

Armenian Authorities  
Report Another  
‘Coup Plot’

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun.am) — Law enforcement authorities announced on Wednesday, September 18 the arrests of three persons accused of trying to set up an armed group to overthrow Armenia’s government.

According to the Investigative Committee, they as well as four other suspects wanted by the authorities recruited individuals in Armenia and sent them to Russia for military training in preparation for an “armed coup.”

A statement released by the committee said the coup plot was foiled after “some of the recruited persons refused to participate in the training and returned to Armenia” from a “military base” in Russia called “Arbat.”

No information about such a base could be found from open sources. But “Arbat” is known to be the name of a Russian militia made up of ethnic Armenians reportedly fighting in Ukraine. The Investigative Committee did not say whether it is connected with the alleged coup plot.

see COUP, page 2

US Officials Say Sanctions  
Against Pro-Russian Former  
Georgian PM Ready to Go

By Ani Chkhikvadze

WASHINGTON (Voice of America) — The United States is preparing sanctions against former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili as concerns mount over his role in deepening ties with Russia and steering the country away from its democratic path, according to two US government sources who spoke to Voice of America (VOA) on the condition of anonymity.

US officials say Ivanishvili’s alleged actions benefit Russian interests and undermine Georgia’s aspirations to join the European Union and NATO.

“We have information that Ivanishvili undertook actions to develop relations with Russian oligarchs, took actions to enable Russia to gain better access to the Georgian market. In fact, he, took some actions at the direction of the Russian intelligence services,” a senior US official told VOA’s Georgian service on the condition of anonymity, given the sensitivity of discussing the sanctions.

see SANCTIONS, page 3

TCA Metro LA  
Celebrates Life  
Of Hampartzoum  
Berberian with  
Concert

GLENDALE — On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the establishment of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) in the United States, the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter organized “An Evening Dedicated to Maestro Hampartzoum Berberian: Renowned Composer, Conductor and Educator” at the Armenian Society of Los Angeles on September 6. Berberian served as TCA’s first president in the United States when the organization’s articles of incorporation were accepted in Massachusetts in 1969.

Berberian, who passed away in Watertown, MA in 1999, is revered for his musical pedagogy and admired by generations of Armenians for composing and conducting a wide range of vocal, choral



Dikran Ekizian expressing his heartfelt thoughts in memory of Hampartzoum Berberian



Tenor Berj Karazian

and operatic works, as well as symphonic and chamber pieces. Berberian’s legacy includes his beloved students from the Armenian Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Tarouhy Hagopian School for Girls, AGBU Hovagimian Manougian School for Boys and the AGBU Yervant Demirdjian Elementary School in Lebanon. Former students from all of the above schools were in attendance to pay tribute to their beloved teacher known as “Baron Berberian” in their youth.

Dr. Karen Israyelyan, Consul General of the Re-

public of Armenia in Los Angeles, congratulated the Tekeyan Cultural Association on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organization’s establishment in the United States. He also commended the lifelong contributions of Berberian.

Co-master of ceremonies Hasmig Karayan and Mihran Toumajan integrated numerous tributes to Berberian throughout the program. Among them were excerpts of a voice recording of an interview conducted in 1969 at the Baikar Building in Watertown conducted by Varsenik Parseghian with Berberian. Berberian notes that he was born in 1905 in Adana, the youngest of eight children. The family consisted of six boys and two girls. He became interested in music starting at the age of four.

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Tigran Tsitoghdzian’s Hyper-realism Comes to Watertown’s Armenian Museum

By Aram Arkun

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WATERTOWN — A crowd of Armenian and non-Armenian guests filled the third floor Armenian Museum of America galleries in Watertown to view the oversized artworks of Tigran Tsitoghdzian during the September 19 opening night of his show “Filtered Identity: The Art of Tigran Tsitoghdzian,” curated by artist and educator Ryann Casey.

Executive Director Jason Sohigian of the Armenian Museum provided a brief introduction to Tsitoghdzian and his photograph-like hyper-realistic art. He said that this prominent artist first came to his attention due to social media posts a few years ago. Based in New York, he also

has a studio in Yerevan. Sohigian said that he is so popular an artist that up to 1,000 people stream in to visit on a single day when he opens up the Yerevan gallery to the public on Saturdays.

Born in Armenia in 1976, Tsitogh-

dzian as a child worked with guidance from art critic Henrikh Igityan, who established what may have been the world’s first children’s art gallery in 1970.

see EXHIBIT, page 14



At the entrance of the exhibition (photo Aram Arkun)

CALIFORNIA

Boxers Visit  
Hovsepien School to  
Celebrate Armenian  
Independence Day

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NEW YORK

Lucine Amara,  
Soprano at the  
MET, 99, Dies

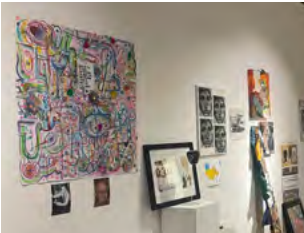
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MASSACHUSETTS

‘The 1915  
Portfolio’  
Exhibition Opens  
At UMass Amherst

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Over AMD 1 Billion Of Illegal Property Confiscated 2024 by Armenia

YEREVAN (Arka) — Five units of immovable and two units of movable property of illegal origin with a total market value of about AMD 1 billion and 123 million were confiscated in favor of the state by three decisions of the Anti-Corruption Court of Armenia in 2024, Srбуhi Galyan, representative of the General Prosecutor’s Office, said on September 20.

