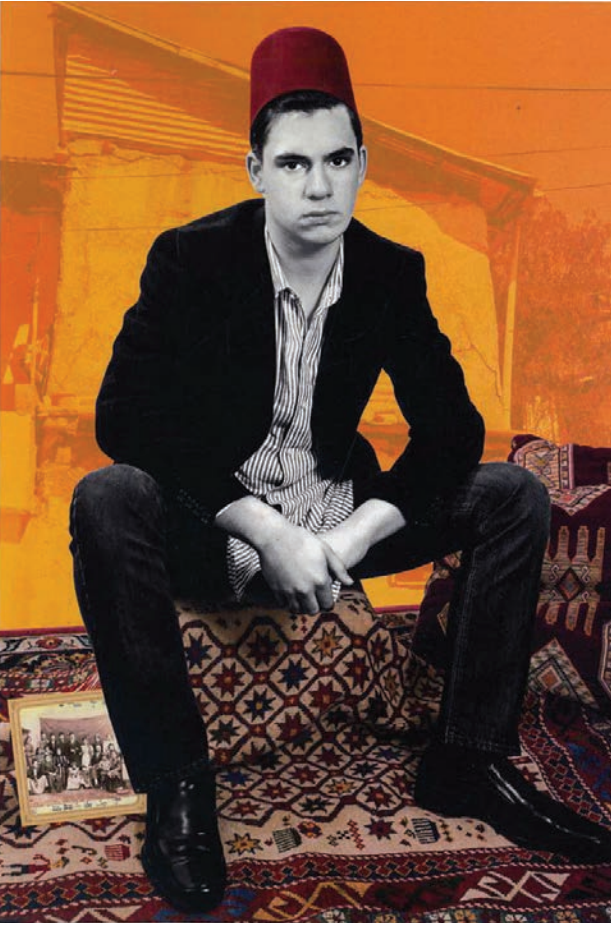
Anahit and Araxie Cass (photo Karine Armen)

work — acronym for South West Asia and North Africa, a decolonial term that refers to the geographical region also known as The Middle East and North Africa — to tell her story, “We need regional solidarity to counter the dirty game of empire,” responded Cass underscoring the shared historical trauma and the experience of diaspora of the peoples of the region. If we work together with “tenacious insistence” we can extend solidarity to other indigenous groups, she added with confidence. Indeed, many of the individuals used to create the photographs are individuals of SWANA backgrounds — Jordanian, Assyrian, Lebanese and Palestinian diasporans. Nonetheless, it is through the celebration of the individual culture that the artist’s vision of a better future for all oppressed people is realized. “The Story of Azad Prime,” for example, tells the story of how technologically savvy Arevik helped lead her people, displaced and homeless in the diaspora, to Azad Prime, the place of freedom. Arevik is a genocide survivor. She is a refugee with no home to go back to. Yet she finds home before the invaders come, and brings her people to the place of “love and light” where they can live freely, in peace and in harmony. It is not by pleading for mercy from the rulers that Cass creates this happy new world. The chance of liberation for those forcibly removed from their ancestral lands comes from “the mother who led us here,” the goddess Anahit who gave her people a sacred stone that would help them in times of trouble. The amulet passed from Anahit’s granddaughter Naira, to Astghik, to Arevik. Most fittingly, the book promotion event highlighted the centrality of this female lineage. Watching mother Anahit Cass and daughter Araxie Cass, a writer herself and the editor of the book, in discussion on stage about Anahit’s book evidenced the love and the support mother and daughter have for each other. Their joy was visible. The great appeal of *Reparations of the Heart* is that it transcends the politics of acronyms and of labels even as it



“Mornings with Fairuz”

positions itself in them to celebrate an all-inclusive world. Cass’s is indeed a most creative way of building this inclusive community. While the better world that the artist envisions is inclusive of the struggles of all oppressed groups, and it is premised on respect for all differences and the celebration of the cultures and the identities of the individual groups, it is clearly rooted in her identity as “an Armenian in exile from my indigenous land.” The artist goes to her past, to the celebration of the culture of her ancestors, to shape a future of solidarity. “I carry the story of survival every day,” she says with en-



