

Miqayel Voskanyan Puts a Contemporary Spin on the Tar



By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Miqayel Voskanyan has been drawing more and more attention to Armenian tar music in recent years on an international level. He is a composer and singer as well as an instrumentalist, and recently was in Boston to participate in Silkroad’s Global Musician Workshop of the New England Conservatory. He is the leader of the five-man Mikayel Voskanyan and Friends Band and the smaller Tarup Trio.

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MVF Band at Royce Hall, UCLA, 2023 in the scope of its Center Stage US tour

EVN Founder Discusses Disinformation in Armenia At Boston Tekeyan Center Event

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN— EVN Report on-line news magazine founder and editor-in-chief Maria Titizian was the guest speaker at a program at the hall of the Baikar Building of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, on September 5, about the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation in Armenia now. The program was sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter, the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Issues.

Speaking to a rapt audience of about 50, Titizian, with humor and insight, described the state of media and news



Maria Titizian (Aram Arkun Photo)

dissemination in Armenia, especially the proliferation of disinformation and misinformation during the Karabakh (Artsakh) war, and continuing still.

Titizian is a Lebanese-born Canadian who moved to Armenia more than two

decades ago. Previously she was a associate editor of the *Armenian Reporter* and later managing editor at CivilNet. She also contributed a column for *Asbarez*, an official organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, and is a lecturer at the American University of Armenia.

First, a couple of definitions; Merriam-Webster defines misinformation as “incorrect or misleading information,” whereas disinformation is “false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.”

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Azerbaijan Refuses To Sign Peace Treaty Based on Already Agreed Upon Points

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Azerbaijan has refused to sign an interim peace treaty with Armenia based on articles both parties had already agreed on, despite having proposed to do so earlier this year.

On Wednesday, September 11, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Aykhan Hajiade stated that signing a framework peace treaty with Armenia which only included mutually agreed upon provisions was “unacceptable” and only served to “postpone the solution of existing problems in bilateral relations to the next stage.”

Hajizade echoed previous Azerbaijani demands that Armenia end its “continuing” territorial claims against Azerbaijan in its legislation and constitution.

His remarks came in response to a speech on the ongoing peace talks delivered by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan earlier that day at the Yerevan Dialogue conference.

Pashinyan reiterated Armenia’s offer to sign the already agreed-upon articles of the peace treaty with Azerbaijan, to have “a fundamental document” and then move on to discussing other issues.

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Armenian Sovereignty Over Transit Routes ‘Not Questioned By Russia’

By Tatevik Lazarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Transit routes passing through Armenia must not undermine its territorial integrity, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk insisted on September 15, commenting on Russia’s renewed calls for the opening of transport links between Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave.

“The unblocking of communications [between Armenia and Azerbaijan] is possible within the framework of the agreements reached by the leaders of the three states and reflected in the joint statement of November 9-10, 2020,” he said, referring to a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement that stopped the last Armenian-Azerbaijani war in Nagorno-Karabakh. “As you know, Russia is always ready to join in that process and help based on the principle of sovereignty, territorial integrity and jurisdiction.”

Overchuk arrived in Armenia and met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on September 13, following bitter recriminations on the issue traded by Yerevan and Moscow. Russian Foreign Sergei Lavrov sparked the war of words with his August 19 statement accusing the Armenian side of “sabotaging” the construction of a highway and railway connecting Nakhichevan to the rest of Azerbaijan via Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering Iran.

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Bishop Says No State Funds Used for Echmiadzin Renovation

YEREVAN (Panarmenia.am) — No government funds were allocated for the renovation of the Armenian Apostolic Church cathedral in Echmiadzin, Bishop Mushegh Babayan said on September 17.

Babayan, head of the Administrative and Economic Department of the Mother See, told reporters that the renovation was carried out through donations from around 10 benefactors, as well as contributions from other people.

He underscored that the Echmiadzin underwent such a major renovation for the first time under Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians.

The re-consecration ceremony of the cathedral is scheduled for September 29 following the blessing of Holy Muron on September 28.

France Will Provide Funds for Teaching Language

YEREVAN (ARKA) — Armenian Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Zhanna Andreasyan and French Ambassador to Armenia Olivier Decottignies signed an agreement in Yerevan on September 17, aimed at improving the quality of teaching French in Armenian schools, reported the press service of the ministry.

As part of the project, France will provide 600,000 euros to improve the quality of French language teaching in Armenia and to support the needs of students.

According to the agreement, the parties will join forces to ensure, consistent, regular and coordinated retraining of French teachers for a minimum of 10 days per teacher per year, from the beginning of 2025.

Robert Kocharyan to Face New Charges

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia's Court of Cassation on September 12 overturned the acquittal of former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan and other officials in 2021, sending the case to the Anti-Corruption Court for renewed investigation.

"The Court of Cassation found that the first instance court ruling to terminate the criminal prosecution of Robert Kocharyan, Seyran Ohanyan, Armen Gevorgyan and Yuri Khachaturov was unlawful and after the recognition of Article 300.1 of the Criminal Code as unconstitutional and invalid and before the departure of the court to the deliberation room, the prosecutor was authorized to change the legal assessment of the charges levelled against them," the Prosecutor General's Office said on September 17.

"Taking into account the elements of a crime envisaged by another article of the Criminal Code in the acts incriminated to Robert Kocharyan and the others, the prosecutor dealing with the criminal case will soon submit a relevant decision to the Anti-Corruption Court," the law-enforcement agency added.

Pashinyan Visits Georgia for Talks with Leaders

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze had a private conversation in Tbilisi on September 16, which was followed by an extended-format meeting.

According to a readout issued by the office of the Prime Minister Pashinyan, Irakli Kobakhidze welcomed the official visit of the Armenian PM and emphasized the importance of consistent development of strategic relations between the two countries in all fields. The Prime Minister of Georgia emphasized the importance of trade and economic cooperation with Armenia, expansion of business ties and development of infrastructures.

Pashinyan thanked the Georgian leader for the warm welcome, noting that the intensive nature of mutual high-level visits testifies to the interest of the governments of the two countries to expand and strengthen multilateral cooperation. Pashinyan noted that the government Armenia is interested in strategic cooperation with Georgia and emphasized joint projects in the fields of economy, energy, tourism, education and culture.

The parties expressed readiness to continue discussions on joint infrastructure development projects, which will also contribute to the expansion of regional cooperation.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, left, with his Georgian counterpart Irakli Kobakhidze

Pashinyan presented details to his Georgian counterpart regarding the discussions on the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the border demarcation process.

Kobakhidze welcomed the steps towards

peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the benefit of establishing and strengthening peace and stability in the region. He expressed his country's readiness to contribute to the normalization of relations between the two neighboring states.

Founder of Georgian-Armenian Media Outlet Barred from Entering Georgia

By Arshaluys Barseghyan and Tata Shoshishvili

Georgian authorities have barred Aliq Media founder Arsen Kharatyan from entering the country, reportedly detaining him for hours at Tbilisi International Airport before deporting him.

Aliq Media reported that their founder was detained at Tbilisi Airport on the morning of Tuesday, September 17, and that he was denied access to his phone.

Kharatyan later stated that he had arrived in Tbilisi from an undisclosed European country, reportedly Luxembourg, on Monday. He said that he was detained by the border guards at the airport for four hours before being deported to the country he had arrived from, despite having a flight to Yerevan booked for September 18.

"By now I have no doubt that this entry denial aka deportation is political, which ultimately means that current Georgian authorities are either afraid of people like me or have patrons from Moscow or Baku telling them to 'clear up the space' before the elections," Kharatyan said.

Georgian media reported that Kharatyan made these statements while in Istanbul.

Kharatyan was also briefly barred from entering Georgia from Armenia last week, stating that he was similarly detained at the airport for two hours and given a document stating that he was barred from entering due to "other cases envisaged by Georgian legislation."

Georgian border officials regularly use this as a justification for not allowing people, including Russian journalists and activists critical of the government in Moscow, into the country.

"I now have a document with a denial of the entry and a stamp in my passport which let me enter Georgia, so not sure what's more legal," Kharatyan wrote at the time.

Kharatyan was one of the founders of



Founder of Aliq Meida Arsen Kharatyan (Heinrich Böll Stiftung photo)

Armenia's ruling Civil Contract party, having previously served as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's foreign relations adviser. He has also been a part of pro-democracy movements in Armenia, as well as a member of various international media organizations.

"The biggest problem here is the fact that no one has explained to me the reason why I was denied entry to Georgia, where I lived for over [five] years, created a media, co-founded various organizations, helped build bridges between Armenia-Georgia and so on," Kharatyan wrote, adding that Georgia was his 'second homeland.'

Kharatyan also said that six weeks ahead of the parliamentary elections the ruling Georgian dream party "seems not to care about gaining new friends, but is making new enemies with actions like this."

He expressed confidence that he would return to Georgia "very soon" and that no power in the world "can make Georgia a

country like Belarus," noting that Georgians are 'simply too mature and strong as a civil society.'

"Thus this can only be a short authoritarian notion 'a Belarus vacation' as one great American friend had put it but never a reality to stay!!!"

While it remains unclear why the authorities barred Kharatyan from entering the country, Georgian TV channel Formula cited unconfirmed reports that Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party, "had information that the journalist was going to launch a TV station in Georgia."

His deportation was met with criticism inside Georgia, with Ana Dolidze, one of the leaders of the opposition Strong Georgia coalition, stating that what had happened to Kharatyan was a continuation of "Russia's strategy."

"If there is a person who has free thoughts, supports the West, supports democracy in Georgia and fights for it, [Georgian Dream] prevents their entry. This is Russia's strategy," Dolidze said.

On Monday, September 16, Georgia barred Belarusian journalist Andrei Mialeshka from entering the country, despite him having lived there for the last few years. Mialeshka flew to Kutaisi in western Georgia with his daughter from Warsaw on Monday night and was sent back to Poland almost 24 hours later.

In February, Olesya Vartanyan, a former employee of the Crisis Group, reported mistreatment she experienced by Georgian revenue officers when crossing the Armenia-Georgia land border.

OC Media has reached out to Georgia's Interior Ministry for comment on Kharatyan's deportation.

(This article was originally published by OC Media on September 17.)



INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan Refuses to Sign Peace Treaty Based on Already Agreed Upon Points

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Pashinyan added that articles contained “internationally accepted core provisions” for establishing relations, noting that it envisages a mechanism that would enable the two parties to continue discussions through a joint mechanism and to also establish diplomatic relations.

Pashinyan quoted high-ranking Azerbaijani officials, including President Ilham Aliyev, as saying that “almost 80% of the peace treaty paragraphs have been approved.”

Despite turning down Pashinyan’s offer, Azerbaijan made a similar proposal in July, calling on Armenia to sign a document on the basic principles of a future peace treaty as an interim peace measure, a proposal that received a cold reception in Yerevan at the time.

Pashinyan proposed a similar measure at a press conference on August 31, stating that the current draft of the treaty included thirteen articles that had been fully agreed upon, with three other partially accepted articles.

“In any case, we, or anyone, else can’t ever have the kind of peace treaty that would regulate all possible issues,” said Pashinyan.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov rejected Pashinyan’s offer a few days later, stating on September 2 that Baku had received the latest draft of the treaty from Armenia a few hours before Pashinyan’s press conference, and that “several key points” had been removed from the document.

“Important aspects were not included in the draft of the agreement, and we were told that this was the solution to the issue. In the context of a historical conflict, the agreement and each of its clauses are of great importance,” he said, recommending that Armenia “take these issues more seriously.”



From left, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, in February. (Tass photo)

Despite Azerbaijan’s negative reaction to the latest draft, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan earlier this week said that the draft Armenia had submitted “largely includes the fully agreed text” and that Yerevan was awaiting Baku’s response to it.

“There is a real opportunity to sign the peace treaty in a short period of time,” he said.

Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hajizada criticised Mirzoyan’s remarks, stating that “instead of adequately reacting to the commentary made by Azerbaijan, Armenia tried to turn a blind eye to the challenges by removing the necessary provisions that are necessary to be reflected in the draft.”

It is unclear what exactly Armenia was alleged to have left out of its draft.

In August, Azerbaijan agreed to withdraw their demand from the agreement for a “Zangezur corridor” — a proposed transit link connecting mainland Azerbaijan to its

exclave of Nakhichevan.

The issue was considered a major roadblock to the signing of a peace treaty, with Azerbaijan then stating that Armenia’s constitution was “the only obstacle to further progress in the peace process.”

The Armenian constitution references the Armenian Declaration of Independence, which includes a joint decision by the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Karabakh Council to “reunify the Armenian SSR and the Mountainous Region of Karabakh.”

While Armenia has repeatedly denied that changing its constitution was a precondition for a peace treaty with Azerbaijan, Pashinyan in May issued a decree to draft a new constitution by December 2026, and at the end of August, the government announced plans to hold a referendum to approve a new constitution in 2027.

(This story originally appeared on www.ocmedia.org on September 16.)

INTERNATIONAL

Dink Award Laureates For 2024 Named

ISTANBUL — The sixteenth International Hrant Dink Award laureates were announced during a ceremony on Sunday, September 15.

The award was granted to the Mor Çatı Women’s Shelter Foundation from Turkey for being one of the longest-standing women’s organizations in Turkey, with its efforts in enabling women to stand together and empower them and for combating violence for decades. The award was also granted to Ruggiatu Neneh Turay from Sierra Leone for her efforts against gender mutilation of women and girls.

Goddess Anahit’s Statue Is Brought to Armenia From UK

YEREVAN (News.am) — Zhanina Andreasyan, the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, announced on September 16 that for the next six months, the History Museum of Armenia will be home to a bronze statue of the Goddess Anahit, on loan from the British Museum.

The statue of Anahit, the Armenian goddess of fertility and motherhood, will be in Armenia for about six months.

The History Museum of Armenia prepared a document package with the British Museum, where the bronze head and left hand of the Goddess Anahit were kept, and both are in Armenia now.

The bronze has never been exhibited in Armenia. It was found in the 1870s in the Satala settlement of Erzurum, Turkey.

French Foreign Minister Reiterates Support

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné has reiterated France’s support to Armenia.

Speaking at a joint press conference with his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan, the French FM said on September 16 there are very few topics in France that all political circles would agree upon, but everyone agrees on the topic of Armenia.

He said his visit to Armenia is meant to reiterate to the Armenian people and government French friendship and support.

“Despite the challenges, the obvious hostility and pressure attempts by Russia, Armenia continues its path towards democracy, towards freedom, it is advancing phase by phase. Know that you can always count on us for democratic values,” the French FM said, adding that Paris supports every country that is fighting for these values.

“France is always by your side,” he said.

“There are very few topics in France that all political directions would agree upon. We can say that Armenia is one of these topics. This is why representatives of various levels of different political directions are eager to visit Armenia, because everyone agrees around topics related to Armenia,” Séjourné added.

One-Year Anniversary of the Ethnic Cleansing of Artsakh Marked

BRUSSELS (Panorama.am) — In cooperation with several Armenian organizations across Europe, including the Initiative Munk Germany and the Armenian Apostolic Church of Belgium, the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (EAFJD), co-organized an Evening of Remembrance and Hope at the Sainte Marie Madeleine Armenian Apostolic Church in Brussels on September 13. The event marked the one-year anniversary of the complete ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023.

For the first time in two millennia, no Armenians remain in Artsakh — their ancestral homeland. The evening brought together Belgian politicians, public figures, journalists, religious leaders, and members of the Armenian community to commemorate the anniversary and the profound cultural and religious loss that has occurred, EAFJD reported.

The gathering served to raise awareness about the urgent need to protect the endangered Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh as well as the humanitarian tragedy that continues

to affect the Armenian nation. The event was honored by the presence of Vrtanes Abrahamyan, Primate of the Diocese of Artsakh, who delivered a firsthand account of the forced displacement of the Armenian population from Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and the ongoing threat to Artsakh’s cultural and religious heritage, which includes around 5,000 monuments.

The Primate’s speech was followed by musical performances featuring Lorance Anahid Mekhitarian on piano, Vardan Hovhannesyan on the Armenian duduk, and an opera performance by Maria Abajan-Schaber.

Commenting on the event, EAFJD President Kaspar Karampetian stated: “The forced depopulation of Artsakh is a wound in the heart of every Armenian and a violation of basic human rights that must not be ignored by the global community. We will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the world keeps the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh on the agenda, and that the rights of its people, notably the right to collective return, are restored. These cultural events are vital to both commemorate our loss and inform the public about the necessity of taking action to protect the inalienable rights of the Armenian people of Artsakh, as well as its endangered cultural heritage and identity.”



Vrtanes Abrahamyan, Primate of the Diocese of Artsakh Evening of remembrance in Brussels marks one year since ethnic cleansing of Artsakh, at left, at the commemoration



INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Community Promotes Unity In Diversity

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

HESSE, Germany — On September 7, the Armenian Cultural Association (AKV) in Hesse proudly celebrated its 55th jubilee, one of the oldest immigrant communities in the state. While presenting various facets of the uniqueness of Armenian culture, the festive gathering focused on the integrative function of cultural exchange. The event was entitled, “55 Years of Culture, Integration, and Language Diversity.”