“110 lawsuits were filed with the court demanding to confiscate in favour of the Republic of Armenia about 1,205 units of immovable and 230 units of movable property of illegal origin in the amount of AMD 566 billion,” Galyan said at the conference held in Belgrade on September 18-20 under the patronage of the Council of Europe.

Galyan also said that within the framework of confiscation of property of illegal origin the Prosecutor General’s Office concluded 8 reconciliation agreements, according to which 7 units of immovable and one unit of movable property worth about AMD 5 billion were transferred to the ownership of the Republic of Armenia.

Over 751,800 Jobs in Armenia in August

YEREVAN (Arka) — The number of income-generating jobs, according to income tax and social payment reports submitted by corporate taxpayers, amounted to 751,816 in August 2024, reports the State Revenue Committee of Armenia. This is 34,536 jobs or 4.8% more than the same month a year earlier.

Prosecutor Directs Authorities Not to Arrest Lapshin

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — Alexander Lapshin, a well-known blogger of Russian-Jewish origin, was located by Armenian police on September 21, based on a request from the law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Belarus. According to a statement from Armenia’s Prosecutor General’s Office, after reviewing the documents, the prosecutor verbally instructed authorities not to detain Lapshin. He remains at liberty. On the same day, Lapshin reported that border guards at Zvartnots Airport had prevented his entry into Armenia and seized his passport.

Weightlifter Samvel Gasparyan Announces Retirement

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — Armenian weightlifter Samvel Gasparyan has announced his retirement from the sport due to injuries. The two-time European Championship gold-winning athlete said he’s quitting the sport due to knee injuries: “I’ve had three surgeries on my knee, but the pain persists.”

Pashinyan Discusses Peace Treaty With Azerbaijan at World Armenian Summit

YEREVAN (primeminister.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan participated in the panel discussion on “Armenia’s Internal and External Security” within the framework of the World Armenian Summit in Yerevan.

The prime minister answered many questions of the speaker and those present at the discussion, among which referring to the challenges facing Armenia, the strategy of Real Armenia, foreign policy, topics related to EAEU [Eurasian Economic Union] and CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization], development of Armenia-European Union cooperation, energy security of our country. Pashinyan, in response to the questions, also spoke about the signing of the peace treaty with Azerbaijan, as well as the topics related to the unblocking of regional transport channels.

Referring to the signing of the peace treaty, the prime minister noted that also according to the statements made by Azerbaijan, 80 percent of the treaty has been agreed upon. “What are we saying today? We are saying that 80 percent of the peace treaty, including with the statements made by Azerbaijan, has been agreed upon. We say, let’s sign what is agreed and move on to the rest, issues that have not been agreed upon so far. But there is a view that, no, unless everything is agreed or all the articles are agreed, that treaty should not be signed. And I’m sorry, how many articles should it have?

“Look, there is an announcement that no peace treaty will be signed until all the articles are agreed upon. And how many articles should there be in that treaty? I will give an example: there is an article that was not agreed upon, which was proposed by Azerbaijan just months ago. Can they explain this subtlety? Let’s say there is X number of articles, is it all agreed? One of the parties can say: there is one more article, we have to agree also on this. It may turn out later that there is one more article that needs to be agreed upon.

“In other words, nowhere is it written that the peace treaty must have 25 articles and cannot have 17 articles or 15 or 14 or 13. The problem here is political will“, the Prime Minister emphasized. According to Nikol Pashinyan, the fact is that there is no peace treaty in the world, or any agreement that answers all possible questions. “We say: could what is agreed become a framework, have a framework significance for peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, yes it can. We say, let’s sign, let’s go discuss the supposed articles 27, 28, 30, 40, because after signing it, the atmosphere, the environment, everything will change for the benefit of the discussion of those articles,” said Pashinyan, adding that after that, agreeing on other issues will be easier.

Referring to the assertions of the Azerbaijani side that there are territorial claims against Azerbaijan in the Constitution of Armenia, the prime minister noted: “What do they mean? We assume that they mean the reference of the preamble of the Constitution of Armenia to the Declaration of Independence, where there is a reference to the decision of the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Supreme Council of Armenia on the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Is there such a thing in the Declaration of Independence? Yes, there is. Does that mean that this content is expressed in the Constitution? There is no such thing written in the Constitution, and it does not mean that this content is expressed. Why do I think this?

Because there is Article 5 in the Declaration of Independence, which states that the Republic of Armenia creates armed forces, security bodies, etc. under the Supreme Council to ensure its security.