With ancestors

thusiasm. Following our brief exchange at the conclusion of the presentation of her book, she told me, “Thank you for seeing the wonder of being Armenian.” “Home as it might have been,” or the Republic “that could have been,” Cass envisions is not a place of ideal perfection. It is nonetheless a place where it is possible to heal and to survive. At its core, *Reparations of the Heart* is an eloquent commentary on the inhumane world we have created for ourselves. By daring to counter the chaos and the craziness of the genocides and the wars we have immersed ourselves in with compassion and with care, the artist asserts that the will to fight the violence and the greed will, to borrow her words, not be “silenced or eliminated.” There may be a naïveté to the artist’s approach but “solutions” are often simple. Why not give them a try? The world can be different.



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 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 5 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association, Armenian Mirror-Spectator and National Association for Armenian Studies and Research/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Topics** present “Fighting Misinformation Amid a Security Crisis: The Armenian Media Landscape,” a lecture by Maria Titizian, editor-in-chief of the weekly online magazine EVN Report in Yerevan. Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Baikar Building, Main Hall downstairs (Norseman Ave. entrance), 755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. Free admission. RSVP [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).

**SEPTEMBER 8 — The Istanbul Armenians of Boston** are hosting their annual picnic on Sunday. AGBU Center, 247 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. 1 p.m.

**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=caBEqHO04LdBPmtBmZd972jJvfSDai.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@mose-sianarts.org](mailto:tickets@mose-sianarts.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 4 — The Istanbul Armenians of Boston** are hosting a benefit concert featuring the acapella trio Zula. First Parish Church, 630 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington. 7.30 p.m.

**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 1 — Save the date.** City of Smile is hosting A Night of Wine Tastings from Around the World. Oakley Country Club, Watertown. All proceeds will be donated to the City of Smile – USA, an organization dedicated to treating the children of Armenia who have cancer.

**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. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

Armenian Art of Lettering Brings Children Closer to History of Church

CALLIGRAPHY, from page 12  
surprising, all who attended learned the Armenian alphabet was invented in Artsakh in 404 AD.

The day of the workshop, almost 20 youth from ages 9-22 first watched and listened to a PowerPoint presented by Kochakian about the Armenian alphabet and the history of Armenian lettering. Then, after a prayer specifically read to prepare for painting icons and other such images, it was time to work on our own paintings. Each participant was given an outline of the first or last initial of their names, and then had free reign to experiment with colors and add embellishments such as pomegranates, flowers and doves. After each participant finished, Kochakian spent some one-on-one time with each participant, personally demonstrating how to enhance the letters through shading and highlighting with white paint.

At the end of the program, participants brought their Armenian letters to the sanctuary, where he and the location’s host pastor, Very Rev. Ardag Arabian of Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Worcester, led the group

in prayer. Being in the sanctuary at a time when *Badarak* (mass) is not taking place always has an air of reverence to it, and this time was no different. Following the prayers and the singing of one of St. Nersess’s hymns, *Norasdeghdzal*, by the participants themselves, no one wanted to leave.

Linda Bullock, HyeLights committee member and production director, said, “Der Garabed was our pastor at Church of Our Saviour during my high school and college years. He passionately taught us to become servants of God. I cannot express enough the pure joy I felt to have him back in Worcester, more than 40 years later, to teach our youth. It was surreal.”

The young participants were proud of their work and eager to get them home. From my experience as a teacher, I know this is a clear sign that someone is proud of the work they have done.

The Armenian letters, created for the purpose of translating the Bible into Armenian, have indelibly established our identity and through this unique form of iconography continues to define who we are and how we live.



Young participants hold their Armenian letters.





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



An ADL Publication

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COMMENTARY

# Possible Changes in US Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Many are curious about how the future of US foreign policy may change, depending on whether Kamala Harris or Donald Trump wins the presidential election. Some believe Harris's approach will closely mirror Joe Biden's, focusing on ongoing support for Ukraine, strengthening NATO relations and maintaining pressure on Russia and China.