In his greetings, Uwe Becker, State Secretary in the Hesse Finance Ministry, made the point most clearly: integration of an ethnic community into German society does not mean relinquishing that identity, but rather, making its own contribution to enrich the culture of what was originally a host country for our ancestors. Becker, who spoke as the representative of the Hesse State Governor, stressed that the city of Frankfurt is rich, not because it is the business and financial capital of the state, but because of the wealth of cultural interchange and dialogue among its diversified population. Of the many contributions made by the Armenian community, he highlighted its music, as well as its cuisine—both abundantly on exhibit during the event. And he noted the importance of the city’s historic St. Paul’s cathedral, which hosts a major commemoration ceremony every year on April 24 for the victims of the Armenian genocide. Becker emphasized the importance of speaking out against genocide denial through such events, as well as in school curricula.

Official greetings came from Armin Preuss, chairman of the Board of the AKV, and Armenuhi Tadevosyan, attaché of the Armenian Embassy in Berlin, before a concert featuring young musicians from the community began.

Arevik Beglaryan performed an original composition, *Haghartsin* (2018), on the piano, then accompanied soprano Seda Nahapetyan, who sang two Komitas pieces, the favorite *Krunk* (Crane) and a delightful *Hoy Nazan*. Violinist Ostap Shpik followed with *Tsirani Tsar* (Apricot tree), also by Komitas.

Two more prominent members of the Armenian community offered brief remarks. Jonathan Spangenberg, chairman of the Board of the Central Council of Armenians in Germany (ZAD), said the history of the AKV, now over a half-century old, is an integral part of the

history of the city of Frankfurt, just as it is an important chapter in the history of Armenians. In fact, as recounted in a short film shown later, the AKV has built bridges between Armenians living in Germany and German society at large. From the very beginning, AKV members have engaged in volunteer activities nurturing harmonious community relations in the city and region. In addition to its own rich calendar of events, the AKV has taken part in numerous international projects, including the International Festival at the Dominican monastery in Frankfurt on the day of the Ascension of Christ, the Brotherhood Peoples Festival every July in nearby Aschaffenburg, as well as the Intercultural Week in Sulzbach every October.

Rev. Vahridsh Baghdassaryan, representing Bishop Serovpé Isakyanhyan, Primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Germany, offered greetings and blessings. He took note of the fact that the day of the celebration, September 7, also marks the anniversary of the 1945 pogroms against the Greek minority in Istanbul, as well as Armenians and Jews. In contrast to this violence, the AKV has engaged in promoting peaceful

A special treat, a surprise for many, came next. Bass-baritone Hovhannes Karapetyan, the talented young opera and lieder singer, arrived recently with his wife in Wiesbaden, where he has been engaged by the Hesse State Theater for the season. (<https://www.operabase.com/hovhannes-karapetyan-a2176186/bio/en>) Karapetyan, who has a powerful, sonorous voice, displayed his versatility, singing (a cappella) *Tagh Haryutean* (Song on the Ascension of Christ) by 10th century monk Saint Gregory of Narek, then, accompanied by pianist Sona Talian, *Hayastan* (Armenia) by Komitas. His program in Wiesbaden this season includes opera roles, in Beethoven’s “Fidelio” and Rossini’s “Barber of Seville,” as well as lieder. Sona Talian, who is also a composer, closed the concert with solo works.

Art, Dance, and Fine Cuisine

As if to illustrate Secretary Becker’s praise of Armenian specialties, the AKV hosted an art exhibit with works by artists Anna Mikayelyan, on the theme of “Meditation,” and Denis Alt with works on “Unknown Armenian Women” and “Armenian Architecture in Istanbul.” Sculptor and art teacher Ishkhan Nazaryan



Shushan Tumanyan and the AKV Dance Group

relations with all communities, which Baghdassaryan praised. Participants rose to join in a prayer he offered, a prayer for peace.

Continuing the concert featuring Armenian musicians performing Armenian music, pianist Diana Sahakyan accompanied Mane Harutyunyan on the duduk to present Artur Grigoryan’s “Hay garunner” (Armenian Spring), and followed up with a duet with violinist Ostap Shpik to play the Armenian folklore piece, “Sirezi yarez taran” (My love has been taken away). Sahakyan then offered two solo works, Arno Babajanyan’s “Vagharshapati pare” (Vagharshapat Dance), and “Shushiki” by Komitas.

displayed sculptures on the theme “Homeland.” Guests followed from the exhibit area into the adjacent hall, where the long table featured Armenian delicacies and Armenian wines.

To conclude the festive afternoon, Shushan Tumanyan, co-chair of the AKV board and the person chiefly responsible for the massive organizing effort behind the event, took to the stage. Holding her right hand high, with colorful scarf, she led her Armenian dance group, dressed in characteristic attire, in a series of lively dances, then invited all interested attendants to join on stage for an impromptu workshop. Soon, there would be more people on stage than in the hall.

Armenian Sovereignty Over Transit Routes ‘Not Questioned By Russia’

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The two increasingly estranged allies have different interpretations of Paragraph 9 of the truce agreement stipulating that Russian border guards will “control” the movement of people, vehicles and goods through Syunik. Armenian officials say this does not mean they can escort the traffic to and from the Azerbaijani exclave, let alone be involved in Armenian border controls. Lavrov indicated earlier this year that Moscow wants “neutral border and customs control” there.

Overchuk co-chairs, together with Armenian and Azerbaijani deputy prime minister, a trilateral working group dealing with the practical modalities of those transport links. He and the Armenian co-

chair Mher Grigoryan held separate talks on the same day. Speaking to journalists on September 14, the Russian vice-premier did not say whether the two sides managed to bridge their differences.

“The key question is whether or not the Armenian authorities can renounce the infamous Paragraph 9 of the November [2020] statement and do so without shocks,” said Armen Baghdassaryan, an Armenian political analyst. “It’s not just about that road [to Nakhichevan.] If that road functions without Russian control, then Russia’s position in the region will be significantly weakened.”

“But if the communication channels are placed under Russian control, then Armenia can once and for all forget about ever

escaping Russian influence,” Baghdassaryan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

Russia’s renewed push for such a transport corridor has also alarmed Iran, which fears losing its common border with Armenia. The Iranian Foreign Ministry reportedly warned Moscow earlier this month against contributing to any “geopolitical changes” in the region.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said last week that it has provided Tehran with “all the necessary clarifications on this matter.” An Iranian lawmaker, Fada Hossein Maleki, again criticized Moscow at the weekend. He earlier described the percent Russian support for the “Zangezur corridor” sought by Azerbaijan as a “stab in the back.”



Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk at an international economic forum in Kazan, May 17, 2024.



Community News

AGBU to Hold 93rd General Assembly Weekend in New York

NEW YORK — From October 10 to 12, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) board members, delegates, supporters, friends and guests from across the globe will have the chance to partake in an historical turning point in one of America's most historic cities — the celebration of AGBU President Berge Setrakian's half a century of transformative leadership and the inauguration of his successor Sam Simonian as the eighth president of the 118-year-old global organization.

The transition will take place at New York City's glistening Mandarin Oriental on Saturday, October 12, as part of the formal agenda of the AGBU 93rd General Assembly. A gala evening will follow in tribute to the legacy of service of Berge and Vera Setrakian. The entire weekend



Berge Setrakian, the outgoing AGBU president

includes a series of curated events showcasing international talents and encouraging important dialogue among attendees.

On Friday, October 11, the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI Armenia), an independent think tank and policy accelerator based in Yerevan, will host a half-day forum called "Armenia's New Balance: Russia, the West, and the Future of the South Caucasus." Distinguished experts in regional and global affairs, including leading voices engaged in shaping Armenia's policy future, will participate in the three-hour discussion addressing such issues as Armenia's new foreign policy balance between Russia and the West, the potential impact of the US presidential election on global stability, Armenia's ongoing security and defense reforms, and the quest for peace and stability in the South Caucasus.

APRI Armenia was founded by AGBU in 2022 in response to a dire need for deep insight, dynamic policy dialogue, and clear understanding of Armenia in its geopolitical and domestic context. The forum also takes place at the Mandarin Oriental, which offers spectacular views of the city's iconic Central Park.

That same evening, guests will be treated to a unique experience called

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(Left to Right) Joshua Rednik, Chief Executive Officer at American Friends of the Hebrew University (AFHU), pictured with Drs. Eric and Melina Esrailian, who were presented with the Humanitarian Torch of Learning Award during the Bel Air Affaire hosted by the Western Region of AFHU. On right is Hebrew University President Prof. Asher Cohen. The Esrailians were honored for their philanthropy and support of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Armenian Studies program. Credit: Robert Lurie Photography

Drs. Eric and Melina Esrailian Honored for Support of Hebrew U. Armenian Studies Program

BEVERLY HILLS — The 15th Annual Bel Air Affaire, hosted at the iconic Papillon Estate in Beverly Hills, raised more than \$2.5 million for scholarships to assist Hebrew University of Jerusalem students impacted by the October 7 Hamas attacks.

This year's honorees, Drs. Eric and Melina Esrailian, received the AFHU Humanitarian Torch of Learning Award at the prestigious event, hosted by the Western Region of American Friends of the Hebrew University (AFHU), for their community philanthropy and longstanding support of the Hebrew University Armenian Studies Program.

Keyboardist David Foster, 16x Grammy Award-winning writer and producer and his wife, singer and actress Katharine McPhee Foster, feted gala participants as the surprise evening musical entertainment. Among those who provided tributes were Cher, Barbra Streisand and Jeffrey Katzenberg.

For decades, Drs. Eric and Melina Esrailian have been active in the Los Angeles philanthropic, medical, academic and Armenian communities. Eric is chief of the Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, as well as an Emmy-nominated producer, investor, and entrepreneur. Melina is a practicing dentist with a background in public health, and a successful real estate investor.

The Esrailians have been closely involved in creating the Promise Institute for Human Rights at the UCLA School of Law and The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, formalizing an organization to protect Armenian scholarship, history, language, and culture.

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One of the highlights of the American Friends of the Hebrew University (AFHU) was the Armenian dance troupe that provided the evening's entertainment at the Bel Air Affaire honoring Drs. Eric and Melina Esrailian. They received the Humanitarian Torch of Learning Award during the event hosted by the Western Region of AFHU for their community philanthropy and longstanding support of the Hebrew University Armenian Studies Program. Credit: Robert Lurie Photography

Hye Pointe Armenian Church Consecration To Take Place in October

By Rev. Fr. Vart Gyozyan

HAVERHILL, Mass. —

In the year 2000, members from Holy Cross Church in Lawrence and St. Gregory the Illuminator in Haverhill, bought land together with the idea of creating a new church community. A new name was adopted: Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe. Culturally, these were the first parishes in the Eastern Diocese to combine their resources. In 2007, during his Pontifical visit to the United States, Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians visited the Hye Pointe site and blessed the four cornerstones of the future sanctuary.

In 2017 April, Hye Pointe Church was constructed and opened the Family Life and Cultural Center and shortly after that, began construction of the new sanctuary. Unfortunately, COVID delayed further fundraising, until 2022.

The Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe is now preparing for the consecration of its sanctuary. The consecration, to be presided over by Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, is set to take place on the weekend of October 25-27. Located in Haverhill, the newly constructed sanctuary will represent the combined parishes of the Holy Cross Church and St. Gregory the Illuminator.

I believe that the Consecration of Our Sanctuary truly is a Testament to our Faith and Determination. In the heart of our community lies a testament to faith, dedication, and unwavering perseverance — our beloved sanctuary. For years, she has stood as a beacon of hope and a focal point of our spiritual journey. Now, after much anticipation and hard work, we are on the cusp of witnessing a historic moment — the Consecration of Our Sanctuary.

This event is the culmination of a dream nurtured by Hye Pointe parishioners and community members, a vision that many have held close to their hearts for countless years.

It symbolizes not only the physical manifestation of our devotion but also the spiritual significance of our collective journey.

The sanctuary, connected to the Family Life & Cultural Center, was constructed in an Armenian traditional style on both the exterior and interior. Modeled after the Armenian churches St. Hripsime in Holy Echmiadzin and All Savior /Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi, Artsakh, the representation of these two churches is being carved on the Church's main doors. Many of the pieces used in the construction (windows, pews, vigil lamps) were used at both Holy Cross and St. Gregory the Illuminator churches. Other new Liturgical items were or are being constructed or made in Armenia and brought to the United States.

As Hye Pointe's Parish Council chair, Kim Dandurant, said, "We remember and cherish our past, the sacrifices made by Genocide Survivors

see CONSECRATION, page 7



COMMUNITY NEWS

EVN Founder Discusses Disinformation in Armenia at Boston Event

DISINFORMATION, from page 1

Both are rampant in Armenia, Titizian said. With an enfeebled post-war Armenia, these cause an existential threat to its very existence.

Titizian noted that the media landscape in Armenia is “richly diverse,” with television, radio, print and online outlets for news. “But it is highly polarized, as is society,” she said, facing “significant challenges, also in the information stage.”

“The media has been weaponized and manipulated,” especially post 2018 Velvet Revolution, she said.

“There is a prevalence of misinformation, fake news, false narratives coordinated disinformation campaigns,” she said.

“Disinformation campaigns have intensified as state, non-state, internal and external forces are trying to forging information campaigns, to shape political power in Armenia,” she said, affecting Armenia domestically as well as its uneasy peace with Azerbaijan.

This unfortunate turn of events is not only happening in Armenia. “This is a global phenomenon,” she noted.

‘Major Obstacles’

Just who is behind the false narratives as well as legitimate media outlets in Armenia?

Titizian said it is important to know who or what entity backs any news outlets. For example, she said, there are both domestic and outside forces behind dissemination of disinformation in Armenia.

“Internal actors and external forces are shaping the reality in Armenia,” she said. Among the online news outlets, Kremlin-affiliated media and Azerbaijani-affiliated Telegram channels are especially rampant in “spreading misinformation and causing a lot of panic and instability.” They often write in Armenian, warning of an impending catastrophe.

(Telegram is much more popular in Russia-centric countries. Its founder, Pavel Durov, was arrested earlier this month in France on various charges, including knowingly allowing the use of the social media network for illegal activities, including child trafficking.)

The landscape in Armenia itself is dominated by three forces, she said, the state, political parties and oligarchs and “then we have a handful of media outlets.”

The state owns several outlets, including Armenian Public Radio, Armenpress online news and H-1 television channel.

She joked about the rosy picture the latter always portrayed. “I wish I was living in the Armenia of H-Mek,” she said.

Political parties and oligarchs own many of the news outlets, ensuring “journalists do as they are told” to promote that entity’s agenda, much like the Soviet-era propaganda.

One major problem facing Armenia is the truth about ownership of media outlets.

“There was a big push for media ownership transparency and where they were getting their money,” she said. “This came with big push back.”

“Oftentimes you won’t find information” in an “about us” section on news websites. Therefore, “people oftentimes don’t know what agenda is being pushed by an outlet,” she said.

“The greatest lie of the 20th century was that the Soviet Union collapsed. In many ways, it is still very prevalent,” she said. In post-Soviet countries, “There is little tradition of objective information gathering, leading to reliance on rumors, speculation and conspiracy theories.”

She stressed the problems caused by conspiracy theories. “In Armenia, we love

conspiracy theories. The country thrives on it,” she said.

Social media entries are often given the same weight as news from a serious, verified outlet, she added.

Facebook, she said, is a considered a major news outlet in Armenia. “Due to the fact that trust for the media is at its lowest [level]. They trust personal contacts more than they trust the media.”

She added, “If your friends on Facebook are of a particularly political persuasion, you are just going to be seeing certain news items that belong to that, creating echo chambers.”

“The war escalated the spread of misinformation,” she said.

Velvet Revolution and Karabakh War

When Nikol Pashinyan launched the Velvet Revolution and eventually became the holder of the country’s top political office, it seemed like the country was headed

The government has enacted laws which while apparently intended to clear up media ownership, have led to curtailing the rights of the free press, leading to self-censorship by legitimate media outlets. “That’s just the reality,” she said.

She singled out the government’s military press conferences during the war, as an example of why the citizens don’t trust government data.

Artsrun Hovhannisyan, the Armenian Ministry of Defense spokesperson during the Karabakh war, offered precise, detailed information about the victories of the Armenian army day to day, which turned out to be little more than fiction.

“We will win. We will win,” she quoted him as saying.

“What they were doing was choosing not to share bits of information. They were leading us to believe we were doing well in the war,” she said.

Her son and colleague were in Artsakh

like the church or the army.”

Many in the opposition, after the ignominious defeat, started a narrative that this ending was a premediated defeat, that lands were sold to Azerbaijan.

“We throw around words and sentences and narratives without having proof,” she said.

“Loss of Shushi has fueled public distrust,” she said.

Traitor or Hero

The words “traitor” and “hero” are so used so often to describe people that they have become devalued, she said.