“According to the Declaration of Independence, all law enforcement bodies of Armenia are subject to the Supreme Council. But in 1995, when the Constitution was adopted, all law enforcement bodies were placed under the authority of the President of the Republic. Did the Constitution contradict the Declaration of Independence? Yes, it did. And therefore, the content of the Declaration of Independence, which is expressed literally, has been expressed in the Constitution.”

According to Pashinyan, on the contrary, when we look at the Constitution of Azerbaijan, we see that there are territorial claims against Armenia: “How? Their Constitution refers to the Act of 1991, if I remember correctly, it’s called the Act of State Independence, the Act of State Independence in turn refers to the First Republic of Azerbaijan of 1918-1920, and the Declaration of the First Republic of Azerbaijan. In that declaration, it is written that Azerbaijan is founded on the territory of southern and eastern Transcaucasia. Apart from that, in 1919, Azerbaijan officially presented a map of its territory to the Entente states and the League of Nations, which includes the entire Syunik and Vayots Dzor regions of the Republic of Armenia, part of Ararat region, part of Tavush region, part of Lori region, part of Shirak region. This is an obvious territorial claim against Armenia, but we do not raise this issue, we do not say Azerbaijan must change the Constitution for a peace treaty to be signed.

Why? Because there is an article in the agreed part of the peace treaty that says neither party can refer to its domestic law for failing to fulfill its obligations under this treaty. We consider that this issue is solved by that article.”

Speaking about the other assertion of the Azerbaijani side that no agreement can contradict the Constitution, the prime minister noted that when the agreement is signed, it will be sent to the Constitutional Court to verify its constitutionality: “If the Constitutional Court decides that this treaty contradicts the Constitution, we will say so be it. But if the Constitutional Court de-

cides that it does not contradict the Constitution, it will go to the National Assembly and be ratified. Once ratified, in accordance with Article 5, Clause 3 of the current Constitution of Armenia, international treaties ratified in the Republic of Armenia take precedence over Armenian legislation. In other words, a ratified international treaty is higher than the law of the Republic of Armenia, and if that treaty has been ratified, then it does not contradict the Constitution. And the undertaken obligation, in particular, the obligation that the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan have no territorial claims against each other and undertake not to raise such territorial claims in the future, becomes de jure, essentially, a provision with the highest legal force.”

Pashinyan referred to the Crossroads of Peace project of the Armenian government and the possibilities of unblocking regional transport communication routes. He emphasized that the meaning of the Crossroads of Peace project is about the readiness of the Armenian government to open all possible roads passing through Armenia. “In Syunik, Tavush, Gegharkunik, Shirak, Vayots Dzor, we are ready to provide our roads in all possible places. According to what principles? The roads should operate without bypassing or without damaging, or without subordinating Armenia’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction. In other words, like the roads of all the countries of the world,” stressed the Head of the Government.

Referring to Azerbaijan’s statements that if Armenia does not want, they will implement the projects through the territory of Iran, the prime minister once again officially stated that our country is ready to ensure the transition to Azerbaijan under exactly the same conditions as the Islamic Republic of Iran. “Moreover, we do not rule out certain simplifications of the procedures and perceive it in the logic of bilateralism. Azerbaijan says: well, you don’t want it, we are going through Iran. We don’t mind them going through Iran, of course, it is a matter of Iran-Azerbaijan relations, but we are reassuming again, under the conditions the Islamic Republic of Iran provides that passage, we are also ready to do it under the same conditions. Moreover, in the bilateral logic, we are also ready to make certain simplifications,” the prime minister noted.

Authorities Report Another ‘Coup Plot’

COUP, from page 1

Nor did the law-enforcement identify any of the arrested or fugitive suspects. Other sources told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service that one of the detainees is Serob Gasparyan, the leader of a militant group called Sev Hovaz (Black Panther). Gasparyan has been an outspoken critic of the Armenian government. His lawyer, Gurgen Grigoryan, said he denies the accusations but refused to comment further.

Some political allies of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan rushed to present the accusations as a proven fact. Andranik Kocharyan, the chairman of the Armenian parliament committee on defense and security, claimed that Armenia’s “internal and external enemies continue to seek hand in hand multiple ways to regain power,” including through “terrorism.” He did not name them.

The authorities claimed to have

thwarted two other coup attempts last year. In September 2023, the National Security Service arrested a once prominent politician, Albert Bazeyan, and seven members of an obscure group called Khachakirner (Crusaders) after raiding its offices and confiscated weapons, ammunition as well as electronic jamming devices allegedly kept there.

Bazeyan was moved to house arrest in March and set free last month. He strongly denies the coup charges brought against him. It is still not clear whether he and the other suspects will go on trial.

Five other men were arrested in November. The NSS described them as members of a separate armed group that plotted to seize government buildings and “disrupt the work of state bodies.” Very few details of that criminal case have been made public since then. The suspects went on trial in July.