In contrast, others argue that a Trump presidency would resemble his previous term, featuring pressure on NATO, limited engagement in international matters except for select priorities, steadfast support for Israel, pressure on Iran and shifts in relations with Russia and China.

However, our focus is on the implications for US foreign policy in the South Caucasus, particularly regarding Armenia, under either Harris or Trump.

On July 21, US President Biden announced his withdrawal from the presidential race, and endorsed Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's nominee. Biden became the third president in US history to have followed such a course of action. The other two acting presidents who had previously decided not to pursue another term as presidents were the 33rd president, Harry S. Truman, and the 36th president, Lyndon B. Johnson.

The US presidential elections are consequential for US foreign policy and the whole world. Thus, Biden's decision is going to inevitably influence the future of US foreign policy. Aside from Harris and Trump, there is a third independent contender for the presidency — activist-lawyer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. He can cause some problems for both Trump and Harris by winning important ballots in swing states where his mere thousands of votes can change the outcome of the swing state votes and ultimately impact the result of the presidential elections. But still, the main battle is going to be between the former two. And whichever one is elected, one thing is certain: the trajectory of US foreign policy is going to undergo some change. As a consequence, US foreign policy towards the South Caucasus region will also change.

Firstly, under the Biden administration, the US assumed the role of an active mediator to regulate Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and actively encourage the settlement of Armenian-Turkish relations. However, this approach is not new, as all the US administrations, starting from George H.W. Bush administration, have pursued an active policy for the regulation of Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. One thing that is significantly different now is that Armenia is ready to make unilateral concessions, something that previously has not happened under any other president. This has also opened a new window of opportunity for the US to reduce Russia's influence through the settlement of conflicts in the South Caucasus. Hence, we observed a much more active US involvement in the region.

As for Kamala Harris, it should be noted that she actively co-

operated with Armenian lobbyists during her years as a senator and supported some pro-Armenian initiatives. In 2019 and 2020 Kamala Harris signed the letters supporting Artsakh de-mining, in 2020 she signed a letter to the Library of Congress urging them to properly categorize the Armenian Genocide, and she issued an April 24th statement marking the Armenian Genocide in 2019/2020. At the same time, Harris did not cosponsor or support the Azerbaijan human rights / arms ban resolution, did not cosponsor the Turkey human rights / arms ban resolution and did not sign the 2020 statement condemning Azerbaijan/Turkey attacks on Armenia/Artsakh. Despite the fact that she was a senator representing California, she had never stood out for her active pro-Armenian initiatives.

To understand what Harris's foreign policy will be in case she becomes the new US President, one should keep in mind that she does not have much experience in foreign policy and is going to rely mostly on the opinions of her advisors, unlike President Biden, who had extensive experience and knowledge about US foreign policy and international relations in general.

In the case of Trump's victory, the settlement of Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations will be pushed back and a certain passivity will ensue. We have observed Trump's foreign policy unfold until 2021, including the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Trump took a rather passive stance, limiting himself to a couple of tweets and statements that did not entail concrete steps toward the resolution of the conflict. The only significant engagement in this war by the Trump administration was the meeting between his National Security Advisor and the Armenian community, as well as the third ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan brokered by the USA which did not last long. There was no other substantial involvement by the Trump administration and there is no reason to think this will change during his second tenure.

There is a possibility that he will once again adopt a somewhat isolationist policy. Similar to his initial years in office, Trump is likely to prioritize addressing critical issues vital to the US, such as concerning the Middle East, resolving the conflict in Ukraine, and clarifying relations with China. Taking into account the high probability that Trump will seek to regulate relations with Russia and end the Russian-Ukrainian war, it means that Russia will start taking more active steps in the South Caucasus, including taking over the role of the main mediator in the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

In sum, regardless of the outcome of these elections, whether current Vice President Kamala Harris or former President Donald Trump is the winner, active US policy towards Armenia will decline to a certain extent.

(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.)

## No Weddings, No Students, No Schoolchildren: Azerbaijan Prepares to Host UN Climate Summit

BAKU (BBC) — An oil and gas exporter that does not separate its waste and jails journalists and human rights activists will host a major international conference on climate change this year, angering green energy groups and international observers who say Azerbaijan is using the conference to green its reputation.