“It’s not that black and white,” she said. “There is a huge gray area that we fail to see. If we continually do this to ourselves, we are only fueling [Azerbaijani leader Ilham] Aliyev.”

Armenia’s social fabric is being unraveled by this set of circumstances where the government is not being truthful or forthcoming and various sources online spout stories which are being taken as facts by many.

“Addressing disinformation is vital. Building resilience against disinformation would be key to Armenia’s recovery and the creation of a unified vision for Armenia’s future,” she said.

She talked about “hybrid warfare” waged against Armenia.

“There is no definite definition of what hybrid warfare is, but basically it uses or leverages asymmetrical tactics such as political or economic manipulation to exploit vulnerabilities,” she said.

“Weaponizing the media or governmental organizations, spreading disinformation, creating panic in society is their ultimate goals,” contributing to society’s instability.

One power using such means is Russia, she said.

“Russia isn’t conducting military operations against Armenia. We know that. But a lot of hybrid warfare mechanisms they are using is already in place,” she said. They control mining, infrastructure, finance and energy. “Russia doesn’t need to do a lot. They own so much of the infrastructure.”

“The economy is so intertwined with Russia,” she said. “We’re so dependent on Russia that Russia doesn’t even need to use these tactics.”

“Our vantage point is always from the Russian machine,” she said.

Maria Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, is someone who is watched in Armenia with awe and fear, as she is forever chiding Armenia for its latest bad actions and cooperation with the West.

“Armenia has always cooperated with NATO, that’s nothing new. They are spinning the news in such a way that Armenian is trying to be a member of NATO,” she said.

Another problem is in Armenia, many don’t understand the difference between a news story compared to an opinion piece. Also, with the current laws there, politicians often take media outlets to court, even if the story is correct. That way, the outlet has to spend a lot of money on lawyers and next time may think twice before writing a story.

She advocated for self-regulating bodies, which would advocate for fact-based and open journalism.

At the end of the talk, Titizian participated in a lengthy question-and-answer session.

Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada Executive Director and *Mirror-Spectator* Managing Editor Aram Arkun served as moderator and introduced Titizian at the lecture.



The Tekeyan Cultural Association organizing committee of the lecture with Maria Titizian, center, and at far left, Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan Distinguished Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Stonehill College

for a major, positive pivot in every regard.

By 2019, the process seemed to have soured.

“However, what happened with the Velvet Revolution was we saw signs of polarization, disinformation flows significantly escalated and it marked the beginning of large-scale misinformation in the media,” she said.

The previous government, she said, pushed the narrative that the new government was “Sorosakan,” meaning being on the payroll of George Soros, a billionaire who donates to liberal causes and is a favorite target of pro-Russian outlets. “This narrative was heavily pushed in the Armenian landscape,” she said.

Armenia has endured a great deal of extremely difficult challenges in the past few years, and citizens often don’t get the full picture from the government. Instead, the divisions among people is deepening.

Starting with the 2020 war, the 2022 invasion of Jermuk by Azerbaijani soldiers, the blockade of Artsakh and then the devastating ethnic cleansing and now the demarcation process on the border with Azerbaijan, the people have tried different outlets to get news they think they can trust.

“It has deepened societal divisions,” she said.

“Another problem is inconsistent communication by the government which has contributed to the vulnerability of Armenia’s information space. Strategic communication does not exist in Armenia,” she said.

“They are just not giving us the information,” she said.

and even they had a hard time finding out what was happening.

“It was so difficult to get information from the military. Not only were they not trying to massage the message, they were trying to hide the message from us. That led to a lot of distrust. We all failed. We knew it was happening on some level but we were afraid to admit it,” she said.

The fall of Shushi into Azerbaijani hands was when they realized that the narrative they were receiving from the government was indeed fictitious.

When Karabakh Premier Arayik Harutyunyan’s office made the announcement on Facebook, she said, they refused to believe it.

“We’re like ‘no, his Facebook has been hacked.’ That’s how delusional we were. We didn’t do our job well enough to tell the public what was really happening,” she said. “I couldn’t believe Shushi could fall.”

Titizian and her colleagues did not know what was happening on the front lines, but, she said, they knew well before the war, the state of Armenia’s army — and it was not good. However, telling the truth was also out of the question.

“I feel that I failed as a journalist and most of us feel that way. Before the war we were too afraid to tell the truth. We were too afraid to say there was corruption. That for 30 years there was this myth that we were the strongest army in the region. ... We all had husbands or brothers or friends who served in the army. We all knew what was going on because if we did, we were labeled as traitors,” she added. “There are certain institutions that are untouchable,



COMMUNITY NEWS

Hye Pointe Armenian Church Consecration to Take Place in October

CONSECRATION, from page 5
who built and established these two churches to honor God. By incorporating their sacrifices with this generation's sacrifice, we are ready for our next chapter."

St. Paul speaks of the faith of our ancestors, who, despite facing insurmountable odds, remained resolute in their belief in a higher purpose. Their stories serve as a source of inspiration for Hye Pointe Parishioners as we embark on this sacred journey of consecration. Just as they looked beyond the present circumstances and held fast to their convictions, so too have we remained steadfast in our commitment and resolve to see our Sanctuary built and consecrated.

An apt passage is: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

(Hebrews 11:1)

St. Paul emphasizes the importance of determination in the face of adversity. It reminds us that faith is not passive but rather an active force

that propels us forward, even when the path ahead seems uncertain. Through every setback and obstacle, we have pressed on, fueled by the unwavering belief that this day would come to fruition.

Yet, as we rejoice in the imminent Consecration of our Sanctuary, we also acknowledge those who are no longer with us to witness this historic moment. Countless souls, who shared in our vision and labored alongside us, have departed this earthly realm. Their absence is keenly felt, yet their spirit remains intertwined with ours as we gather to celebrate and glorify God for His abundant blessings.

In the spirit of faith and remembrance, we honor the memory of those who have gone before us, recognizing their contributions and the indelible mark they have left on our journey. Their legacy serves as a reminder of the enduring power of faith and the profound impact it has on generations to come.



The Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe



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Esrailians Honored for Support of Hebrew U. Armenian Studies Program

SUPPORT, from page 5

Together with AFHU Western Region Vice Chair Patricia L. Glaser, Eric produced two films as part of a bold and ultimately successful strategy to get the U.S. government to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

"The Promise," starring Christian Bale, was inspired by true events showcasing survival, love and faith. Dr. Esrailian simultaneously produced the documentary "Intent to Destroy: Death, Denial & Depiction," which analyzes the Armenian Genocide, its historical context, and ongoing denial. Intent to Destroy was nominated for an Outstanding Arts & Historical Documentary Emmy in 2018.

"The AFHU Humanitarian Torch of Learning Award, for us, is truly a mechanism to build a bridge between the Armenian community and the Jewish communities," Dr. Esrailian said. "Melina and I are grateful to AFHU and Hebrew University, which educates people from all backgrounds and faiths in one of the world's most historic cities."

The Hebrew University offers Armenian and Armenian cultural studies through its Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. The program, which began in 1966, encourages students to explore the rich history, culture, and language of Armenia, and to foster a deeper understanding of the Armenian experience in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Student Ambassador Shona Goldwirth, a third-year medical student at Hebrew University who was born in Los Angeles, addressed attendees at the event. Following October 7th, Shona organized medical students to cover hospital shifts for physicians recruited for military service. This initiative placed over 4,000 student volunteers in hospitals throughout Israel, with more than 200 in Jerusalem alone.

Hebrew University President Prof. Asher Cohen gave welcome remarks to the guests and congratulated the Esrailians for their generosity at the AFHU-hosted program.

"The Esrailians were ideal honorees given their longstanding commitment to elevating human dignity and to strengthening educational institutions that are finding solutions for so many of the world's challenges," says Barbara Natterson-Horowitz, MD, President, AFHU Western Region.



OBITUARY

Jirayr ('Jerry') Phillipos Balikian, MD

Son of Genocide Survivors, Leading Doctor

BOSTON — Jirayr ("Jerry") Phillipos Balikian, MD, FACR, previous Vice Chair of the UMass Memorial Health Radiology Department, former Director of Thoracic Radiology at Dana Farber Cancer Institute and Brigham and Women's Hospital, as well as past Professor at Harvard Medical School and the American University of Beirut Medical School, died peacefully on September 13, 2024 at 97.

Born in Arapkir, Turkey, he was the second child of the late Phillipos Balikian and Askanoush Keshishian Balikian, survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. His older sister, Surpuhi, and younger brothers, Yenovk and Norayr, grew up first in Kerkhan, Turkey and then Beirut, Lebanon in a humble home filled with love, support, encouragement, and dedication to schooling. Given his talent to excel in academics, he graduated first in his high school class earning him a scholarship to attend the American University of Beirut (AUB). At AUB, he again excelled in his studies and was encouraged to pursue a career in medicine. Not having the financial means to afford medical school, he again relied on the generosity of financial support and worked odd jobs, including as a night caretaker at a morgue, to earn money for school.

After medical school, he traveled from Lebanon to the United States by train and a Transatlantic ship to pursue his residency in radiology at the McGraw Medical Center of Northwestern University in Chicago. Upon completing his program, he returned to Beirut and became a highly respected physician and professor at the AUB Medical School. He was a co-founder of the Armenian Medical Association in Beirut, Lebanon.

An expert and highly respected radiologist, especially in tuberculosis, in 1976, after the civil war in Lebanon became increasingly unsafe, he was recruited by Harvard Medical School to join its faculty as head of the Thoracic Radiology Department at Brigham and Women's Hospital. He then moved to the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, where he was again the Director of Thoracic Radiology. He was finally recruited to the UMass Memorial where he eventually became vice chair of the Department of Radiology.

In 1980, 1992, 1998, and 2007, he was recognized for his outstanding contribution to the radiology residence education program. He published more than 50 academic research papers and gave hundreds of lectures in the field of radiology. In May 2017, he was honored by the Department of Radiology at UMass Chan Medical School by the creation of the annual Balikian Go The Extra Mile Award that recognizes one resident that goes the extra mile in their job, which exemplified his approach and dedication to the practice of medicine.

He was a doctor to doctors and loved by his residents who have become leaders in the field of radiology. He retired after 60 years of service to the science of medicine, saved countless lives and dedicated himself to the care of the citizens of the Com-

monwealth of Massachusetts and patients throughout the world.

He was an avid gardener, loved classical music and traveling, treated everyone equally, altruistically helped his family and friends, and was a kind, generous and gentle soul.

Beyond his accomplishments, he was above all dedicated to his family. He was the loving husband to Annie Yeghyayan Balikian, the love of his life to whom he was married for 58 years. He was the father of Philip J. Balikian, MD and his wife Nora Janoyan Balikian, Ara J. Balikian, Esq. and his wife Taline Farra Balikian, OD, and Richard V. Balikian, MD and his wife Priscilla Wood Balikian, as well as the adoring grandfather to Alexander, Isabella, Vatche,

Raffi, Aria, and Leo. He was also a devoted brother and uncle to both his sisters, brothers and wife's extended families, including Yevovk Balikian and family, Mr. and Mrs. Norayr Balikian and family, Dr. and Mrs. Harout and Nora Ajdaharian and family, Sonig Balikian, Dr. and Mrs. Mishac and Karen Yegian and family, Mr. and Dr. Koko and Marilyn Bizdikian and Justin Hopkins, and the Janoyan, Farra and Wood families.

Funeral services will be held at the Holy Trinity Armenian Church, 45 Brattle Street, Cambridge, on Saturday, September 21, at 11:00am. Visitation prior to the funeral service from at 10 a.m. Interment to follow at Mt. Auburn Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 55 East 59th Street, New York, NY 10022, Armenia Tree Project, 400 West Cummings Park, Suite 3725, Woburn, MA 01801, or Holy Trinity Armenian Church, 45 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.



Robert Haig Bedoukian, PhD

Beloved Husband, Father, Grandfather, and Friend

DANBURY, Conn. — Robert Haig Bedoukian, PhD, died peacefully on Friday, August 30, 2024, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. He was 76.

He was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and cherished friend. He lived a life filled with love, kindness, and generosity. He inspired all who knew him.

Robert was born on July 2, 1948, in Hastings on Hudson, NY to the late Dr. Paul Z. Bedoukian and Victoria (nee Hagopian) Bedoukian.

He was known for his humor, wisdom, and compassion. He dedicated his life to the flavor and fragrance industry through his own business, Bedoukian Research, Inc. (BRI).

Robert joined BRI in 1975 after earning a PhD in chemistry from Purdue University and a BS in chemical engineering from Tufts University in 1970.

Robert worked closely with his father, who began the business with three employees; Robert grew the company to where it is today, with 170 employees. Under Robert's leadership as president from 1986 to 2024, BRI enhanced its reputation in the Flavor and Fragrance (F&F) industry for superior quality products, excellent customer service and availability of technical expertise.

Robert also showed a passion for agricultural pest control and founded BedoukianBio (BB), which delivers semiochemical products with the same tradition of high quality and service as BRI. Through Robert's work, BRI became one of the leading companies in insect pheromone synthesis in the world. He also was a passionate inventor and was granted more than 80 U.S. patents throughout his career.

Robert served on the Board of Directors of the Research Institute for Fragrance Materials (RIFM) from 1989 to 2022, was chairman of the Board from 2005-2007, and interim co-president from 2015 to 2016. Until his passing, he was also ac-

tive on the Board of Fragrance Creators Association (FCA, formerly FMA and IF-RANA) since 1995; Ability Beyond, most recently as vice chairman, since 2014; and Regional Hospice since 2020.

Posthumously, on September 12, 2024, at its 58th Annual Meeting, RIFM honored Robert's life and legacy to the fragrance industry by renaming its existing Board of Directors Science award the



Robert Bedoukian Excellence in Science Award; it is an award given to a deserving scientist in recognition of his lifetime of excellence in Fragrance Science.

Since 2021, Robert created and chaired the Nuvance Research and Innovation Bedoukian Endowed Chair.

He was a member of the Armenian Museum of America Board of Trustees since 2002 and served on the Purdue Chemistry Advisory Committee since 2018. Robert was also a member of the Finance and Audit Committee at Ability Beyond and the Finance and Personnel Committee at the First Church of Christ Congregational in Redding.

Robert received numerous professional and civic awards, including the

Purdue University College of Science Distinguished Alumni Award (2013), the Eric Bruell Distinguished Service Award (2015) from the FCA to honor his achievements and willingness to go "above and beyond the call of duty", the Cecil Previdi Award for Entrepreneurial Business Achievement from the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce (2021), and the Robert S. Young Humanitarian Award issued by Ability Beyond (2018). He was also honored for community service by the Association of Religious Communities (2020) and the Greater Danbury Good Scout Award (2021).

Beyond his professional life, Robert was a loving husband to his wife of 47 years, Gail, and a wonderful father to his three children, Matthew, David, and Philip; father-in-law to Kristin and Annissa. He adored and was adored by his four grandsons, Blake, Cole, Max and Lincoln. In addition to his immediate family, Robert will be deeply missed by his sisters, Joan and Betty Demirjian, his sister-in-law, Laura McCarthy, his niece, five nephews, and numerous cousins.

Robert had a love of soccer and played competitively until the age of 53 when he decided after his second run-in with broken ribs that it was time to give it up. Robert's love of soccer continued; he coached travel and recreation soccer in Redding while his three sons were growing up, and he often attended his grandsons' soccer games even up until the final months of his life.

He had a love for Cape Cod that developed from his childhood, and he would spend many weeks in the summer at his home in Eastham.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in Robert's memory to the following charities that were close to his heart: Nuvance Research and Innovation Bedoukian Endowed Chair; Ann's Place; First Church of Christ Endowment or General Fund, Redding, CT; Armenian Museum of America, Watertown, MA or Ridgefield Visiting Nurses Association (RVNA)

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OBITUARY

Apet Torosian

Philanthropist, Member of ADL, Tekeyan

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Apet Torosian, beloved father, grandfather and respected member of his Boston community, passed away peacefully at the age of 90 on September 10.

Born on October 15, 1933 in Kayseri, Turkey, Apet immigrated to the United States, where he built a new life in Boston, as a dedicated union pipefitter. His skilled work ethic, resilience, and unwavering commitment to his craft made him a respected figure among his peers and colleagues.

Apet was a loving father to his two children, Arek and Nicea, who were the greatest joy of his life. He treasured his role as a grandfather to Shaunt, Veken and Nyri, whom he adored and cherished. His humor and wisdom have left an indelible mark on his family and all who had the privilege of knowing him.

Throughout his life, Apet remained deeply connected to his Armenian heritage and instilled in his family the importance of tradition, love and perseverance. In his retirement, he spent 20 years in Armenia to help try and make an impact in bettering his motherland through silent contributions to programs without ever boasting

about them.

He was a member of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) District Committee of USA and Canada, the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Watertown, and staunch supporter of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* newspaper.

He invited the Armenian painter Gevorg from Yerevan to Boston, and at the same time, he invited the owner of Wentworth Galleries of Florida. The latter bought all 62 paintings of Gevorg and introduced him to the American public; afterwards he invited him every year to Florida to paint more paintings. Now, Gevorg's paintings are sold at Wentworth galleries all over the US.