## INTERNATIONAL

# US Officials Say Sanctions Against Former Georgian Prime Minister Ready to Go

SANCTIONS, from page 1

Ivanishvili, 68, a billionaire who amassed his fortune in Russia during the 1990s, remains a deeply influential figure in Georgia despite having abandoned formal politics in 2013. He resides in a palace overlooking Georgia's capital Tbilisi and rarely appears in public. His extravagant lifestyle, including a shark tank in his palace, a zoo in his hometown and a love for trees, has earned him the nickname "James Bond of Georgia" and captured the attention of international media.

The political party that Ivanishvili founded, Georgian Dream, has held power in the country since 2012, and some observers say he continues to make key political decisions from behind the scenes.

According to Giorgi Gakharia, a former Georgian Dream member who served as Georgia's prime minister from September 2019 until February 2021, when he resigned and went into opposition, Ivanishvili is still involved in all major political and economic decisions.

"Ivanishvili is managing all kind of issues on strategic as well as tactical levels," Gakharia, who now leads the For Georgia party, told VOA. "He's involved directly in [economic and] political issues. Everything going on in the country [at] this moment is around and about Ivanishvili."

Another opposition politician, Giga Bokeria of the Federalist Party, says Ivanishvili has been at the center of the Georgian government's move the country in a pro-Russian, anti-Western direction.

"He the one who steered from the very beginning this campaign of demonizing the West as a threat to Georgia's security and identity, that the West and in particular the U.S. uses Georgians as pawns in their interests, and that, in order to survive, we must accept Russian security dominance in our region," Bokeria told VOA. "And, under that pretext, he has facilitated Russian infiltration into the Georgian economy, security structures and political life and targeted pro-Western institutions and his political opponents."

Bokeria added that while the looming sanctions against Ivanishvili are a justified and necessary step, a more strategic US approach, one that strengthens Georgia as a key Western stronghold in the region, is needed.

"While it's ultimately the responsibility of Georgian society to defeat this regime, the problem with US policy towards Georgia is that it remains reactionary, lacking a clear, proactive strategy. The US should target all Russian allies and enemies of liberty more comprehensively, while combining this approach with a broader vision to

make Georgia a stronghold for projecting Western power in the region."

The US sanctions targeting Ivanishvili fall under Executive Order 14024, on "Blocking Property With Respect To Specified Harmful Foreign Activities of the Government of the Russian Federation," signed by President Joe Biden in 2021.

"Executive Order 14024 has broad authorities to designate individuals who engage in, behaviors that undermine democratic institutions, democratic values, engage in transnational corruption," the senior US official, speaking on background, told VOA. "There is a whole range of activities that, if they are found to be benefiting the Russian Federation, those are sanctioned."

When and if sanctions are imposed on Ivanishvili, his assets within US jurisdiction will be frozen, and American citizens and companies will be prohibited from doing business with him. The sanctions would also cut Ivanishvili off from the global financial system, given that many international institutions follow US regulations in order to avoid secondary sanctions. In addition to asset freezes, visa restrictions could be implemented, limiting Ivanishvili's access to global banking services and ability to travel outside of Georgia.

"When the United States spoke of potential sanctions, Ivanishvili always believed that they were bluffing," Tina Bokuchava, leader of the opposition United National Movement party, told VOA. "Now he understands that undermining Georgian democracy, and depriving Georgia [of] Euro-Atlantic prospects, implies real consequences from the United States."

The sanctions targeting Ivanishvili follow visa restrictions and asset freezes that the U.S. imposed in recent months on individuals in Georgia accused of undermining democratic processes there.

"I think the Biden administration has been frustrated by its inability to get the Georgian government to take seriously the position they've put themselves in," a source familiar with the discussions within the US government told VOA on condition of anonymity. "The Biden people are trying to convey the seriousness and hope that somebody in the Georgian government is listening in a serious way."

The prime minister's office declined VOA's request to comment about the report that the U.S. has sanctions package ready for Ivanishvili.

The US and EU have grown increasingly alarmed by Georgia's undemocratic steps, its reluctance to adopt a clear pro-Western stance over Russia's war in Ukraine, and inflammatory rhetoric from Tbilisi accus-

ing Washington of trying to drag Georgia into the conflict. Georgia has officially refused joining international sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine and faced criticism for publicly attacking Ukrainian leaders. Washington has also raised concerns that Georgia may be helping Russia evade sanctions.

Another major point of contention is the controversial "law on transparency of foreign influence," which requires Georgian NGOs and media outlets receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as foreign agents. While the ruling Georgian Dream party defends the law as upholding transparency, critics charge it is modeled on Russian legislation and aimed at suppressing independent media and Western-funded organizations.

Mass protests erupted in Tbilisi earlier this year when the government reintroduced the law, after initially withdrawing it in 2023 following a public outcry. Despite the protests, the Georgian Dream party pushed the law through, overriding a veto by President Salome Zourabichvili, who has emerged as a vocal critic of the government.

Critics say the law is part of a broader effort by Ivanishvili and his allies to consolidate power ahead of Georgia's parliamentary elections, scheduled for October.

"The law was adopted because it allows the Ivanishvili to use an instrument well-tested in Russia and other authoritarian regimes for the purpose of demonizing and destroying free media and NGOs - the biggest threats for him [Ivanishvili] maintaining power," Sergi Kapanadze, director of Georgia's Reforms Associates, a Tbilisi-based think-tank, told VOA.