The news that Azerbaijan will host the 29th UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) has caused a surge of pride in the country among local media, officials and politicians.

“Holding COP29 in Azerbaijan is a clear indicator of the country's authority on the world stage”, “Azerbaijan will be in the spotlight of the world by hosting COP29”, “International recognition and support from the world community”, “Baku will become the center of the world” – these are the headlines with which the Azerbaijani pro-government media greeted the news.

The authorities seem to have already begun to prepare for the influx of foreigners, but in their own way.

President Ilham Aliyev said that 70-80 thousand foreigners are expected to arrive in the country for the conference.

On August 1, Prime Minister Ali Asadov decided that students would be transferred to distance learning for the duration of the conference, and schoolchildren would be sent on vacation.

At the same time, some of the capital's banquet halls and large restaurants have stopped accepting orders for weddings in November.

In Baku, it is not uncommon to see lavish weddings for several hundred people in special celebration houses. They are often accompanied by cavalcades of relatives' cars driving through the streets, honking loudly.

Azerbaijani media write that some es-

tablishments did this voluntarily, fearing overcrowding from the influx of tourists during the conference, others admitted that they were prohibited by the authorities, and still others are waiting for the authorities to issue orders on their behalf.

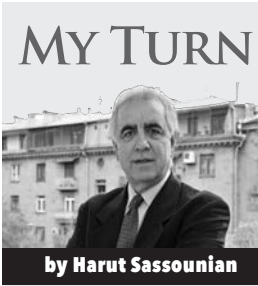
A similar situation has developed with many capital hotels. They do not accept pre-orders for November (when the conference will take place) on their websites. However, rooms in the same hotels for the period of COP29 can be booked directly through the website of the organizers of the climate conference.

In November, the international hotel booking site booking.com offers vacancies in only 89 hotels (at the time of writing), while in late October and early December there are several times more. This may be explained by the fact that hotels are holding places for guests of the climate conference.

*continued on next page*



COMMENTARY



# Khachigian’s Memoirs: How A Farmer’s Son Became Speechwriter for Nixon and Reagan

Ken Khachigian, the son of a farmer in Visalia, California, just published the captivating memoirs of his years in the White House as a speechwriter to two prominent US Presidents, Nixon and Reagan. Titled, *Behind Closed Doors: In the Room with Reagan and Nixon*, the book’s cover page describes Khachigian as a “speechwriter, confidant and strategist to political legends.”

Khachigian’s book has attracted keen attention. The *Wall Street Journal* published a very positive review by Tevi Troy. Quin Hillyer, a popular Washington columnist, wrote two laudatory reviews in the *Washington Examiner*. Khachigian’s memoirs was ranked number 2 in pre-sales of all the titles for the publisher’s new releases in mid-summer. The publisher is now planning a second printing.

Khachigian grew up in a struggling farmer’s family deprived of a shower and other basic necessities to become one of the most influential men in the White House. He started his involvement in politics as a volunteer for the Nixon presidential campaign. After the election, he became Nixon’s speechwriter. He then joined the Reagan administration as the president’s chief speechwriter. He also served as senior advisor and principal strategist for California Governor George Deukmejian in the 1982 and 1986 elections.

In an interview with the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, Khachigian related a memorable episode that happened while he was working for Nixon, when his father passed away in 1975. The president wanted to know what he could do to honor the memory of Khachigian’s father. Since his father was from the Armenian village of Chomaklou in Turkey, Khachigian made the unusual request of asking President Nixon to donate to the Chomaklou Compatriotic Society. Nixon obliged by writing a personal check for \$500 to the Armenian society.

Among the hundreds of speeches Khachigian wrote for the two presidents, I must isolate two important documents he penned. Up until 1981, no US President had described the Armenian Genocide as genocide. On April 22, 1981, Reagan issued a presidential proclamation in which he mentioned the Armenian Genocide. The text was written by Khachigian. This was 40 years before President Biden finally issued a statement in 2021 officially recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

While Turkish denialists try to dismiss President Reagan’s 1981 proclamation by stating that it was written by the President’s Armenian speechwriter,

Khachigian counters the Turkish accusation by saying that all Presidential Proclamations carry the president’s signature; therefore, the 1981 Proclamation is an official statement by the President of the United States.