Apet's legacy lives on through his children and grandchildren, who will forever carry forward the values he held dear.

Apet's passing leaves a profound void in the hearts of his family and friends, but his memory will remain a source of strength and inspiration to all who knew him. He is survived by his brother Himayak, of Belmont, MA, sister Filyani of Watertown, MA; son Arek, his daughter Nicea, and his three grandchildren, Shaunt,



Veken and Nyri.

Funeral services were held on Friday, September 13, at St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church, Richmond Heights. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Armenian Tree Project, The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* or to St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church.

Tribute: Haroutiun Kurkjian, An Intellectual Giant of the Diaspora

By Razmik Panossian

This summer the Armenian Diaspora lost one of its greatest intellectuals. On August 8, Haroutiun Kurkjian passed away in Athens, at the age of 81.

While his name might not invoke immediate recognition in the United States and other English-speaking countries (he never sought to write in English), Kurkjian has had a profound impact on diasporan thought. The established Diaspora today thinks of itself as such partly because of his work, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Along with a few other young men and women of his generation, Kurkjian thought through some of the fundamental issues affecting diasporan identity — issues that remain salient today.

This Armenian generation of '68 called for a profound rethinking of who we are as diasporans, how we should relate to the world, to our past, present and future, and to the idea of the homeland. The generation included Krikor Beledian, Marc Nichanian, Vehanoush Tekian, Khachig Tololyan, Jirair Libaridian and a few others who subsequently went on to build their careers in other domains. Kurkjian stayed closer to "home," serving in community organizations and schools in Lebanon and Greece.

Haroutiun Kurkjian's 1968 seminal essay "Երկրորդ հավասարում բազմաթիվ անյայտներով" (loosely translated as "A Second Equation with Many Unknowns"), first published in *Ahegan* (1968, no. 3-4, Beirut), is an absolute masterpiece. It calls for the re-evaluation of our relationship



with the *odar*, the foreign. We must shun the comforts of the "ghetto," Kurkjian argues, and embrace the world; we have to innovate and reformulate diasporan identity in a global setting, rather than look inward and withdraw into the conventional comfort zone of the familiar. It was a truly rebellious stance, in the spirit of the 1960s. In a conservative setting, Kurkjian was arguing that opening to the world was essential for the modernization of Armenian identity and essential for youth to remain engaged within the Diaspora.

Alas, the revolutionary approach Kurkjian called for did not materialize. The civil war in Lebanon and the dispersion of the generation of '68 marked the end of innovation and reformulation. The "ghetto" had to be physically defended and intellectually

shielded. A deep fog of conservatism descended on diasporan thought and practice. The Karabakh movement in 1988 put an end to any attempt to reconceptualize the Diaspora, to think of itself and in itself, as all eyes were fixed on Yerevan and Stepanakert. The Diaspora stopped imagining its own future, or at the very least parked its imagination in Yerevan. Kurkjian himself realized that the opportunities of progressive change in the Diaspora had dried up and withdrew into the intellectual boundaries of the community.

And yet, critical voices remained, often unsung and unpublished (except on the pages of the *Haratch* newspaper in Paris). Two decades after 1988, Kurkjian published a sequel to his 1968 essay: "Չորս Տասնամյակ Ետը" ("Four Decades Later"). Writing in 2008, he asks what did we (the generation of '68) accomplish in changing diasporan perspectives in the last 40 years, to make it more open and in line with global trends? He leaves the question open, but clearly wants to go back to the fundamental question of the Diaspora's relationship with the world, and the need to embrace it instead of seeking to isolate from it.

In July of this year, we at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation organized a three-day event partly to honor the generation of '68, partly to instigate an inter- and intra-generational conversation, and partly to restart the tradition of diasporan thought, i.e. the habit of the Diaspora thinking about its own condition and future. One of the inspirations of the event had come from Kurkjian: the title of the gathering was "Հավասարում Նորոկ" (Havasarum Norok – "A New Equation"), a play on words of his 1968 essay. The first invitation letter I sent was to Haroutiun Kurkjian. We were so pleased when he accepted the invite. It was only right to have him there, both to play tribute to him, and to be inspired by him. Kurkjian realized how much of an impact his essay had had 55 years after its publication, and how timely it remains. It feels like it was written just last week.

Kurkjian was a paragon of humility, delightful to interact with and generous.

He inspired many generations of students as a teacher, stimulated our thinking and made us laugh with his stories. While he was in Lisbon, we spoke of future projects. Three weeks later he had succumbed to Covid, leaving a huge hole in our hearts and minds. His legacy is immense in the Armenian-speaking world, through his numerous writings, language and literature textbooks, Armenian-French dictionaries, and teaching. Thousands of students in Lebanon and Greece owe their intellectual development to him. Educators in the Armenian language know of his innovative textbooks.

Kurkjian was a master editor. ARF-affiliated intellectual circles are familiar with his management of *Droshak* (the party magazine) in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as publications on party history. About four years ago he took onto himself the task of correcting the editing and printing errors in the published oeuvre of Hagop Oshagan. When I asked him why did he want to do such a tedious job that will take nearly a year, he answered in his characteristic humility: "I owe it to him; it is my intellectual debt to the greatest Armenian novelist of the 20th century." And he did it — meticulously.

Kurkjian's last words that echoed at our gathering in July were "ինքնութեան մնայուն վերանայում" (constant re-evaluation of our identity). The spark of his '68 rebellion was still with him: we cannot take our identity for granted; we must renew it constantly, and in line with current global realities. Each generation must do this, not only looking backward, but also forward; not only looking inward, but also outward.

Kurkjian embraced our culture, our language, our community; but he also embraced the world, the new, the unfamiliar. Perhaps that was due to his ability to synthesize his Jemaran education with his graduate studies in philosophy at the Sorbonne.

In many respects, we have come full circle from 1968 to 2024, by way of a detour via Armenia and Artsakh. We need to go back to Haroutiun Kurkjian's essay and continue his thinking if we want the Diaspora to survive both as an intellectual and as a living entity.

May you rest in peace dear Haroutiun. We will continue to be guided by your wisdom and inspired by your kindness.

(Razmik Panossian is the Director of the Armenian Communities Department at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal.)

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Portantino Participates in Human Rights Conference in Armenia, Voices Strong Opposition to Azerbaijan as COP29 Host

YEREVAN — Last week, Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D – Burbank) participated as a panelist during the Third Annual Conference of Human Rights and Accountability at the Matenadaran in Yerevan. The conference was hosted by the Center for Truth and Justice and co-sponsored by the Constitutional Court of Armenia. The panel, titled Azerbaijan and COP29, focused on the upcoming climate conference and Azerbaijan’s dismal environmental track record and human rights abuses. As the only US elected official to visit Artsakh after the 44-day war, Senator Portantino was asked to share his views on Artsakh and joined a distinguished panel of speakers to voice opposition to Azerbaijan hosting COP29.

“Azerbaijan has no business hosting a climate conference – or any international conference organized under any United Nations framework,” stated Senator Portantino. “After carrying out serious war crimes and genocide in Artsakh, and violating international laws, dictator Aliyev must be held accountable by the international community. I was honored to serve on this panel and as someone who has personally witnessed the devastation of the 44-day war firsthand, it is unacceptable to allow a genocidal government to host COP29 as a way to burnish its image. We must continue to voice our opposition loudly and clearly.”

In addition to Portantino, the panel included Hrair Balian, Practitioner of Conflict Resolution Focusing on the South Caucasus, Ukraine and Levant, as well as Michael Rubin, Director of Policy Analysis at the Middle East Forum and a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and Deputy Mayor of Paris Anouch Toranian. Political analyst Eric Hacopian moderated the panel.

COP29 is the 29th annual Conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is a part of a series of global climate negotiations aimed at addressing climate change by bringing together world leaders, climate experts, and activists to discuss progress, challenges, and future strategies to combat global warming.

This week marks one year since Azerbaijan’s brutal at-



From left, political analyst Eric Hagopian, Paris Deputy Mayor Anouch Toranian, State Sen. Anthony Portantino, American Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow Michael Rubin and Hrair Balian

tack on Artsakh, which, after a ten-month blockade, led to the expulsion of over 120,000 ethnic Armenians. The Aliyev regime still detains Armenian prisoners, including former officials. Recent reports also confirm the ongoing destruction of Armenian cultural sites in Artsakh.

Earlier this year, Portantino led efforts in the State Senate to urge the Biden administration to increase its support for the forcibly displaced indigenous Armenians of Artsakh and to demand the immediate release Armenian POWs, civilians, and government leaders illegally held

captive by Azerbaijan. In the letter to President Biden, members of the Senate pledged support for the people of Artsakh and stressed the importance and urgency of holding Azerbaijan accountable for their genocidal actions.

Portantino chairs the State Senate Select Committee on California, Armenia, and Artsakh Mutual Trade, Art, and Cultural Exchange, which was first established in 2017 at his request. Senator Portantino was invited to go to Artsakh after the 44-day war by the Human Rights Ombudsman Artak Beglaryan.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Former ICC Chief Dr. Chile Eboe-Osuji Joins The Zoryan Academic Board of Directors

TORONTO — The Zoryan Institute this week announced that Dr. Chile Eboe-Osuji, the distinguished international jurist and former President of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to the Institute’s Academic Board of Directors effective October 1.

Eboe-Osuji was the 4th president of the ICC from 2018 to 2021; he served as an ICC judge from 2012 to 2018. He also served as the Legal Advisor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2010 - 2012) with earlier work at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Before joining the international public service, he practiced law in courts in Canada and Nigeria.

Currently, Dr. Eboe-Osuji is the Distinguished International Jurist at the Lincoln Alexander School of Law at the Toronto Metropolitan University, where he is also the Special Advisor to the President of the University. Dr. Eboe-Osuji has several affiliations with universities as a sessional lecturer and visiting professor including the University of Windsor, Stanford Law School, University of Toronto Law Faculty, Santa Clara University, the Carr Centre at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and the Faculty of Law of the University of Ottawa.

He received his PhD from the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and his LL.M. from McGill University, where he also received his Canadian law accreditation after completing his LL.B. degree from the University of Calabar, Nigeria. Dr. Eboe-Osuji also has an extensive record of legal scholarship and publications, including the books *International Law and Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts* and *Protecting Humanity* (ed).

Dr. William Schabas, OC, Zoryan Board Member said: “Judge Eboe-Osuji has had a long and distinguished career in international justice, rising to the most senior position of President of the International Criminal Court. He brings huge experience



Dr. Chile Eboe-Osuji

as well as great wisdom to Zoryan’s Academic Board.”

K. M. Greg Sarkissian, OC, President of the Institute, welcoming Dr. Eboe-Osuji to the Academic board had this to say “The stakeholders of Zoryan Institute take pride in having internationally renowned scholars on its Academic Board. No doubt, a scholar of Dr. Eboe-Osuji’s stature joining the board will help take the Institute’s work to new heights.”

AGBU to Hold 93rd General Assembly Weekend in New York

AGBU, from page 5

Arvest, A Night of Rhythms and Flavors, to be held at the Harold Pratt House, a grand mansion in the architectural style of early 20th century New York’s industrialist elite that dominated Manhattan’s Upper East Side. Attendees will enjoy cocktails and hors d’oeuvres before embarking on a musical journey throughout the mansion, each room featuring Armenian performers showcasing diverse genres and trends. They include: Lucy Yeghiazaryan Quintet, which combines the rich Armenian heritage with the ultimate American artform; Gregory Dolbashian, dancer, and Artyom Manukyan, electric cellist, who create dynamic rhythms with contrasting free-flowing melodies; Intesa, a duo of Viola de Gamba artists Lucine Musaelian and Nathan Giogetti, who put lyrical folk and baroque tonalities in a contemporary context; and Mher Mnatsakanyan and Antranig Kzirian performing captivating harmonies and blended styles on the classical clarinet, duduk, and oud.

Gala at Gotham Hall

On Saturday evening, guests will assemble at New York’s famed Gotham Hall for a Gala Tribute to Berge and Vera Setrakian. The evening will feature a roster of distinguished guest speakers, musical entertainment, and an inspiring look back on the extraordinary life and times of Berge Setrakian over his half century in the governance of AGBU, 22 of which as AGBU’s seventh president. His legacy is a mirror to the modern history of the Armenian world in which many momentous changes occurred during his watch. Guests will also be treated entertainment by world renowned violinist Samvel Yervinyan. An after-event will follow at the venue.

For young professionals (YPs) arriving on Thursday October 10, AGBU Young Professionals of Greater New York has organized a Welcome Night at a hidden speakeasy called Saint on New York’s legendary Lower East Side. With YPs joining from locations near and far, it is the perfect opportunity for a lively meet up.

Event tickets and special rate hotel reservations are selling fast. To learn more and ensure your participation in one or more of these events, visit at agbu.org/general-assembly.

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Arts & Culture

Rouben Koulaksezian

Traveling through 'Little Armenias'



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

VENICE — Rouben Koulaksezian's name is known to many Armenians, especially in diaspora. Born in 1989 in Paris, to an Armenian father and a French mother, Rouben studied at the ESSEC Business School and Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. He is known for his "Little Armenias" project founded in 2018 with the aim of forging links between Armenian communities around the world, and more particularly by creating educational content on social networks, to reach younger people. The result is the publication of *Little Armenias. Your Travel Guide in the Armenian Diaspora* guidebooks in English and French, covering Armenian sites in more than 100 countries. By the way, on September 17, 2020 *Mirror-Spectator* editor Alin K. Gregorian wrote about the initial volume.

After a brief meeting in Yerevan I met Rouben again in last August in Venice, where he came to present his book to the participants of the 38th edition of the Intensive Summer Course of Armenian Language and Culture of the Association Padus-Araxes.

Dear Rouben, my long contacts with the diaspora show that there are not many French Armenians who have the same Armenian language skills or links to Armenia as you. What is your biggest motivation in keeping your Armenian identity so strong?

I agree that French Armenians tend to assimilate quicker than other diasporas, but I think that in the case of my family, even if we are a family that came to France in 1930 from Aleppo, we always tried to transmit the Armenian identity to the next generations. I can say that my biggest motivation is this family heritage, when I imagine my ancestors being proud of what I'm doing, I understand it's the right path.

You speak a number of languages. Many think there is no need to study a language with limited usage such as Armenian. How do you counter that?

see KOULAKSEZIAN, page 16



From left, Dr. Alisa Dumikyan, who was a Visiting Scholar at the Armenian Museum in Watertown for several years and instrumental in coordinating the former's partnership with the Matenadaran, Ara Khzmalyan, and Tatevik Muradyan, viewing some of the manuscripts restored by Matenadaran specialists at the Armenian Museum (photo courtesy Matenadaran)

Matenadaran Delegation Visits US East Coast Institutions

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

BELMONT, Mass. — A delegation from the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts — widely known simply as the Matenadaran — led by Director Arayik "Ara" Khzmalyan, visited several cities in the US, including Boston and New York, in early September. The delegation included the Matenadaran's Deputy Director of Development Tatevik Muradyan and International Development Specialist Sona Baloyan.

The Matenadaran is the world's largest repository of Armenian manuscripts, housing approximately 23,000, and also holds around 500,000 archival documents and many other rare items such as early printed books.

Dr. Khzmalyan, formerly deputy minister of education, science, culture and sport from 2019 was elected in July 2023 to his current position, defeating in-house candidates Drs. Karen Matevosyan, then Acting Director of Matenadaran, and Artsruni Sahakyan, research associate of the Matenadaran. Khzmalyan served as director of the Tourism Development Foundation of Armenia from 2017 to 2019. From 2009 to 2017 he was director of the Matenadaran's Archive Department.

In the Boston area, on September 9, the Matenadaran delegation visited the Armenian Museum of America in Watertown, met with the museum staff and viewed the restoration work previously conducted by Matenadaran specialists sent to Watertown for this purpose. It also met with philanthropist Noubar Afeyan to discuss various projects.

On September 10, the delegation met with Harvard University's teaching staff



Visiting Harvard University, with Dr. Christina Maranci, fifth from left (photo courtesy Matenadaran)

in Cambridge at the initiative of Christina Maranci, the Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies at Harvard University. They spoke about the Matenadaran's academic activities and the results of the International Armenological Congress, also exploring opportunities for academic and educational cooperation, increasing access to digital resources, promoting Armenian studies within the university, and setting up summer schools for students interested in the subject. Khzmalyan invited participation in the open access international periodical *Matenadaran: Medieval and Early Modern Armenian Studies (MEMAS)* and the other scholarly publications of his institution.

continued on next page

Constantine Orbelian Installed As NYC Opera Executive Director, Music Director

NEW YORK — On September 11, the board of New York City Opera announced the appointment of Constantine Orbelian as the organization's new executive director and music director, succeeding General Director Michael Capasso.

"We look forward to this new chapter in New York City Opera's story," said Roy G. Niederhoffer, Chairman Emeritus of the Board. "We are grateful to Michael for his time with NYCO, working tirelessly to bring back the company and programming for New York City audiences to enjoy. We are so pleased to have Constantine's roles expand as the new leader of City Opera — the future looks bright!"