The package of sanctions targeting Ivanishvili follows the US Treasury Department's recent sanctions on four individuals in Georgia under the Global Magnitsky Act, which authorizes the U.S. government to sanction foreign government officials who violate human rights. The four sanctioned Georgians included two high-ranking officials from the Georgian Interior Ministry and two private citizens involved in suppressing peaceful demonstrations and restricting the freedom of assembly.

The US has also placed visa bans on 90 individuals in Georgia accused of undermining democracy in the country.

While the exact timing of the sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili remains uncertain, a source close to the Biden administration told VOA on condition of anonymity that, in preparing those sanctions, "the administration internally has had to meet a legal threshold of documenting" that his activities have "clear benefits to Russia."

## INTERNATIONAL

## Armenian Men's Chess Team Named 'Team of The Century' by FIDE

BUDAPEST (FIDE) — FIDE has named the Armenian men's chess team as Team of the Century. The award was presented September 19, the night of Round 8 at the FIDE Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

The chess gala, dedicated to the centenary of the International Chess Federation, celebrated the exceptional achievements and contributions of individuals, groups, and organizations within the chess community. While Team USSR would be the unbeaten leader in both Men and Women categories based on the number of Olympiad medals, the jury decided to choose a currently existing country. Armenia has outperformed others, winning three times, and China has won two gold medals in the last ten years.

The same night, Smbat Lputian was among the recipients of the eight Presidential Awards. Lputian is an Armenian chess grandmaster and educational chess facilitator. Under his leadership, chess was introduced in Armenian schools, and he led the FIDE Educational Commission for many years, promoting educational chess worldwide.

Both awards were received by Armen Gevorgyan, the Executive Director of the Armenian Chess Federation.

## New French Cabinet Includes Three Ministers of Armenian Origin

PARIS — Newly appointed French Prime Minister Michel Barnier announced the composition of the country's new government on Saturday evening, September 21. According to the French media, three ministers of Armenian origin are included in the government. All are members of President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance Party.

Astrid Panosian-Bouvet was appointed Minister of Labor and Employment, Guillaume Kasparian as Minister of Civil Service, Streamlining and Transformation of State Activity and Antoine Armand as Minister of Economy, Finance, and Industry.

## EEC Ends Bypass Routes for Dumped Import of Azerbaijani Aluminum Tape

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) has adopted measures banning the import of aluminum tape from Azerbaijan bypassing anti-dumping duties, the press service of the EEC reports. In September 2020, the commission (the executive body of the Eurasian Economic Union) established anti-dumping duties for a period of 5 years on aluminum tape from Azerbaijan and China – slightly more than 16% for Azerbaijan, slightly more than 13% for China.

# UK Foreign Secretary Lambasted for Calling Azerbaijan's Occupation of Karabakh Liberation

LONDON — United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Lammy has been lambasted in the British media and elsewhere after making a remark in his first post on his new blog titled "Progressive Realism" on the website Substack that "Azerbaijan has been able to liberate territory it lost in the early 1990s" – namely Nagorno Karabakh.

The *Financial Times* quoted Conservative MP Alicia Kearns, former chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, from X that Lammy appeared to be "contradicting long-standing UK policy" in a way that was "totally inappropriate

and throws into question the foreign secretary's judgment." Associate Fellow at the London-based thinktank Chatham House Laurence Broers weighed in too, calling them on X "poorly informed remarks" and proclaiming, "It's a real gaffe by the foreign secretary."

Meanwhile, in the United States, Congressman Brad Sherman, again on X, called Lammy's remarks "a stain on UK foreign policy" and an endorsement of ethnic cleansing.

The UK Foreign Office in turn clarified on Friday, September 20 that Lammy's

comment did not mark a change in the UK government's stance on Nagorno-Karabakh, though the Armenian government formally is seeking further clarification from the United Kingdom, according to an Armenian official cited in the *Financial Times*.

Azerbaijan's Ambassador to the UK Elin Suleymanov, not unexpectedly, approved of Lammy's statement, declaring: "I don't understand why there's so much response to this blog by the foreign secretary, because what [Lammy] said is absolutely true."



# Community News

## First-Ever Delegation Of Armenian-American Young Leaders from Los Angeles to Visit Japan

By Diran Avagyan

BURBANK, Calif. — Under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, a delegation of Armenian-American young leaders will visit Japan as part of the Kakehashi Project, coordinated by the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE).

The Kakehashi Project – meaning “bridge” in Japanese – aims to connect nations, cultures, and communities through peer-to-peer exchange, promoting mutual trust and understanding. It also deepens participants’ knowledge of Japan’s economy, society, history, diverse culture, politics, and diplomatic relations through networking and collaboration.

This trip was made possible through the cooperation of the Japanese Consulate General of Los Angeles and the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, both of which boast a long-standing, deep bilateral relationship. These two organizations have been instrumental in bridging the Armenian and Japanese communities of Los Angeles through a series of joint cultural and educational events.