In his interview with the *Mirror*, Khachigian explained that since he was aware of the controversy regarding the mention of the Armenian Genocide by the White House, he checked with the Deputy National Security Advisor, Bud Nance, who said that he saw no problem with the reference. “Well that’s a fact, isn’t it?” Nance asked. Khachigian replied, “as far as I am concerned it is a fact.” Nance then said, “well, it is okay with me.”

Khachigian then decided to make sure that there will be no problems with the reference to the Armenian Genocide in the Proclamation, so he checked with Richard Allen, the White House National Security Advisor. “I want to show this to you. I’d shown it to Bud Nance. Here, please read this proclamation,” Khachigian told Allen who replied: “well, that is an historic fact.” Khachigian told him, “well, yes it is.” Allen then said, “well, as long as it is an historic fact, there is no reason why it shouldn’t be in the proclamation.”

Khachigian related another important Armenian-related episode in his book. He wrote that an Armenian friend, Jim Renjilian, invited Khachigian to accompany him to the Arlington Cemetery for Armenian Genocide Day Remembrance on April 24, 1985. During the commemorative program, Khachigian recalled the stories he had heard as a young boy about the tragic experiences of his family during the Armenian Genocide. His father was a survivor of that Genocide which Khachigian described as “the coerced exile from their homes when the Turks murdered the [Armenian] population of Anatolia by arms, starvation, pestilence, and forced march.”

Khachigian then quoted from Aris Kalfaian’s book about Chomaklou, describing the suffering and hellish experiences of the deported Armenians. Khachigian disclosed that, as a result, his father “at age sixteen, lost his mother, his brother, and sister.”

Khachigian, grief-stricken, described his emotions at the Arlington Cemetery: “The music and prayers in Arlington jolted me with reminders of my heritage and brought back those plaintive memories from my childhood. In 1915, there was a Bergen-Belsen in the Syrian desert that history had forgotten, and the pain and suffering endured by the victims and the survivors of the Armenian Genocide suddenly made my mission very real during our quiet ride back to the White House.”

Khachigian described how the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at the Arlington Cemetery inspired him to write what many have described as Reagan’s greatest speech which he delivered days later during his visit to the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen in Germany.

Khachigian concluded, “the clattering of the keys on the IBM typewriter began shouting through me the story I absorbed that morning and the one the president — and I — needed to tell.”

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## The Price of Prestige

The BBC asked the conference organizers whether there was a ban on restaurants, function rooms and hotels taking bookings during the conference, but did not receive a response.

The restrictions have already reminded many Baku residents of the pandemic period, when weddings were also banned, restaurants were closed, and students were sent to remote learning or vacation.

Residents of the capital say there are already rumors that people will only be allowed to go out on the streets for two hours a day during the conference, as was the case during the lockdown. Azerbaijan, by the way, still keeps its land borders closed more than four years after the start of the pandemic under the pretext of fighting Covid.

“With closed borders, restrictions, I am ready to believe in this [going outside with permits],” said Malakhata, a pensioner who works in catering - preparing national dishes to order. She fears that it will be possible to go outside only for two hours a day, which could destroy Malakhata’s small business. But so far the authorities have not spoken about such restrictions.

People are used to being asked to sacrifice many freedoms and comforts for the sake of the country’s prestige. Long before the Formula 1 Grand Prix, the city center, where the race track is located, was fenced off, and people had a hard time finding a way to get to Primorsky Boulevard, a traditional place for walks on hot summer evenings.

## Conflict of interest?

Transparency International, meanwhile, calls the climate conference in Azerbaijan a “troubling conflict of interest.” The rights activists note that the country is “climate-unfriendly,” produces oil, and plans to triple its gas production. And the event will be chaired by a man who previously held senior positions in the state oil company for 20 years.

Azerbaijan’s environmental image raises questions for many. The country has not yet managed to solve the prob-

enwashing” (similar to “whitewashing”).