"I am honored and excited to take on the role of Executive Director in addition to my current role as Music Director and Principal Conductor of the New York City Opera, a company with such a rich legacy and profound history in the world of music," said Orbelian. "This opportunity allows me to blend my passion for artistic excellence with mindful and positive stewardship, ensuring that the cherished traditions of this great institution continue to thrive. Together with this wonderful community, we will embark on a journey that honors the past while boldly shaping the future of this iconic opera company."

New York City Opera's 2024-25 season is poised to captivate and inspire with dynamic repertoire that celebrates resilience, history, and community, beginning with a monumental Carnegie Hall concert, *Music of Survival*, featuring works by Mieczyslaw Weinberg and Erich Korngold — music born from the crucible of adversity. The company's commitment to education shines through expanded outreach programs, bringing opera to new generations of K-12 students. The enchanting and wildly popular Bryant Park summer performances will continue to delight thousands of New Yorkers, culminating in a masterful presentation of Mascagni's rarely performed *Isabeau*, an exciting co-production with Opera Holland Park that explores themes of love, honor, and sacrifice.

Four-time Grammy-nominated conductor Orbelian has been called "the singer's dream collaborator" by Opera News, which hailed him for conducting vocal repertoire "with the sensitivity of a lieder pianist." On June 7, 2021, Maestro Orbelian was appointed Music Director and Principal Conductor of one of the great New York institutions — New York City Opera.

He has toured and recorded with some of the world's greatest singers, such as American stars Renee Fleming, Sondra Radvanovsky and Lawrence Brownlee, Stephen Costello and Charles Castronovo, and with the great Dmitri Hvorostovsky and other renowned Russian singers in

see ORBELIAN, page 16



ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page

On September 12, the Matenadaran delegation visited the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, seeing the collection and meeting with Department Head of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts Roger Wieck and Reader Services Librarian Sylvie Merian, a specialist in Armenian manuscripts and books, to discuss collaboration.

NAASR Presentation

On September 10, after some private meetings, Khzmalyan gave an evening presentation to a group of community leaders at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) in Belmont. First, NAASR Director of Academic Affairs Marc Mamigonian welcomed guests. He noted NAASR's collaboration with the Matenadaran, including a number of events, plus the provision in recent years of some 20 grants, together with the Knights of Vartan Fund for Armenian Studies (disclosure: the chairman of the latter committee is this author).



Matenadaran Director Ara Khzmalyan at NAASR (photo Aram Arkun)

After he spoke about NAASR's own library of over 37,000 items, NAASR Library Curator Ani Babaian rapidly showed three valuable manuscripts in the NAASR collection. These included a *kanonakirk* or book of canon law from 1679 written in what today is called Chmshgadzak (Cemisgezsek) with a beautiful leather cover, a 17th century Armenian grammar book from Aleppo, and a fragment (20 loose pages) of a Book of Psalms, again from the 17th century.

Mamigonian then introduced Khzmalyan, who accompanied his English-language talk, titled "Strategic Priorities of the Matenadaran: Modernization and Internationalization," with a PowerPoint presentation. Khzmalyan put great emphasis on working with the US, for political as well as cultural goals. He declared: "In my vision, for the development of the Matenadaran, extensive international cooperation is a priority with a particular focus on deepening ties with the United States. And why the United States in particular? During our visit to meet with individual philanthropists, charitable organizations and representatives from academic and cultural institutions. The goal is not only to expand relations but also to foster a deeper understanding of Armenia to enhance its cultural footprint. It is not known that the perceptions of Armenia in the United States are often tied to the tragic events in Armenian history. Unfortunately this can overshadow the vibrant cultural heritage of the Armenian people, whose rich and creative expressions are fully embodied in the Matenadaran. We are confident that by knowing Armenia better, the United States will recognize a country with a rich history of tolerance, respect for other civilizations and cultures, and a deep commitment to democratic and humanistic values."

Khzmalyan announced that last month an official letter from US Ambassador to Armenia Kristina Kvien informed the Matenadaran that its proposal was selected to receive a grant of \$74,000 from the US Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. This will allow rare manuscripts and documents from Nagorno Karabakh, dating from the 13th to 18th centuries, which are now kept in the Matenadaran, to be catalogued, restored, digitalized and exhibited. Khzmalyan said he believed that this grant marks a symbolic beginning of the deepening of collaboration with similar institutions in the US.

Preservation and Dissemination

He declared that the primary goal of the Matenadaran was the preservation, processing, research, publication and popularization of the Armenian written heritage. In fact, it

is the only professional restoration center in Armenia, he said, and thanks to joint funding from the Matenadaran and Ararat Bank, a new biochemical research group for manuscripts with modern laboratories has been established and will open in October during an international seminar at the Matenadaran called "Faces of Memory."

Meanwhile, the Matenadaran's researchers have already developed new methods to prepare and produce Armenian restoration paper from mulberry trees, traveling to Berlin and Tokyo as part of this project. Khzmalyan said that obtaining this paper previously was very expensive and presented many logistical issues, as the main producer was in Japan. Consequently, he said, this advancement not only will save money and secure Armenia's independence from the international market, but give Armenian young specialists important experience in this work. He added that this project was supported by the Armenian Tree Project, whose representative was in the audience.

The digitization of written heritage is also underway. Khzmalyan noted that with a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Matenadaran is developing an Armenian manuscript catalogue access platform, which will feature various search tools, while with the support of another leading Armenian bank, it has acquired new digitization equipment. Around 8,000 manuscripts have already been digitized, and archival documents and early printed books are also being digitized.

With its various thematic exhibitions, Khzmalyan said that the Matenadaran ranks first in Armenia in terms of tourist visits, while organizing exhibitions in prestigious world museums like the Doge's Palace in Venice or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are a priority. Discussions are underway to hold new exhibitions in several US museums. The Matenadaran also publishes scholarly works and foreign language albums, while implementing around a dozen educational programs for children and teenagers.

As the leading organization in the preservation, restoration and study of written heritage in the region, the Matenadaran is committed to extending its scope of responsibility, Khzmalyan said. It seeks to preserve and restore Armenian manuscripts on a global level, sending specialists to various centers to work on site and training specialists from other countries at its own facilities. He gave the example of hosting specialists from Syria and Lebanon in cooperation with UNESCO in 2018 and 2021 in workshops on conservation and restoration, while in 2022 the Matenadaran sent experts to the Center for the Digitization of Oriental Manuscripts in Erbil, Iraq. It also has played an important role in preserving the Armenian manuscript collection of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. In the US, Matenadaran specialists recently helped restore 21 manuscripts at the Armenian Museum in Watertown.

In early October, the Matenadaran will host a workshop called Faces of Memory, on the latest technologies for preservation and restoration of manuscripts and printed works.

New Administration, Programs and Finances

Khzmalyan remarked that "the Matenadaran's activities are multilayered and comprehensive, requiring new management, approaches and adaption in line with modern standards and perceptions. Our motto is the older the values, the more modern the management of the institution should be. I am pleased to note that the government of Armenia is a strong supporter of these expansive efforts."

Through recent structural changes, the Matenadaran has been reorganized into eight academic departments and four research groups. With new public relations marketing tools, the Matenadaran has increased its outreach to the private sector, and grant sources. Khzmalyan said that over the past year alone, some \$1,300,000 of financing has been secured from both governmental and non-governmental sources to support various projects and modernization efforts.

In 2023, the Matenadaran's researchers published around 100 articles in various academic periodicals, presented 163 papers in conferences and workshops, and had 18 books published, while two master's degree programs, in textology and the restoration of written heritage, have been planned in cooperation with Yerevan State University. It already began Ph.D. programs in 2012 in a number of other fields.

The Matenadaran held the International Armenological Congress in Yerevan from July 19 to 22, with the participation of some 40 Armenologists from around the world, including several from the US. Khzmalyan said, "The

main objective of the Congress was to establish a unified platform in Armenia, particularly in the Matenadaran, for discussing issues concerning Armenian studies. It endeavored to address problems, promote the development of the academic discipline and multilateral cooperation as well as assessing and formulating future strategies....The results of that Congress will serve as the foundation for the state strategy on the development of Armenian studies." He also hoped it would foster more collaborative research between Armenian and international Armenologists, encourage young scholars to become involved in Armenology, and support the publication and distribution of foreign language periodicals in this field.

As one of the principal issues discussed was the need for coordinated global efforts to preserve the Armenian written heritage, the Matenadaran, with the support of Minister of Education, Science Culture and Sports of Republic of Armenia Zhanna Andreasyan, convened a discussion with representatives from seven Armenian spiritual centers with manuscript collections for this purpose. A conference on medieval studies will be convened by the Matenadaran this November and a second international Armenological conference in 2025, Khzmalyan announced.

During the last year, many new items have been added to the Matenadaran's collection, both through purchases and donations. Though Khzmalyan said that his current US trip was not specifically in pursuit of this goal, efforts here will begin in the future. He also noted that despite this, the last two manuscripts which were donated to the Matenadaran came from the US, specifically, from the Armenian Martyrs' Congregational Church of Philadelphia.

Starting this year, Khzmalyan said that new gold, silver



The Matenadaran delegation at the Morgan Library and Museum in NY: from left, Sona Baloyan, Tatevik Muradyan, Ara Khzmalyan, Roger Wieck, Sylvie Merian (photo courtesy Matenadaran)

and bronze medals have been produced to give to important donors, while a new strategy to raise public awareness has been initiated. Some of the new acquisitions were showcased in a new exhibition entitled "One Year's Eternity" while a prior exhibition, "Cherished Place: Homecoming of Manuscripts" displayed items major donors gave to the Matenadaran over the years.

Khzmalyan concluded, "Each manuscript that enters the Matenadaran stands as a testament to the persistence of our collective memory. Over the years, the donation of manuscripts has acquired a sacred significance. Each new issue illuminates the history of our collection, extends our knowledge and completes the history of the manuscript. Every manuscript that enters the Matenadaran receives continuous and dedicated professional care."

After Khzmalyan's formal talk, a ten-minute video was shown about the aforementioned International Armenological Congress, and then several questions were answered from audience members, with Baloyan translating for Khzmalyan.

During the informal reception that followed, Khzmalyan told the *Mirror-Spectator* that aside from the international repositioning of the Matenadaran to get appropriate global recognition, the Matenadaran can play an important role in uniting Armenians around the world, and the recent assembling of the representatives of seven Armenian spiritual centers is one evidence of this. He said: "the Matenadaran is the structure which will generate public optimism. Moreover, in our times, with divisiveness and the decline in values – the atmosphere of mutual rejection, there will be a structure which will be the unity and the connection between Armenians, coalescing around the same idea, and the Matenadaran is that structure."

ARTS & CULTURE

Voskanyan Puts Contemporary Spin on the Tar

VOSKANYAN, from page 1

What Is a Tar?

Voskanyan explained that the tar is an Iranian stringed instrument in origin but there are actually two types, Iranian and Armenian. He said, “The differences are huge between the Armenian and Persian tars. I can mention some of these differences, like shape, wood, the number of strings, the technique — because Iranians play the tar like a guitar, while Armenians hug the tar — and the sound.”

For Voskanyan, the sitar sounds more like the Armenian tar than the Iranian one. He said, “The sound of the Armenian tar is more wooden, while the Iranian one sounds more metallic.” The Afghani *rubab*, he added, also sounds more like the Armenian one than the Iranian.

The Iranians have their own repertoire of classical music, different from what Armenians play. Armenians, he said, use it for a greater variety of music, including folk and traditional music, as well as an orchestral instrument, performing music composed for concerts with orchestras. The Armenians have played the tar since at least medieval times, if not earlier, Voskanyan said, and this is borne out by references in medieval manuscripts and sculptures, including *khachkars* (cross stones).

In Soviet times, Voskanyan said the tar became called the Caucasian tar because it was also performed in neighboring countries, including Georgia. However, Voskanyan said that in that country, it was the Armenian minstrels who played the instrument, not native Georgians.

On the other hand, Azerbaijanis do play the tar. He said the founder of the professional performing school of tar in Baku, which was a more cosmopolitan city then, was an Armenian named Soghomon Seyranyan. The Armenian version of the tar was used and played in the Armenian fashion. Today, he said, there are many Azerbaijanis who play the tar, in part because of governmental support of this.

Innovation

Voskanyan said that he feels lucky to have traditional training in playing the tar. He said: “At the same time, I say that if you just play a list [of musical pieces], you are doing something wrong. It is excellent that we have this type of music, but we have to develop it. Let’s not make traditional music like something in a museum. When I started, I found new techniques, new ways to play. I started to improvise. I used different kinds of music — jazz, rock, funk, and classical, and I found that everything is possible on the tar. I do fusion, and I started to create my own compositions. I then gathered musicians and founded my band.”

He said that the development of tar music is primarily an individual thing at present, as there are no schools for modern Armenian music in general. In Armenia’s music schools, like the Komitas Conservatory, they either teach classical or traditional music, and furthermore, there are no separate schools for instruments like tar or kamancha. Instead, musicians are taught how to play an instrument as part of an ensemble.

“Armenians like to do fusion because our traditional music and our instruments are very flexible,” Voskanyan said. Armenians have done this more many decades, including in many countries abroad such as the US. He said that one can do Armenian fusion with Western-style jazz, rock, with Eastern style music, including Persian and even Chinese or Japanese music as well as with African music.

He did something new too. Voskanyan

said, “I changed the way of fusion music. I decided to make Armenian fusion jazz or pop fusion music based on instruments — not to use the instrument to feature the music, but to make music around my instrument. I started to compose music for the tar, and with my band, we started to do arrangements around the tar.”

While it was a type of fusion music at the start, Voskanyan said, “Over the years, we developed our music, and I and my musicians founded a unique sound...It is very difficult to say what genre it is. It is modern Armenian music. Afterwards, some musicologist can find the right word for this genre, but I do not care to find a name for it.”

Voskanyan added that in recent years, he also tried his hand at composing in different realms, such as for choirs, string quartets, and chamber groups. He also started to do film scoring during the pandemic period. He said, “That is when I started composing for others. Film music is a very good area for that. You can see the movie and compose to create emotions for it. Because I am a cinephile, I was interested in doing this, and I liked this process. I still want to do more films.”

He primarily scored short films, which he found more interesting to do musically than feature films because of the challenge of limited time. There are a few instances when films use him performing traditional melodies, but usually he composes original scoring. He was given a cameo in Michael Goorjian’s recent film, “Amerikatsi.”

Musical Roots

Voskanyan was born in Yerevan in 1986, while his family has roots in Artsakh, Syunik, Ayrarat and Tavush. He said that he was attracted to music as a child. His father played *dhol* and sang, and his grandmother also was a good singer, but they were not professionals. Voskanyan began performing on stage at the age of 5, and became a member of a children’s folk instrument orchestra in Yerevan. Some of his relatives and friends also joined. He went to a reg-



Ten-year-old Miqayel Voskanyan holding his children’s tar

ular school, but from age 9, he also began attending a music school simultaneously.

He recalled, “I chose the tar only with my soul. I heard how this instrument sounds and chose to learn to play it. That was in 1995.”

Initially, Voskanyan wanted to learn the *kamancha* [spiked fiddle] because the director of the children’s ensemble, Hrachya Muradyan, was one of its great players, and he inspired all the children in this way. However, as there was no one who played tar in the orchestra at that point, they played the tar for the children and its sound, which he had not heard before, he said, changed his mind.

He found out later, after he had already started to learn to play this instrument, that his great-great-grandfather Sargis, who lived in Ijevan, was one of the best performers of the tar in Armenia in the 1920s and 1930s. Voskanyan said that he had never met him, and even his father never had



MVF Band 2023 US tour in the scope of Center Stage program

met him, but Voskanyan’s grandfather remembered him. Unfortunately Sargis’s tar was broken and irreparable, but Voskanyan even today said that he keeps the body of the instrument as a memento.

For seven years, Voskanyan said that he pursued tar and also vocal studies, but then decided to add one more specialization when he attended Yerevan State University (YSU) from 2005 to 2009. He graduated with a degree in art and music history. While at YSU, he also took classes from various professors and musicians at the Komitas State Conservatory, but not as a regular student.

In the early 2000s, he began to work in the State Orchestra of Folk Instruments of Armenia as a tar player, though for a few years he supplement his income by working as a tour guide. He took part in various musical ventures as a sideman playing with different musicians, but made the audacious decision, together with his friend Lusine, who later became his wife, to launch his own musical projects. In 2011 they created the band MVF.

In music school, he learned also to play the piano. He later did learn also to play the saz, oud, bouzouki, guitar and other similar string instruments.

He said that while he was just starting out, he used to compose lyrics along with melody, but then focused on composing the instrumental portion of music. Now, he said, he again sometimes tries to write lyrics. When he performs, she said, “Sometimes I don’t think — I just sing and play. In improvisational music, there is an energy which you don’t fully understand. I suddenly see that I am both singing and playing.”