There is no doubt that through the Kakehashi Project, the friendship and



Members of the group with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian

collaboration between the Armenian and Japanese people will be elevated to new heights-whether on an individual, community, organizational, or national levels.

Elated by the prospect of the Kakehashi Project and with a sense of deep gratitude, the delegation members held their inaugural in-person meeting on September 9 at the Western Diocese.

This was not only an orientation meeting but also a unique team-building opportunity for the delegation. After icebreaker activities and introductions, participants indulged in traditional Japanese milk buns and other delicacies, while an informative presentation packed with important trip details was shared. The objectives and expected outcomes were discussed in detail, followed by the distribution of roles and responsibilities. Understanding that effective communication is one of the project’s key tools, the delegates also deliberated on marketing and promotional strategies for multimedia platforms.

The Armenian-American young leaders look forward to sharing memorable moments from their trip through reflections, blog posts, photos, and videos via a dedicated Facebook group.



The two speakers at left, with some interested audience members (photo Aram Arkun)

## Shahbazian and Glorikian Address Developments in Artificial Intelligence At Tekeyan Boston Event

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — News about AI (Artificial Intelligence) is nearly ubiquitous in the media due to recent advances and their practical applications in various fields. As AI rapidly becomes incorporated into many aspects of our lives, in what some deem to be a new and more expansive version of the Industrial Revolution, people can’t help but wonder what transformations lie ahead. The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter sponsored a presentation on September 12 at the Baikar Building in Watertown by two specialists in different fields, Prof. Joseph Shahbazian and Harry Glorikian, to discuss these issues and touch upon related developments in Armenia.

Dr. Shahbazian is a physicist, medical engineer, author, inventor, and philanthropist, who has taught at Northeastern University, Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Bunker Hill Community College. The Shahbazian Charitable Foundation was founded in 2014 by the efforts of Shahbazian and Dr. Bella Margarian in memory of his beloved brother, Janson Shahbazian. The couple supported hundreds of pupils and students from the remote villages of Armenia since 2014 with computers, scholarships, and stationery. Furthermore, they have been supporting the students of schools in different regions of Armenia, such as Tavush, Martuni, and Ijevan, since the 1990s when they were still university students.

Healthcare entrepreneur and global business expert Glorikian, based in the Boston area like Shahbazian, is the author of *The Future You: How Artificial Intelligence Can Help You Get Healthier, Stress Less, and Live Longer* (Dering Harbor, New York: Brick Tower Press, 2021). The book was on the top ten list of Amazon.com best-sellers. Today, Glorikian is a general partner at Scientia Ventures, a venture capital firm focusing on promising tech companies using AI and big data to make diagnostic devices and new therapies, and serves on the boards of various companies.

### Shahbazian’s Presentation

Shahbazian provided a general introduction, accompanied by slides, to the development of AI, starting with the coinage of the term at a conference at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire in 1956. He observed that there are some problematic effects of its spread evident already, such as job displacement. In just the last seven months, more than 12,000 people were laid off in the gaming industry, which is a booming field. Everything from entry level cashiers to English teachers are being affected. He also gave the example of how AI works dispassionately, imposing unbendable rules, unlike humans.

Yet there are many advantages. AI allows repetitive processes to be conducted with few errors, such as through robots. It can be used to conduct many tasks as a virtual personal assistant or provide customer service and even transportation.

Shahbazian gave several examples of how AI can be used by ordinary people today, such as rapidly preparing a PowerPoint presentation through gamma.com. He showed some examples of applications of AI developed in Armenia, including by Picsart to create images, or Krisp AI, which is used for online meetings to cancel noise and create transcripts.

### Glorikian

Glorikian also accompanied his talk with images. He pointed out how people already are using core old AI without perhaps being aware of it, for everything from Google searches to Netflix use AI in the background to make life easier. Two years ago, the introduction of ChatGPT with its chat-oriented interface significantly enhanced the accessibility and interactivity of AI.

In healthcare, Glorikian said that AI now is being used for many different applications, from robot assisted surgery to virtual nursing. Anything that is

*continued on next page*

## Diocese Holds Symposium Of Armenian Language Teachers

NEW YORK — The Eastern Diocese’s Armenian Language Ministry held its annual Teachers’ Symposium on Saturday, September 7, at the Diocesan Center in New York. Dn. Hovhannes Khosdeghian organized the gathering of some 40 Armenian School teachers and principals from nine Diocesan parishes — hailing from New York and New Jersey as well as North Carolina, Georgia, and New England — who met to discuss the state of our schools, their needs, and ways to make Armenian programs more effective and meaningful.

Cathedral Vicar Fr. Davit Karamyan and Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan, pastor of Holy Martyrs Church in Bayside, NY, joined the educators, as did Hovik Mamikonyan, from Armenia’s Permanent Mission of to the United Nations.

Interim Director of Ministries Fr. Hratch Sargsyan welcomed participants and conveyed the blessing Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, and the Primate’s fond wishes for a fruitful conference.