Both Azerbaijani journalists and international human rights activists call COP29 a “greening” of reputation , noting that the event is being held during a new wave of repression against the media, as well as critics of the regime.

## From “whitening” to “greening”

In Azerbaijan, the authorities have previously presented major international events to the public as a great international success for the country and its permanent leader Ilham Aliyev. This was the case with the Eurovision Song Contest, Formula 1 auto racing, the European Games and other major events.

Azerbaijan even applied to host the Olympic Games, although unsuccessfully. But this did not prevent the construction of a sports town, stadium and sports complexes in various cities, which are still called Olympic.

And then, too, there were critics who said that Azerbaijan was using major international events to whitewash its own reputation, which was hampered by human rights violations.

One of them was human rights activist Rasul Jafarov, who since 2012, when Azerbaijan hosted the Eurovision Song Contest, has organized his own alternative contest in Baku, Sing for Democracy, to draw attention to human rights and democracy. He last held such a contest in 2014, after which he ended up in prison on charges of financial crimes.

In December 2022, protesting “environmental activists” blocked the road from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia for several months, after which Azerbaijan fully regained control of the breakaway region in September 2023, and Armenians left. At that time, activists were presented as an important force supported by the authorities. It is not yet clear whether COP29 will become a pretext for new protests by such eco-activists.

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL, MEANWHILE, CALLS THE CLIMATE CONFERENCE IN AZERBAIJAN A “TROUBLING CONFLICT OF INTEREST.” THE RIGHTS ACTIVISTS NOTE THAT THE COUNTRY IS “CLIMATE-UNFRIENDLY,” PRODUCES OIL, AND PLANS TO TRIPLE ITS GAS PRODUCTION.

lem of collecting and recycling household waste.

Azerbaijan is known for its large number of sunny days, and Baku is even called the “city of winds”. According to the International Energy Agency, the share of renewable energy sources (including hydroelectric power plants) in Azerbaijan amounted to only 1% of total production.

“Inviting fossil fuel interests to play the role of climate defenders is a waste of time,” says Oil Change International, which calls Azerbaijan’s behavior “reputation gre-





## COMMENTARY

# Knights and Daughters of Vartan: Honoring Armenians, Making A Difference, Investing In Economic Development

FRESNO — It has been only a few weeks since the Knights of Vartan 106th and Daughters of Vartan 84th Grand Convocation which was held in Fresno, with more than 300 Knights, Daughters, and guests present, who attended various workshops and meetings, celebrated successful humanitarian, educational, and economic programs implemented during the year and honored a Man and Woman of the Year for outstanding service to the Armenian people through their extraordinary influence on the public at large to gain an understanding of Diasporan Armenians and the Armenian nation.

This year the Knights of Vartan honored Michael Goorjian as the 2024 Man of the Year. An accomplished American actor, filmmaker and writer, Goorjian has received acclaim for his diverse contributions to the arts. He earned an Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor and gained further recognition as a director with his

two national political conventions. Her leadership extends to chairing numerous events and contributing to the Board of Trustees at Saint Agnes Medical Center. She has also been actively involved with the Fresno Area Crime Stoppers, Neighborhood Watch, Fresno County and City Historical Society, California Women for Agriculture, Fresno County Farm Bureau, Ani Guild Patron for the California Home for the Aged, and the Clovis Chamber of Commerce. This award celebrates her lifelong dedication to her family, community, and her Armenian heritage. Both Goorjian and Poochigian were present to receive their awards.

Since 2023 the Knights of Vartan has initiated a new award, the Mamigonian Knight of the Year, to recognize dedicated Asbeds who have worked to improve the lives of the Armenian people and support the Armenian Church. The 2024 Mamig-

onian Knight of the Year recognized Past Commander Anto Cingoz. In addition, several members received an Asbed of the Year award: Past Commanders Leo Manuelian, Harry Kochounian, Rafi Bousnoyan, Joe Zabounian, Armen Oganessian, and Asbed David Jamgotchian.