Armenian Music in Today’s World

Voskanyan said, “I notice that we [Armenians] do not represent our music much. Our music is very interesting, so people want to know more about it. We have a great heritage and a huge legacy of unique music....When we had Greater Armenia [historically], it was a big country and we had more neighbors than now. We had an influence on those nations, and they had an influence on us. That led to different styles of music, such as in Artsakh, Taron, Hamshen, Tigranekert/Diyarbakir, etc.”

It is quite an effort to reach a broader audience, he said. He exclaimed, “Armenia is like an island, a very little island, and it is very complicated [to break out].” He said that the easiest way is to release music digitally, though sometimes physical copies on vinyl are more suitable, depending on the

value of the music.

However, he said that you need specialists to help you in this process, while artists stick to their composing and performing. It remains difficult to do this while in Armenia, he said. Armenian artists who have entered the global market like Rosa Linn (Roza Kostandyan) benefited from having management based in the United States.

Voskanyan said that he is lucky because he has his own team and company working on disseminating his music. He cofounded his company, called Oberton Music, with his wife, Lusine, in 2018. He said it was the first multigenre music label in Armenia.

As a music management company, he said that it also tries to help other artists besides Voskanyan to develop and to enter the world music market. This includes Armenian artists living abroad. Most recently, for example, Oberton Records released Armenian-American vocalist Lucy Yeghiazaryan’s album, “Beside the Golden Door,” on vinyl.

Digital releases and the Internet are not enough, Voskanyan said, especially if the goal is to take the music and culture to a global audience.

“Digital music is just not the same as live music,” he remarked. “People must listen live to understand all the energy and the background.” Also, collaborations with other musicians and other cultures are important.

Consequently, he said he strives to travel outside of Armenia. As one of the most successful musicians in Armenia, he is invited to participate in various festivals or programs and sometimes, he said, his band does its own tours and programs. One year he traveled abroad once a month, while another year he did not travel at all. “It is not regular yet. I dream to make it stable because it is very important for a musician not to stay in his location. For me, it is like a mission. With my tours, I can explain my culture. I can give master classes about my culture, about Armenian music from ancient to modern times. I myself can also develop, expose myself to many influences, communicate with musicians, agents and producers, and of course help my music culture to get more visibility by being present in person.”

Voskanyan said that even in Armenia, it is not easy to preserve traditions. There is more globalization and Armenians accept a lot of things into Armenian life. He said that it is good to reflect all cultures, but it is important to know and feel our own culture strongly.

Contemporary Armenian music has an important role to play in this. We live in contemporary times, he said, so naturally we can feel this music as close to us. “At the same time,” he said, “contemporary music is a gate to enter other periods of time, at least for me. Using contemporary music, I can open the door to ancient music.”

He said, “Today, we have some undetermined things in our identity, especially in this post-war time. Some people are tired of being Armenians. But at the same time, when you go to your roots and feel your roots, there is a physical power. You can see your power and do more good things.”

Music in particular, he said, has a healing dimension. He chose fusion some 15 years ago as a way to make his music more interesting to different types of people. But now, many people have come back to their roots. He said, “I can play tar not using fusion but just tar, and they can understand it, and they feel good when they listen because they are transported to their roots and given power.”



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Walnut Carrot Cake Muffins With California Walnuts

These moist, delicious carrot cake muffins are sweetened with coconut sugar and get their nutty flavor from heart healthy California walnuts.

By Something Nutritious - Gal Shua-Haim

Celebrate the Power of 3 with this healthfully indulgent dessert.

Join California Walnuts in celebrating the Power of 3. The Power of 3 campaign is dedicated to celebrating walnuts as the omega-3 nut. Walnuts are the only nut that is an excellent source of the essential omega-3 ALA (2.5 grams/ounce). Omega-3 ALA has been associated with benefits for heart health, brain health and inflammation.¹ Eating just a handful of walnuts a day reaps the benefits walnuts have to offer. Over 90% of Americans aren't getting enough omega-3 in their diet.² Adding walnuts to a snack or meal is a great way to get the essential nutrient benefits of ALA without a lot of work.

To help celebrate the Power of 3, check out this delicious recipe that is sure to make your house smell wonderful, too. Walnut Carrot Cake Muffins have all the flavors of carrot cake that you love, but in muffin size. They're light and fluffy, easy to prepare and, because they can be easily transported, a great option for a spring potluck, brunch or family gathering. Walnut Carrot Cake Muffins are the perfect treat to have on hand this season or any season.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups grated carrots (about four to five carrots)
- 3/4 cup coconut sugar
- 1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts, divided (more to taste)
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup applesauce
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (to taste)

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 350°F and line 12 muffin cups with paper liners (or lightly grease the muffin tin).

In a large bowl, stir together carrots, sugar, oil, applesauce, eggs and vanilla extract. Whisk together until smooth.

Add flour, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder and salt, and stir together until fully incorporated. Fold in most of the walnuts, reserving some to top the muffins.

Spoon equal amounts of batter into each cup and sprinkle with remaining walnuts. Bake for 25 minutes or until the tops are firm to touch or a toothpick comes out clean.

Let cool completely, then store in an airtight container for up to 3 days, or refrigerate for up to 1 week.

Pro tip: Always store your walnuts in the refrigerator or freezer so they stay fresh. And start to think of walnuts as part of a heart-healthy eating plan – not just for special occasions. Remember that when you include walnuts as part of a healthy eating plan, you may be lowering your risk of heart disease.

Check out additional plant-forward <<https://walnuts.org/recipes/?collection%5b%5d=plant-forward-eating>> recipes to get into the spirit of the Power of 3. If you want to learn more about the Power of 3 initiative, read all about it, as California Walnuts gathers inspiration from kitchens and chefs around the world on how to incorporate more walnuts into your daily meals and snacks.

REFERENCES:

1 Supportive but not conclusive research shows that eating 1.5 ounces of walnuts per day, as part of a low saturated fat and low cholesterol diet and not resulting in increased caloric intake, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. (FDA) One ounce of walnuts offers 18g of total fat, 2.5g of monounsaturated fat, 13g of polyunsaturated fat including 2.5g of alpha-linolenic acid – the plant-based omega-3.

2 Papanikolaou Y, Brooks J, Reider C, Fulgoni VL: U.S. adults are not meeting recommended levels for fish and omega-3 fatty acid intake: results of an analysis using observational data from NHANES 2003–2008. *Nutr J.* 2014, 13: 31-10.1186/1475-2891-13-31.

For information, contact:

California Walnut Board and Commission

101 Parkshore Dr. Ste. 250

Folsom, CA 95630

Phone: (916) 932-7070

Fax: (916) 932-7071

Email: info@walnuts.org

Website: <https://walnuts.org/>

<https://walnuts.org/about-walnuts/>

<https://walnuts.org/nutrition/>

California Origins

More than 99% of the walnuts in U.S. are grown in the fertile soils of California's Central Valley. Internationally, California walnuts supply two-thirds of the world's walnut trade.

The California Walnut Board was established in 1948 to represent the walnut growers and handlers of California. The Board is funded by mandatory assessments of the handlers. The California Walnut Commission, established in 1987, is funded by mandatory assessments of the growers.

The walnut was first cultivated in California by the Franciscan Fathers in the late 1700s. The earliest walnuts to enter California were known as "mission" walnuts. Unlike today's walnuts, these first entries were small with hard shells. The trees flourished in the Mediterranean-like climate zones of California, and by the 1870s modern walnut production had begun with orchard plantings in southern California, near Santa Barbara. In the next 70 years the center of California's walnut production shifted with successful plantings in the central and northern parts of the state. Many of today's improved cultivars are descendants of early plantings. Luther Burbank is credited with early research in California walnut cultivation.



Constantine Orbelian Installed as NYC Opera Executive Director, Music Director

ORBELIAN, from page 12

European, North American, Russian and Asian music centers.

Orbelian's accomplishments include being Music Director of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia of Russia, founder of the annual Palaces of St. Petersburg International Music Festival, Chief Conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra in Lithuania, and Artistic Director of the State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater in Yerevan, Armenia. Among his concert and televised appearances are collaborations with Hovorostovsky, Renée Fleming, Anna Netrebko and Van Cliburn, including the legendary pianist's fare-

well performance.

Recent performances included debuts at the famed Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires with Isabel Lenoard, Palacio Bellas Artes in Mexico City with Elina Garanca, Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra in Bucharest, and a recent production of Eugene Onegin in Cluj Napoca Opera house in Romania.

Born in San Francisco to Ukrainian and Armenian emigré parents, Orbelian made his performing debut as a piano prodigy with the San Francisco Symphony at the age of 11. After graduating from Juilliard in New York, he embarked on a career as a piano virtuoso that included appearances with major symphony orchestras through-

out the US, UK, Europe and Russia.

The first American to become music director of an ensemble in Russia, he was awarded the title "Honored Artist of Russia" in 2004 in recognition of his efforts championing Russian-American cultural exchange. In 2012 the Russian Consulate in San Francisco awarded the maestro the Russian Order of Friendship Medal, joining such luminaries as Cliburn and Riccardo Muti in being so honored. In 2001 Orbelian was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, given to immigrants, or children of immigrants, who have made outstanding contributions to the United States.

See www.constantineorbelian.com.



CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CANADA

OCTOBER 5 — Banquet of Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada and Abaka newspaper at the Tekeyan Center in Montreal with musical program, Saturday 7:30 p.m., ticket \$75 Canadian, call 514 747-6680. See ad page 10.

MASSACHUSETTS

SEPTEMBER 25 — CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US! Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. highlights Vietnam. Monthly series offered in collaboration with the City of Boston Office of Immigrant Advancement and Age Friendly Boston. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

SEPTEMBER 26 — Tekeyan Boston Armenian Cooking Demo II: Khnkali, Kebebet, with coffee/tea, \$25, Thurs. 7 pm, chefs Rita Balyozian, Betty Aroyan, 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown. RSVP Sossy syogurtian@comcast.net, 617 281-1647.

OCTOBER 4 — The Istanbul Armenians of Boston are hosting a benefit concert featuring the acapella trio Zulal. First Parish Church, 630 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington. 7.30 p.m.

OCTOBER 9 — TEA & TRANQUILITY. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Wednesday at 4 p.m. Meet & Greet featuring BIG JOE, the storyteller, performance for all ages. Enjoy a refreshing Citrus Spritzer & luscious Italian Cookies, hosted by Modern Pastry. RSVP appreciated, hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

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 or call Mary Ann #603-770-3375 or Kathy #978-902-3198.

OCTOBER 20 — "Armenian Vistas: Diasporic Perspectives and Legacies" Concert at Armenian Cultural Foundation, co-sponsored by the Amaras Art Alliance, the Armenian International Women's Association. Works for Cello and Piano by Armenian Composers Komitas, A. Babajanyan, A. Hovhanness, E. Melik-Aslanian, S. Elmas, D. Goolkasian Rahbee in Tribute to composer Dianne Goolkasian Rahbee. Alessandra Pompili, piano; Christina Gullans, cello. Sunday, 4 p.m. Free and open to all. Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic Street, Arlington.

OCTOBER 23 — CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US! Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. highlights Haiti. Monthly series in collaboration with the City of Boston Office of Immigrant Advancement and Age Friendly Boston RSVP appreciated, hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

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.

OCTOBER 25-27 — Armenian Church at Hye Pointe Church Consecration by His Grace Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan. On Friday, October 25, at 5 p.m. Trnpatsek (Opening of Church Doors), 6:30 p.m. Cocktail Reception, Ermonian Hall. On Saturday, October 26, 3 p.m. Consecration Service, 5 p.m. Gala Banquet, Ermonian Hall. On Sunday, October 27, 9 a.m. Morning Service, 10 a.m. Inaugural Divine Liturgy/Antranig Holy Badarak, Celebrant Fr. Vart Gyozyan, Fellowship following the Divine Liturgy. Due to limited seating capacity, please RSVP for all events by September 21. Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill MA 01835, Tel. (978) 372-9227, email:hyepointearmenianchurch.org

OCTOBER 26 — First Armenian Church FALLFEST! Saturday 12 noon. At the church grounds, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont. Freshly cooked Losh, Lamb, Beef and Chicken Kebabs on our outdoor grills! Combo meals, Vegetarian meals and Pastries like mom made.

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.

NOVEMBER 17 — GIVING THANKS: TOGETHER IN CELEBRATION. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 2 p.m. Meet & Greet. Sing! Share the Warmth: Bring hat, gloves, scarf for the ABCD Winter Drive. Enjoy light refreshments. RSVP appreciated, hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

DECEMBER 8 — CANDLELIT LABYRINTH WALK: IN PEACE & HARMONY. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 4:45pm. Meet & Greet. Enjoy Hot Chocolate & Holiday Cookies. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

Send Calendar Items to the Mirror-Spectator: To send calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator, email alin@mirrorspectator.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the "calendar" section under the heading "More." You can also mail them to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472.

Rouben Koulaksezian: *Traveling through 'Little Armenias'*

KOULAKSEZIAN, from page 12

I have many stories of random situations where the Armenian language, that I learned as a young adult, was really helpful. Actually, even speaking a few words creates a connection with other Armenians anywhere in the world. As we say in Armenian, "The more languages you know, the more persons you are." It's important to understand concepts in the language of your ancestors. I'd be very frustrated if I was in a situation where, hypothetically, if I could meet my great-grandfather, I'd had no common language to talk to him.

I also remember when I arrived in Buenos Aires for the first time, I met with a local Armenian couple. We had coffee together, we talked about the Armenian diaspora experience... and after an hour they told me: "We are getting married next week, come to the wedding." That how I realized that being French-Armenian gave me an advantage over other French travelers, because I had fellow Armenians that are locals in many countries. Being Armenian made my experience of visiting Buenos Aires much closer to the local life than if I wasn't.

During your travels to more than 100 countries, where did you have the most unexpected Armenian meeting?

I had too many unexpected meetings to just pick one... I think "unexpected" is what defines the best aspect of traveling in the Armenian diaspora. For example, in the town of Encarnacion, Paraguay, there is a water well called Ykua San Blas ("ykua" means "well" in local Guarani language), dedicated to Saint

Blaise who was from Armenia. An Armenian living in Paraguay renovated the well, bringing a *khachkar*, a *pulpulak* (water fountain in Armenian) and a bronze statue of Saint Blaise from Armenia to Paraguay.

Koulaksez means "without ear" in Turkish. How did your unusual surname come about?

We can't be sure about the origin of the last name, but we probably had an ancestor that was either deaf or stubborn. My family is originally from Marash, in Cilicia. After the genocide and the withdrawal of French troops, they moved to Aleppo, then to France, to an industrial town near Lyon, called Saint-Chamond. Most of my relatives are still there today.

What do you want to see changed most both in Armenia and Diaspora?

I want a prosperous future for Armenia and for it develop even more its connections with all diasporan communities. For the diaspora, I want the best for every single community, but contexts are very diverse. In general, we should do our best to fight to keep our Armenian identity alive through the next generations. We should also, when history made it hard for us to stay in a place, do what we can to preserve our heritage, our landmarks, etc.

Do you intend to continue the "Little Armenias" project? If no, what will be your next Armenian initiative?

I intend to continue the "Little Armenias" project. I have many ideas, but the new edition of the book and developing social media content creation are my main objectives for the year coming.





COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan,
Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian
Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe
Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald
Papasian, Benjamin Poghosyan, Suren
Sargsyan, Harut Sassounian, Hagop
Vartivarian

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-
Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian,
Michelle Mkhlian
YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott
BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
PARIS: Jean Eckian
SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian
Demirjian
CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA
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FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

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Armenia at the BRICS Summit: Choice or Absence of Choice?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In an article for the *Mirror-Spectator* published in July, I argued that Armenia's absence from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit is a strategic error by its government. Also, in that same article I was mentioning that regional powers in the South Caucasus — Russia, Iran, and Turkey have sought to reduce Western geopolitical influence in the region, while China emerges as a new player in the South Caucasus. It joined the club opposing Western presence and countering American interests, especially the US's stance against China. All this suggests that Armenia cannot pursue its foreign policies in isolation amid the rivalry in the South Caucasus.

Recently, it was announced that Armenia will have a high-level delegation at the upcoming BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit in Kazan, Russia, with the Armenian prime minister visiting. This follows a press conference where Nikol Pashinyan made notable positive gestures toward Russia, thanking Russian border guards for their work at Zvartnots Airport after their departure at Armenia's request in August 2024. During his conference, Pashinyan acknowledged Russia's potential role in mediating the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and dismissed discussions about the withdrawal of the Russian 102nd military base from Armenia. He emphasized the importance of maintaining respectful relations with Russia and resolving issues through constructive dialogue. All this seems like public preparation for the announcement of his attendance at the BRICS summit in Russia. Some people in Armenia called the decision of Pashinyan to go to Russia as a balanced implementation of foreign policy or even as an example of complementarism (foreign policy concept during President Kocharyan administration). In reality, I believe the prime minister is compelled to go to the BRICS summit. A few weeks ago, it was revealed that Turkey had already applied to join BRICS, with Azerbaijan also showing interest. It is possible that the meeting in Russia will officially kick off these processes. This indicates that all of Armenia's neighbors, except Georgia, are showing interest in BRICS and want to deepen cooperation with the organization by becoming member states.