“It is a pleasure to welcome you in the Diocesan Center,” continued Fr. Hratch, “and I thank you all for taking the time to take part in person to this important gathering. Christian religion and the culture of our Armenian language are the two wings which makes our ministry of transmitting these two genuine components of our identity possible to rise and meet all challenges. Our history witnessed time and again the reality of demise every time one or the other of these bastions fell apart.”

He expressed his appreciation to all educators engaged in the daily and most often unrecognized work of keeping alive the flame of our identity. “Through your work, you keep alive the timeless work of Saints Mesrob and Catholicos Sahak and our Translators, giving the Word of God to the next generation,” he concluded.

### Speakers and Discussions

The main speakers in the morning were Christopher Zakian, Communications Director of the Diocese, and Aram Arkun, Managing Editor of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and Executive Director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

Zakian presented a thought stirring analysis and reading of the story of the lives of St. Voski and companions, a fitting monument to the power of dreams and aspirations of a society crystallizing its identity, the knowledge of itself.

Arkun’s talk concentrated on the material and real evolution of the gain and loss and regain of the language as the palpable tool of expressing this identity in the history of his family: the microcosm of many Armenian families.

see TEACHERS, page 7



COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

image-based can be studied through these AI systems. AI-driven predictive analytics in healthcare have demonstrated significant improvements in diagnostic accuracy, operational efficiency, and patient care by analyzing complex patterns in vast data sets. AI can point out new molecules and pathways for therapeutics much faster than ever before, though they then will still have to be tested in real life.

A study found ChatGPT to exhibit greater empathy towards patients than human physicians, so Glorikian revealed that now



some medical schools tell their residents to check with ChatGPT before they reveal terrible news in order to find better ways of couching it.

Images, videos and music now can be created by AI programs. The advances in AI “are moving at a speed that human beings cannot comprehend,” Glorikian emphasized. “We are at a fascinating time. I beg you to play with this, fool around with it, and get to know it. If you are not playing with it, you are going to wake up one day and ask, what happened.” He later shared



The two speakers with Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston members

advice he gave his children: “learn how to learn,” emphasizing the need to adapt quickly in our fast-moving world. You can no longer learn one thing and expect to do it for the rest of your life.

Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada Executive Director Aram Arkun introduced the two speakers and served as the moderator of the evening event. A wide-ranging set of questions from the audience were answered by the speakers for over 20 minutes after they concluded their formal presentations, including about the use of the Armenian language, turning poems to music, legislation and ethics concerning AI, medical responsibility when AI is used, whether AI and IT are

good career choices for the future, whether the future lies more in specialized uses of AI or more general large language models (LLM), usage in war, the race between US vs. China in AI innovation, and the dangers of AI used for manipulation or scams.

The audience learned that Armenia is actively embracing AI technologies across various sectors, demonstrating a significant commitment to integrating these advancements into its national capabilities. The establishment of the Armenian National Supercomputing Center is a key part of this initiative. The center is equipped with state-of-the-art computational resources and aims to support a wide range of scientific and technological research, fostering

innovation and development in AI and other high-tech fields. The supercomputer at the center, named after the iconic Charles Aznavour, enhances Armenia’s capabilities in big data, AI, and computational science, positioning the country as a leader in the region for technological advancement.

The center was supported by a consortium including the Armenian government, the World Bank, and several academic and private sector partners, reflecting a strong collaborative approach to boost Armenia’s high-tech sector. This strategic move not only strengthens Armenia’s technological infrastructure but also provides vital resources for researchers and innovators within the country and beyond.



# Tekeyan Cultural Association

# Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

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



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

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Boxers Visit Hovsepien School to Celebrate Armenian Independence Day

PASADENA, Calif. — As part of the St. Gregory A & M Hovsepien School of Pasadena's celebration of Armenian Independence Day, its students were visited by four prominent Armenian boxers on September 19.

Super featherweight boxer Narek Abgaryan, bantamweight boxer Arsen Poghosyan, welterweight boxer Gor Yeritsyan and heavyweight boxer Gurgun Hovhannisyan met with the students, signed autographs and answered questions. Each of the boxers encouraged the students to exercise and participate in sports. The students enjoyed taking photographs with the boxers in front of the newly consecrated *khachkar* at the main entrance of the school.

The students wished Poghosyan

good luck in his upcoming fight on Saturday, September 28 at the Pacific Palms Resort in the City of Industry, CA, which is being promoted by Vartan Torosyan of Toro Promotions. The students also cheered on Yeritsyan and wished him well in his upcoming fight on October 26 at Commerce Casino. Yeritsyan is trained by the legendary



From left, Gurgun Hovhannisyan, Arsen Poghosyan, Gor Yeritsyan and Narek Abgaryan at St. Gregory Armenian Church

manager, Freddie Roach. Narek Abgaryan and Gurgun Hovhannisyan are currently preparing for their upcoming matches which will be held later this year.

The program concluded with the four boxers entering St. Gregory Armenian Church adjacent to the school for a moment of prayer.