Each of the Grand Councils of the Knights and Daughters are continuing to serve for the 2024-2025 fiscal year with one addition as a new Grand Recorder.

The Knight's Grand Council (Avak Tivan) consists of seven officers: Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian of Gomidas Lodge, Grand Lieutenant Commander Levon Thorose of Ardaz Lodge, Grand Chaplain Sergey Simavoryan of Gomidas Lodge, Grand Recorder Gary Kaloostian of Ardaz Lodge, Grand Treasurer Ronald Nazeley of Ardaz Lodge, Grand Master of Ceremonies Gregory Babikian of Gomidas Lodge, Grand Sentinel Karen Amirkhanyan of Gomidas Lodge.

The Daughter's Grand Council (Avak Khorhourt) consists of seven officers: Grand Chairwoman Nancy Berberian



Michael Goorjian, the Man of the Year 2024 being honored (Photos by Scott Marcarian and Jean Mazmanian)

Thompson, Grand Associate Chairwoman Pam Basmajian Ude, Grand Chaplain Arpi Keledjian, Grand Secretary Yn. Roberta Hairabedian, Grand Treasurer Darlene Chardukian, Grand Mistress of Ceremonies Dr. Susie Kalinian, Grand Sentinel Ani Missakian.

Delegates to the Knights and Daughters of Vartan Convocation allocated financial support for various charitable initiatives: the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia NGO, scholarships for students in the USA, as well as students in Armenia to attend the Yerevan State University, the National Polytechnic University of Armenia and the American University of Armenia. Funds were also allocated for CASP (Children of Armenia Sponsorship Program), Mer Hoosy NGO, the "After School Program" at Aygedzor School in Tavush, and to a number of renovation and research projects. An additional allocation this year was granted for the "Economic Sustainability Program", newly established by the current Grand Council, the program supports selected families, who have particular skills and lost businesses in Artsakh, by providing them funds for much needed equipment so that they can resume their business in Armenia.

Significantly, the organization provided humanitarian support to displaced Artsakh Armenians in the fall of 2023, totaling \$103,745. This assistance was distributed to 235 families, encompassing 1,229 individuals, including 487 children. In January, through the Economic Sustainability

Program, 22 Artsakh and local families received economic grants totaling \$60,592.

Helping an Artsakh family begin their business in Armenia can yield significant benefits. It not only provides a vital source of income but also fosters a sense of autonomy and empowerment. Ashot Gabrielyan, who previously ran a successful bakery in Stepanakert for over a decade, found himself a refugee and settled in Masis, Armenia in 2023. There, he purchased land with an unfinished structure in order to establish a new bakery. While his family's funds covered part of the expenses, it was with the support of the Knights of Vartan that he was able to complete the building and launch the bakery and thus support his family. He is now successfully operating his business at its new location.

"We believe that a thriving family-owned business can boost local economies, create job opportunities, and stimulate economic activity within the community," said Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian.

Grand Chairwoman Nancy Berberian Thompson added, "While we continue to support projects in the US and in Armenia, our mission this year is to bring in new members as we did during the Grand Convocation by initiating seven new sisters into various chapters around the country. Then and only then can we continue to enhance the lives of Armenians in Armenia and here at home."

To learn more about the program <https://kofv.org/economic-sustainability-program-esp/>



Grand Chairwoman Nancy Berberian Thompson with New Members (Photos by Scott Marcarian and Jean Mazmanian)

independent film "Illusion" (2004). In 2022, Goorjian wrote, directed, edited, and starred in "Amerikatsi," a comedy-drama about an Armenian American who returns to the Armenian SSR after World War II, only to find himself in a Soviet prison. The film premiered at the Woodstock Film Festival in 2022, where it won the Best Narrative Feature award, and was also selected as Armenia's entry for Best International Feature Film at the 96th Academy Awards.

The Daughters of Vartan recognized Debbie Poochigian as the 2024 Woman of the Year. A California native, Poochigian has distinguished herself as a dedicated civic leader with a notable record of service, including her roles as a delegate to



Debbie Poochigian, the Woman of the Year 2024 delivers remarks (Photos by Scott Marcarian and Jean Mazmanian)