The situation in Georgia is quite intriguing. Its upcoming elections in October could significantly influence its foreign policy direction. If a government is formed that aims to strengthen ties with Russia and enacts the foreign agents law, forcing registration of organizations that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad, Georgia's relations with the European Union — along with its economic ties and current preferences

— could be jeopardized. This would compel Georgia to seek new economic partners and platforms to support its exports, potentially increasing interest in strengthening ties with BRICS.

Notably, Iran became a BRICS member earlier this year and is actively collaborating with the organization and its member states. Prior to joining BRICS, Iran also became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, facilitating its entry into BRICS. Azerbaijan is preparing to join BRICS while actively cooperating with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Turkey is also engaged with the SCO and aims for BRICS membership. Iran is already a BRICS member, and Georgia's status will become clearer by the end of October.

Thus, Armenia finds itself almost entirely surrounded by BRICS members or potential members, which means that Armenia will have little alternative but to deepen its relations with the organization and possibly even seek membership. It is clear that the regional countries will not allow Armenia to pursue a different orientation if they themselves are aligning with BRICS or similar international organizations. All of these countries have geopolitical interests, and Armenia cannot be excluded from the regional mosaic or the overall regional economic structure.

BRICS, with China as its economic powerhouse, has also sparked significant interest in Arab countries, including Egypt and United Arab Emirates, which means that BRICS is getting bigger geographically, larger in terms of its economic market, and richer with member states concerning their GDP.

I am not advocating for Armenia to join BRICS, but I believe that in light of current geopolitical realities, Armenia must swiftly and strategically navigate a changing world. Adopting an anti-American, anti-European, anti-Russian, or anti-Iranian foreign policy is not an option. We must avoid these missteps and pursue a pragmatic approach to safeguard our statehood and territorial integrity. Armenia needs to align its interests with key external players and cooperate on common grounds instead of conflicts.

Currently, Armenia's foreign policy appears cautious, avoiding actions against external actors' interests, even when such actions align with its own national interests. This may appear pragmatic, but it is actually a fearful, unprincipled, and contradictory stance on national interests that must be eliminated.

(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.)

Armenians Must Win the Battle of the Analogies

By Michael Rubin

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Speaking at Italy's Cernobbio Forum on September 6, 2024, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev justified Azerbaijan's conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh. "We fully restored our sovereignty last year, and separatism was eliminated from Azerbaijan's territory in September. Ukraine is trying to do the same but without success despite significant Western support. We did it on our own," Aliyev declared.

The idea that Azerbaijan's attack on Artsakh is analogous to Ukraine's defense from Russian aggression is backward, if not Orwellian. Not only Armenian diplomats, but also Western officials must challenge it. Outside Armenia, few policymakers or journalists and even human rights specialists truly understand the contours of the conflict. Narratives shape thinking. If justice is to prevail, Armenia must win the battle of the analogies.

In truth, Aliyev's behavior is akin to that of Russian President Vladimir Putin, not Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. There is little difference between Aliyev's denial of Armenia's historic legitimacy and his embrace of the "Western Azerbai-

jan" fiction. His revisionism parallels Putin's narrative on Ukraine. Seven months prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for example, Putin published an essay arguing that Ukraine had been part of Russia for nearly 1,000 years. "The name 'Ukraine' was used more often in the meaning of the Old Russian word 'okraina' [periphery]," he wrote. "The idea of Ukrainian people as a nation separate from the Russians started to form and gain ground among the Polish elite and a part of the Malorussian intelligentsia," Putin argued. "Since there was no historical basis – and [there] could not have been any, conclusions were substantiated by all sorts of concoctions."

In reality, Ukrainian culture runs deep. Putin can create his version of Caucasian Albania, but his narrative is no more legitimate than Aliyev's. As Ukraine seeks to rebuff the Russian onslaught, it acts to protect all Ukrainian citizens regardless of ethnicity or language; it does not seek to expel Russians from Donbas. Contrast this to Nagorno-Karabakh, where Azerbaijani forces expelled the entire population of ethnic Armenians whose roots in the region extended back more than a millennium.

So, if Ukraine's defense of its territory

against Russian aggression is not an accurate analogy for Azerbaijan's assault on Nagorno-Karabakh, what is? Here, the former Yugoslavia looms large. Aliyev's dehumanization of Armenians and ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh are more akin to what Serbian President Slobodan Milošević sought to do first in Bosnia and Croatia and then attempted in Kosovo.

Indeed, Kosovo may be the closest parallel to Nagorno-Karabakh. Both are ancient regions. International machinations divided each from co-ethnicists and co-religionists across a border; they both suffered as chauvinist host countries persecuted each regions' citizens. The parallels extend to personalities. Like Aliyev, Milošević was a bigot and a dictator. What Aliyev did to Armenian Christians in Artsakh was simply what Milošević would have done to sought to Albanian Muslims in Kosovo had the West not intervened.

Other parallels exist. American and European officials depict themselves as high-minded on matters of policy and human rights but too often money matters more than principle. The root of Aliyev's influence is his ability to spread Azerbaijan's petrodollars around to lobbyists and

see ANALOGIES, page 20



COMMENTARY

Analyzing Legal Right of Return for Artsakh Armenians On First Anniversary of Ethnic Cleansing

By Philippe Raffi Kalfayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

This article is an extract of a legal opinion to be published on the site of the International and Comparative Law Center – Armenia. Both articles have been released on the occasion of a communication from the author as a panelist in the session concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) issue at the Global Armenian Summit which is taking place on September 18 in Yerevan.

The current situation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian people is widely known: the population is no longer living on its ancestral land. Citizens were driven out forcibly at the end of September 2023, leaving behind their lands, personal and business properties, their cemeteries and the dead who were not buried according to tradition. Humanity is now watching passively the destruction of the Artsakh's cultural and religious national heritage, as well as the erasing of all Armenian traces. Few Armenians still fight for the inalienable right of this people to live on its native lands.

Shockingly, the issue of Artsakh's ethnic cleansing has already become an object of scientific curiosity while the embers of this conflict are still hot and the psychological trauma of blockade and forced displacement remain acute, and lastly, the self-determination case of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian people is far from being over.

The forced exile simply obliges the reformulation of the right to self-determination, because the right to return is the new first stage of this process. It seems more convenient for the vast majority of Armenians in Armenia as well as the diaspora to cultivate victimhood rather than to fight for the valid rights of the living. The same process has been observed regarding the consequences of the 1915 genocide: the memorial approach is favored over a more combative objective — reparations.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) authorities are not exempt from their own mistakes in today's situation. If they had accepted to leave aside their status as a self-proclaimed independent state, notwithstanding the legitimacy of the process that led to independence, they could at least have used some diplomatic and legal levers available to them as a native ethnic group. It would have affirmed their political will and raised awareness on the international scene.

The Committee for the Defense of the Fundamental Rights of the People of Nagorno-Karabakh, headed by Vartan Oskanian, claims to have been mandated by the exiled NKR parliament but its statement is ambiguous since it mentions the “people” and not the “Republic” of Nagorno-Karabakh. Their objective is to act for the right of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian people to return to their homeland as an essential part of building a sustainable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The second element of the declaration says that “the people remain resolute to determine their political future and exercise their own democratic self-governance.” It is unclear how this committee will proceed diplomatically to convince Azerbaijan on this particular aspect.

There are no major legal obstacles in international law regarding the right to return. That is why most countries, especially the US, Russia and EU members, claim that the return of Karabakh Armenians must be on the international agenda. Of course, it is quite cynical to declare so today while these same actors did not do anything to prevent the ethnic cleansing process when needed, including acts of terror against civilians and prisoners, the nine-month blockade and the final assault in September 2023.

The UN Security Council did not even adopt a resolution condemning the blatant violations. Here, too, it is unclear whether this was a failure of Armenian diplomacy or a mutual decision. It is much more challenging to restore the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh's people now that they are no longer living on their lands. The continued detention of the former leaders of NKR, the denial of the Armenian history of Nagorno-Karabakh, the destruction and looting of homes and the continuous anti-Armenian discrimination and rhetoric all clearly indicate that Azerbaijan does not intend to allow Armenians to return to their homes, regardless of their official statements.

The right to return is nevertheless the only legal and political path forward. Armenia has neither the military capacity, nor the political will to reconquer this historical Armenian land for now. In any case, such an act by Armenia would be unlawful. There are no more families ready to sacrifice their

sons for the cause of Artsakh. But Armenians around the world have the duty to promote and defend the right to return of the Armenian people to their native Nagorno-Karabakh. The right to return is reformulating the content of the right to self-determination. The real challenges are else.

Social and Political Challenges

Time is of the essence if the strategies expanded on below to redress this calamity are to succeed. First, Azerbaijan is investing very rapidly and heavily in the territory, with the help of Turkey, to build a regional infrastructure and they have announced its demographic recolonization. Second, the Artsakh refugees in Armenia are living in precarious conditions, subjected to political control, and are therefore emigrating rapidly to Russia or Western countries. It is estimated that already 20,000 have left Armenia and only 4,300 applied for full Armenian citizenship as of September 3, 2024.

The diplomatic plane is no less challenging. Armenia's incumbent government has recognized without nuances the belonging of the former autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan and it lacks a coherent strategy. On the one side hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the agent of the government for legal affairs are defending the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to return to their lands with security guarantees, respectively, in diplomatic and judicial forums. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) provisional measures order on November 17, 2023, has already recorded that right. President Aliyev does recognize that right, too, but claims reciprocity for Azerbaijanis having left Armenia 30 years ago. On the other hand, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the President of the Armenian Parliament Alen Simonyan have declared abruptly that the Artsakh case is over and Armenia is no longer concerned with this issue. Simonyan even stated on November 16, 2023: “We have a big problem concerning the Artsakh Armenians. I don't see the purpose of establishing statehood or preserving and developing state institutions here [he meant in Armenia]. I consider it an imminent threat and a blow to the security of the Republic of Armenia.” He made an ignominious and illegitimate statement on September 9, 2024: “Armenia's government does not regard Nagorno-Karabakh's exiled leaders as legal representatives of the region and of its displaced population.” That's not him to decide.

Artsakh Armenians as Indigenous People

Let us now analyze the individual and collective rights of Nagorno-Karabakh people in the light of international law and the best forum where to claim and defend those rights.

In the literature, the difference between individual and collective rights is generally made on the manner the rights are exercised. Certain rights are exercised exclusively by an individual while others are exercisable jointly in community with others.

The international courts regularly favor the individual rights over the collective and political rights of a people or a community where such conflict exists. Even in the case of indigenous peoples or tribes, the individual right is protected. In fact, the collective rights are those human rights generally recognized to be exercisable by collectives (in other words by groups of individuals) and not reducible to the individual. That includes the right to self-determination. Although there is no normative definition of collective rights, the concept emerged because individual human rights do not guarantee adequate protection for indigenous peoples and other minorities exhibiting collective characteristics.

In the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, this collective aspect is particularly relevant although the Armenians never presented themselves as an “indigenous people.” This ethnic community existed on those lands long before the creation of the Armenian and Azerbaijani republics in 1918. They had always benefited from relative autonomy. They were colonized during the Soviet period and their administration transferred arbitrarily under Azerbaijan rule in 1921 but under an autonomous regime. They proclaimed their independence in 1991 but as a consequence of the lost war in November 2020, the whole ethnic group was forced to leave *en masse* in September 2023 by Azerbaijan, the state controlling effectively the surrounding territory since November 9, 2020.

Hence, the right to return is both an individual and collective right, since a homogenous group of individuals has been subjected to serious violations of its fundamental rights, including its right to self-determination.

The ICJ ordered interim measures that reflect the complementarity of individual and collective rights (ICJ, Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia V. Azerbaijan), indication of provisional measures, Order 17 November 2023, para. 69.).

Applications by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) must also anticipate the redress to be conceived as a right to return on native lands and restitution for one's home. If there is restitution, it supposes implicitly that people can return to Nagorno-Karabakh. Actually, there is an ECHR's case law in relation with Armenian and Azerbaijani displaced nationals from the first Nagorno-Karabakh war (1992-1994). In Sargsyan v. Azerbaijan, the European Court concluded to the continuing violation of the rights of the applicant to return to Gulistan and to enjoy his property. The ECHR delivered a similar judgement in Chiragov v. Armenia, involving an Azerbaijani Yezidi forced out of the Lachin Corridor.

The European Court applied among other international legal provisions the UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons, known as the “Pinheiro Principles.” These principles provide that “All refugees and displaced persons have the right to have restored to them any housing, land and/or property of which they were arbitrarily or unlawfully deprived, or to be compensated for any housing, land and/or property that is factually impossible to restore as determined by an independent, impartial tribunal.”

They principles also recall that “The right to restitution exists as a distinct right, and is prejudiced neither by the actual return nor by the non-return of refugees and displaced persons entitled to housing, land and property restitution.”

The specific principle has been applied in Sargsyan v. Azerbaijan for the latter are not in a position to guarantee secure access to the village and to assess the status of the applicant's property in the area. Subsequently, individual measures shall be limited to just payments. The court indicates that “pending a comprehensive peace agreement, it would appear particularly important to establish a property claims mechanism to allow applicants and others in their situation to have their property rights restored and to obtain compensation for the loss of their enjoyment.”

Power of UN Security Council

While the right to return is indisputable legally, the battle is essentially of a diplomatic nature. Thus, the rights can be best defended by interstate claims and supported by resolutions of the UN Security Council. The ICJ, as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations is the ad hoc forum for Artsakh's citizens. The key question is: Is the Republic of Armenia ready to support and lead the diplomatic and legal battle to the end?

Prime Minister Pashinyan noted the possibility of withdrawing applications against Azerbaijan on a reciprocal basis as an integral part of the negotiations over the possible peace treaty. Azerbaijani official sources did not report directly on this matter; only media close to the government elaborated on Armenian statements.

Abandoning the interstate proceedings at the ICJ would be a hard diplomatic blow to the cause of Artsakh, and sending a wrong signal, since it would offer impunity for crimes against humanity.

Accountability is crucial for identifying and recording underlying structural and systemic drivers of human rights abuses. Racial discrimination is identified as the root of the gross violations. If no corrective or transformative measures are imposed on Azerbaijan to put an end to racial discrimination against Armenians, there will be no sustainable peace. Accountability for serious crimes and accompanying transformative measures are guarantees of non-repetition. Peace between two countries, such as Armenia and Azerbaijan, cannot last long if those guarantees are not established. In the longer term, absence of accountability can serve as fertile ground for those who seek to manipulate history and offer a revisionist interpretation of what happened.

The violation of the right to self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians was associated with the serious violation of other conventional obligations, such as the prohibition of racial discrimination and that of torture and ill-treatment, all of which constitute internationally wrongful acts.

Any third state member of the United Nations does have *erga omnes* obligations toward the violation of those fundamental rights. *Erga omnes* (“towards all”) obligations are owed to a group of states including that state, and are see RETURN, page 20



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Why Can't Pashinyan Remember the Document He Signed at the End of the 2020 War?

It is incomprehensible that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan would forget important details of the document he signed with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and President Vladimir Putin of Russia, at the end of the 2020 Artsakh War.

More incomprehensible is the fact that while Pashinyan is distorting some of the provisions of the 2020 agreement, he is blaming others for misrepresenting it. Shockingly, he then challenges them to read the text of the agreement, reminding them that it is publicly available.

Pashinyan signed the 2020 agreement that called for the unblocking of “all economic and transport connections in the region,” specifically mentioning a road that will cross Armenia to link mainland Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhichevan. Since 2020 he has repeated dozens of times that Armenia is ready “this morning” to allow Azerbaijanis to travel to Nakhichevan through Armenia, not once mentioning, until his August 31, 2024 press conference, that Armenians also have the right to travel through Azerbaijan to Russia.

Fortunately, Azerbaijan has undermined this provision of the 2020 agreement by insisting that the road that will cross Armenia should be a “corridor” which means that the Armenian territory that Azeris will pass through is to be under Azerbaijan’s control. This is contrary to the provisions of the 2020 agreement and a violation of Armenia’s sovereignty. If it were not for Aliyev’s obstruction, Azeris would have been traveling through Armenia to Nakhichevan for several years by now.

To make matters worse, as a result of the dispute between Armenia and Russia resulting from Russian peacekeepers not carrying out their duties of protecting Artsakh Armenians and allowing Azerbaijan to completely occupy Artsakh on September 19, 2023, Pashinyan has been wrongly insisting that Russia has no role to play in the Zangezur road. He is thus ignoring Point 9 of the agreement he signed in 2020 which stated: “The Border Guard Service of the Russian Federal Security Service shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections [between Armenia and Azerbaijan].”

Pashinyan could have been justified in rejecting the Russian role if he had said that the 2020 agreement is no longer valid as both Russia and Azerbaijan

have violated many of its provisions, such as the lack of the protection of Artsakh Armenians, completing the occupation of Artsakh, and not returning all the Armenian prisoners of war. However, Pashinyan insists that the November 9, 2020 agreement is still valid, thus contradicting himself.

Furthermore, Pashinyan wrongly insists that the November 9, 2020 agreement does not mention any Russian role for the Zangezur road. He challenges everyone to read the text of the 2020 agreement and then quotes from its Point 9, leaving out the sentence that calls for Russian border guards to oversee the road between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan.

To add to the confusion, after insisting that Russia has no role in this road, Pashinyan contradicts himself once again by claiming that Russia is supposed to “monitor” the road, not “oversee” it. Making his argument more bizarre, Pashinyan says that Russian monitors don’t have to be physically present on Armenia’s border to monitor the Zangezur road and that they can monitor it remotely from anywhere else, like Moscow.

In the meantime, the Zangezur road has become a political football between Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, Russia and the West. For a long time, Russia had been pushing for the opening of the Zangezur road so it can control this critical artery that will link the Central Asian Turkic states with Azerbaijan and Turkey, all the way to Europe. If the West, instead of Russia, oversees this key road, this would reduce Russia’s influence in the region.

Pashinyan tried to appease all the sides involved in this controversy by suddenly announcing that an international organization could monitor the transit of Azeri goods and people. However, just as quickly, he withdrew his suggestion because Azerbaijan would have never accepted that the same third party would also monitor the transit of Armenian goods through Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan and Iran have come up with an alternative solution. They agreed to allow the movement of goods from mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan through a road in Northern Iran. Even though Azerbaijan and Turkey had been pressuring Armenia to open “the Zangezur Corridor,” Armenia and Azerbaijan mysteriously decided to exclude the Zangezur issue from their peace treaty negotiations.

After Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Armenia of undermining the Zangezur road, Iran issued a stern warning that it will not allow a “Zangezur corridor” through Armenia. Russia quickly patched up its differences with Iran and quieted down the dispute.

This messy situation could have been avoided if Pashinyan had not suggested the inclusion of the Zangezur road in the 2020 agreement. This is what happens when Prime Minister Pashinyan, rather than solving Armenia’s problems, aggravates them because of his incompetence.

A Day of Fast Cars And Genocidal Maniacs in Azerbaijan

By Dominic Lawson

Should you be one of those watching the fuel-fest known as the Formula 1 grand prix taking place in Baku on September 15, consider this: within half a mile of the drivers hurtling around the streets of Azerbaijan’s capital is the state security service headquarters. And languishing in its cells are — among many other political prisoners — several who were ministers of the former Armenian government of Nagorno-Karabakh, now unlawfully held hostage after being captured last year when Azerbaijan invaded the disputed territory.

Greg Maffei, head of Liberty Media, which owns the F1 business, has criticized the holding of one of its races there, but said that such events were in “places like Baku” because they had paid such large sums for the privilege — a succinct description of what has become known as “sportswashing.”

But Ilham Aliyev, who took over from his father as the president of Azerbaijan in 2003, and appointed his wife vice-president, is also the latest example of how autocratic petro-states are cloaking themselves in the sanctimony of the fight against climate change. For in November Baku will host Cop29 — the annual UN conference on climate change. Aliyev has the audacity — given his recent actions — to declare it will be “the Cop of peace.” (I can’t quite believe this slogan could have been dreamt up by the British public relations company Teneo, which has the Azerbaijan Cop29 account. Previously another British PR firm, Portland Communications, toiled most remuneratively to put the best possible gloss on the Baku regime.)

The bulk of Azerbaijan’s GDP and approximately 90 percent of its export revenues are the fruits of oil and gas production. Is this a message that Aliyev wants his country to become a post-hydrocarbon economy? The reverse.

At last year’s Cop assembly he declared: “As head of a country rich in fossil fuels, of course we will defend the right of these countries to continue investments and production.” He has also referred to Azerbaijan’s oil and gas reserves as “a gift of the gods.”

A further gift is the business opportunity for Baku to fill the gap left by much of Europe’s abandonment of Russian gas, following Moscow’s assault on Ukraine. When the European parliament approved sanctions against Aliyev and other Azeri government officials over their offensive against the Armenians, the European Commission refused to implement them, and its president, Ursula von der Leyen, flew to Baku, hailing the country as “a crucial energy partner” for the EU in its efforts to reduce reliance on Russian oil and gas.

But it seems Azerbaijan was increasing its own imports of Russian gas, even as it had been stepping up its exports to the EU. One expert in this field, Gubad Ibadoghlu of the London School of Economics, has written that “the only viable way” Azerbaijan could fulfil its new obligations to the EU was to buy in more gas from Moscow (to shove back down the pipelines to Europe). Indeed, the EU’s energy commissioner told Politico magazine that such repackaging of Russian gas would not be against the rules “because Russian gas is not sanctioned.”

One thing clear in this murky business is that President Aliyev and President Putin enjoy the best of relations. The Azeri leader welcomed the Russian to Baku in August, returning the hospitality he had received at the Kremlin four months earlier. This casts light on the fact that Russia, which had long guaranteed Armenia’s borders, did not come to its aid when Azerbaijan invaded last year. Admittedly, Putin had other matters on his plate, what with trying to conquer Ukraine and threatening the West with nuclear annihilation.

To put it mildly, this bodes ill for the Armenians, the first nation to become officially Christian (long before the Roman empire), who have suffered genocide at the hands of Muslim neighbors before.

The term genocide was coined by the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, partly in response to the atrocities perpetrated against the Armenian population of the Ottoman empire between 1915 and 1918. Roughly three quarters of the Armenian race were exterminated, a greater proportion than even Hitler managed in respect of Europe’s Jewish population.

The language used was similar. One of the perpetrators, a doctor and regional governor called Dr. Mehmed Resid, said “the Armenian bandits were a load of harmful microbes that had afflicted the body of the fatherland. Was it not the duty of the doctor to kill the microbes?”

In this context, Aliyev’s description of ethnic Armenians as “barbarians and vandals” infected by a “virus” for which they “need to be treated” is chilling. As is a commemorative stamp issued by his government, portraying a man in a biohazard suit fumigating the area of Nagorno-Karabakh. Will Baku stop there? In a speech on December 24, 2022, Aliyev declared: “They ... established a state for themselves in someone else’s land. Armenia was never present in this region before. Present-day Armenia is our land.”

In fact, “present-day” Armenia, which represents about 10 percent of the landmass of its historic territory, is a landlocked little country of no strategic significance: it has no oil or gas, for example. Which helps explain why the ever-pragmatic Foreign Office has advised successive British administrations not to provoke Turkey by recognizing what it did to the Armenians as genocide (though the US, Germany and France have found the nerve to do so).

Azerbaijan has also been rather more successful at winning the affection of Westminster politicians, not least in the case of Bob Blackman, who has for many years been chairman of the Azerbaijan all-party parliamentary group — and more recently of the Conservative Party’s 1922 Committee, now organizing the election of a party leader.

In 2020, as Aliyev mounted an earlier attempt to seize Nagorno-Karabakh, Blackman seemed proud to declare that in Westminster he had often “put down positions on behalf of our good friends in Azerbaijan” and that “in these types of conflicts ... whoever gets the best propaganda tends to grab the attention of the listeners and viewers”. In this respect, said Blackman, he had been “fed the information through the Azerbaijan embassy in the UK”, which had been “very helpful and proactive”.

Last week, per contra, three other MPs signed a letter to the head of F1 calling on him to “stop enabling regimes like Azerbaijan to sports-wash their crimes.” I fear there is worse to come

(Dominic Lawson is an English journalist. This column originally appeared in the *Times of London* on Sunday, September 15.)



Legal Right of Return for Artsakh Armenians

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established for the protection of a collective interest of the group; or the obligations owed to the international community as a whole. It entitles any state invoking responsibility to claim from the responsible state the (a) cessation of the internationally wrongful act, and assurances and guarantees of non-repetition and (b) performance of the obligation of reparation in the interest of the injured State or of the beneficiaries of the obligation breached. The ICJ jurisprudence evolved over time to define the scope of those obligations: In *Barcelona Traction* case (1970), it referred to “the outlawing of acts of aggression, and of genocide” and to “the principles and rules concerning the basic rights of the human person, including protection from slavery and racial discrimination.” In the *East Timor* case (1995), the court added the right of self-determination of peoples to this list. It confirmed it in its advisory opinion on the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (2004).

Recently there have been multiple proceedings engaged by third states based on the *erga omnes* principle. Those reference cases are *Gambia (v. Myanmar)* for the account of Rohingyas, *South Africa (v. Israel)* for the account of Palestinians (other states will intervene in this case. So far,

Mexico, Libya, Colombia, Palestine, Spain and Türkiye), *Venezuela (v. Germany)* for the account of Palestinians: they bear the interests of victim groups who are not a State formally recognized by UN. All those cases are relevant for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in the sense that their rights as a people can be defended by third states because *erga omnes* obligations have been breached.

Very recently a new impetus was provided by the ICJ to the *erga omnes* obligations. After having found that Israel’s policies and practices of prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 were in breach of international law and that the continued presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) was also illegal, the Court addressed the matter of the legal consequences for “other States.” The Court observed that the violations by Israel include certain *erga omnes* obligations. Such obligations are by their very nature “the concern of all States” and “in view of the importance of the rights involved, all States can be held to have a legal interest in their protection.” With regard to the right to self-determination, the Court considers that, while it is for the General Assembly and the Security Council to pronounce on the modalities required to ensure an end

to Israel’s illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the full realization of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, all States must co-operate with the United Nations to put those modalities into effect.

Due to the radical stance taken by Azerbaijan and the continuation of racial discrimination and hate speech in Azerbaijani society, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians have no other choice but to adopt a human-rights-based approach that will address the root causes of what they have faced, and prioritize the individual and collective right to return and the right to restitution.

Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians Must Act Independently

Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians must fight for their rights independently from the actions undertaken by the government of Armenia, whose interests are not necessarily theirs.

The displaced citizens must quickly lobby by third states, not as a self-proclaimed state but as an ethnic group that has been forced to leave its ancestral lands. They must convince those third states to intervene in the ongoing proceeding initiated by Armenia against Azerbaijan at the ICJ (application of the International Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimi-

nation). The ICJ has already concluded about the plausibility of claims brought by Armenia and ordered subsequent temporary measures aimed at the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians from irreparable harm. A judgment on the merits would definitely order the cessation of the forced displacement and its associated racial discrimination acts, confirm the right to return of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, the right to restitution of their homes and properties, the compensation for pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages, the release of all prisoners, the protection of the historical and patrimonial legacy of Artsakh, and suggest corrective and transformative measures in Azerbaijan laws to guarantee the security and the rights of Armenians returning to their native region.

In case Azerbaijan does not enforce the judgement, third states may refer the matter to the Security Council of the United Nations. This is the only international organ that can decide about effective sanctions and measures to oblige Azerbaijan to enforcing the judgment.

(Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, based in Paris, is a lawyer, associate-researcher and lecturer in international law at Paris Pantheon-Assas University, and a former secretary general of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), who has earned a Ph.D. in international law. He is a regular columnist for the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.)

Azerbaijan Accused of Hypocrisy after Calling for COP29 Global Truce

By Fiona Harvey

LONDON (*The Guardian*) — The host country of this year’s UN climate summit, Azerbaijan, has been accused of hypocrisy in calling for a global truce to coincide with the conference taking place.

Azerbaijan holds the presidency of the COP29 summit, which will take place in its capital, Baku, from 11 November for two weeks. Heads of government from around the world are expected and more than 180 countries are likely to be represented.

For the duration of the conference, and a week before and afterwards, Azerbaijan is calling on all countries that are engaged in conflict to put down arms. The presidency will also hold a special “peace day” on 15 November, and a COP29 peace and climate initiative, intended to help the most vulnerable countries, in conjunction with the UK, Germany, Italy, Uganda and others.

The conflicts involving Ukraine and Russia, and Israel and Gaza — both in regions neighboring Azerbaijan — will cast a shadow over the conference. Russia is a leading producer of fossil fuels and emitter of greenhouse gases, while Azerbaijan is helping to supply gas to Europe in place of Russia’s gas. Forging diplomatic agreement on the climate is expected to be even more fraught than usual, when geopolitical tensions are already running high.

A leaked draft of the truce appeal, seen by the *Guardian*, shows Azerbaijan is positioning itself as a peace-maker. “[COP29] is a unique chance to bridge divides and find paths towards lasting peace. Conflicts increase greenhouse gas emissions and ravage the environment, polluting soil, water and air. The devastation of ecosystems and pollution caused by conflicts worsen climate change and undermine our efforts to safeguard the planet,” reads

the draft resolution, a short text of 180 words.

But activists have pointed to Azerbaijan’s record on human rights and its recently concluded war with Armenia. More than 100,000 people were displaced in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region after Azerbaijan launched an offensive last September.

A peace agreement was reached in late December but human rights campaigners say Azerbaijan still holds hundreds of political prisoners.

Several accused the Cop host country of hypocrisy. Paul Polman, a former chief of Unilever and now a climate activist and peace campaigner, said: “The idea of a ‘Cop truce’ is a deeply cynical PR stunt by Azerbaijan designed to distract the world’s attention away from its ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh last year.

“If President [Ilhan] Aliyev [of Azerbaijan] truly wants to lead by example, instead on calling on others to act, he should commit to decarbonizing Azerbaijan’s fossil fuel economy and release the more than 300 political prisoners he is detaining before COP29 begins.”

Ibad Bayramov, whose father, Gubad Ibadoghlu, an academic at the London School of Economics, is among those being held, said: “The conflicts have enabled the Azerbaijani government to fly under the radar while systematically dismantling civil society by imprisoning opposition voices. As COP29 approaches, international attention is increasingly focused on the regime’s oppressive tactics. The government’s recent truce call is nothing but a distraction aimed at diverting foreign governments’ attention from the harsh realities on the ground.”

He added: “My father’s trial has been deliberately frozen, while others face extended pre-trial detentions until after COP29. Their aim is to get through COP29 without holding any trials for political prisoners, hoping to avoid

scrutiny.”

A spokesperson for the Conflict and Environment Observatory said of the truce call: “This does nothing to address the root causes of conflict. It’s like a sticking plaster on a gaping wound. Stepping down conflicts for a few weeks would obviously save lives, and that is a good thing, but it would be back to business as usual immediately after. Cop can result in meaningful action for peace and climate justice, but it must address the impact that militaries and conflicts are having on the climate crisis.”

Azerbaijan’s government rejected the criticism. Yalchin Rafiyev, the country’s chief negotiator for the Cop, said: “This initiative does not have any linkage with Armenia. What we are seeking is completely generic in nature. We are simply calling for a truce; it is not linked to political issues.”

He said the reaction from other countries to the idea of a Cop truce had been universally positive so far. But he acknowledged that it would be difficult in practice. “We cannot reassure everyone that it will be observed by all those in conflict,” he said.

Azerbaijan has also announced its program for the Cop, which includes several initiatives on issues such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions from farming and organic waste, and promoting hydrogen as a green fuel, but does not mention the central pledge made at last year’s Cop28 that the world would “transition away from fossil fuels”.

Rafiyev said fossil fuels would be on the agenda at Cop, along with the need to boost renewable energy. The other pressing issue at COP29 will be providing adequate finance to developing countries, to help them cut their greenhouse gas emissions and cope with the impacts of climate breakdown. So far, there is little agreement on how the trillions required for such an effort will be raised.

Armenians Must Win the Battle of the Analogies

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politicians or to launder them through cultural groups and think tanks.

Perhaps there is also an analogy, therefore, to China and Taiwan. Taiwan, as any visitor knows, has a unique identity and culture. The last time mainland China controlled Taiwan was before the Spanish-American War landed the United States in Cuba. Over the last 500 years, China controlled Taiwan only for a few decades and then only barely. While today, Chinese Communist officials cite Qing Dynasty rule, they omit that Chinese nationalists consider the Qing to be Manchu, not Chinese. In 1937, none other than Communist Party leader Mao Zedong acknowledged to American hagiographer Edgar Snow that Taiwan, like Korea, was a separate country. Just like Aliyev, today Communist authorities elide these facts with cash, spreading around money to proxies, corrupt think tanks, and social media troll armies. Chinese Communist authorities likewise fabricate history. This is the root of China’s “Nine-Dash Line” that Beijing uses to justify imperial aggression throughout Southeast Asia. Aliyev, too, fabricates maps to justify his own revanchism. Aliyev’s depiction of Artsakh leaders as terrorists while he dynamites its parliament and its cultural heritage is also analogous to China, where Premier Xi Jinping today overseas the ethnic cleansing of Uyghur Muslims and the destruction of their cultural heritage sites.

For Aliyev to visit Europe and depict himself as a new Zelensky fighting for national survival is perverse. Wherever Aliyev travels, it is essential to treat him for what he is: Milošević with gas, or Xi without the modesty. Sometimes a war criminal is just a war criminal and should be treated as such.

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