Boxers with students



From left, heavyweight boxer Gurgun Hovhannisyan, welterweight boxer Gor Yeritsyan, super featherweight boxer Narek Abgaryan and bantamweight boxer Arsen Poghosyan



The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada  
And *Abaka* Newspaper of Montreal



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Diocese Holds Symposium of Armenian Language Teachers

TEACHERS, from page 4

After lunch, representing the generation that grew from our schools, Arthur Ipek presented a lecture touching upon reminiscences of personal school experience which shaped his attachment to the Armenian language and its cultivation in writing prose and poetry, as well as other published young authors.

presented his survey in understanding the influence religious and cultural identity has on economic investment in Armenia.

The need for developing a common core curriculum, supporting textbooks and adequate teaching materials was discussed at length. Evensong and Requiem Service for Teachers who passed away this year was



Dn. Hovhannes Khosdeghian makes a point

Luca Johnson, a USC business and finance graduate who interned at the Armenian Language Ministry this summer,

held at the conclusion of the day, and the discussion continued around a fellowship dinner.

Central California Vicar Fr. Anania Vartabed Tsaturyan Visits Ararat and Masis Cemeteries

FRESNO – The newly appointed Vicar, Very Rev. Fr. Anania Vartabed Tsaturyan, of the Central Valley, visited the Ararat and Masis Armenian Cemeteries on Wednesday, September 11, with the desire to recite the requiem *Hokvots* prayer on the graves of deceased priests and notable Armenians interred there. Fr. Anania requested to visit the Armenian cemeteries of Fresno, knowing that Deacon Allan Yeghia Jendian, Diocesan Archivist of Priests Data, has documented where priests have been interred.

Fr. Anania was recently named Vicar of the Central Valley by Abp. Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the

Armenian Church of America. A member of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin, Fr. Anania was born in 1984 in Ashtarak, Aragadzotn Province, in the Republic of Armenia. He is a graduate of the Gevorgyan Seminary and was ordained a celibate priest in 2009 by Bishop Vrtanes Abrahamyan. Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II called Hayr Anania to serve as his Staff Bearer and Director of the Department of Protocol Service, a position he held for eleven years.

Parishes within California’s Central Valley are St. Paul, Fresno; St. Gregory, Fowler; St. Mary, Yetttem; Sts. Sahag-Mesrob, Reedley; and Holy Cross, Turlock.



Very Rev. Fr. Anania Tsaturyan and Deacon Allan Yeghia Jendian at the Soghomon Tehlirian Monument in Masis Ararat Cemetery of Fresno

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)

1. Publication Title: The Armenian Mirror-Spectator

2. Publication Number: 3 2 3 - 3 0 0

3. Filing Date: 09/23/2024

4. Issue Frequency: weekly except for 3 weeks

5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 49

6. Annual Subscription Price: \$80.00

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4®): 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472-1509

Contact Person: Aram Arkun  
Telephone (Include area code): (617) 924-4420

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer): 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472-1509

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank)

Publisher (Name and complete mailing address): Baikar Association, Inc., 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472-1509

Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Alin K. Gregorian, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472-1509

Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Aram Arkun, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472-1509

10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)

Full Name: Baikar Association, Inc.  
Complete Mailing Address: 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472-1509

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box ☒ None

Full Name: Complete Mailing Address:

12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one)  
☒ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months  
☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

PS Form 3526, July 2014 [Page 1 of 4 (see instructions page 4)] PSN: 7530-01-000-9931 PRIVACY NOTICE: See our privacy policy on www.usps.com.

13. Publication Title: The Armenian Mirror-Spectator

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: 09/21/2024

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation

		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)			
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	795	795
	(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
	(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®	2	2
	(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	23	23
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))		820	820
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	100	100
	(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies included on PS Form 3541		
	(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	18	18
	(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	2	4
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))		120	122
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		940	942
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))		110	110
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)		1050	1052
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)		87.23	87.05

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	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies	4	4
b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	824	824
c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	944	946
d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16a divided by 16c x 100)	87.29	87.10

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17. Publication of Statement of Ownership

☒ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the 9/23/24 issue of this publication. ☐ Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: [Signature] Manager Date: 9/23/2024

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## OBITUARY

## Richard A. Vann

### Teacher, Humanitarian

METHUEN, Mass. — Richard Alan Vann, beloved father, husband, brother, and grandfather passed away peacefully on September 7, after a nearly decade-long battle with Alzheimer's disease. Though his personality was transformed by his illness, Richard's sweet character and gentle demeanor persisted until the very end. This enabled his wife, Araxie, to care for him in their home in Methuen, MA until the last days of his life. Richard was born in the Naval Hospital in San Diego, California on September 16, 1952, to Isaiah McPhail Vann Jr., a commander and radar missile guidance expert for the US Navy, and Margaret (Peggy) O'Reilly, a social worker. He spent the earliest years of his life traversing the country's Naval bases—from Vallejo, California to Bethesda, Maryland — thanks to his father's sought-after expertise. This early uprooting is perhaps where the seeds for Richard's lifelong passion for travel were sown. In 1962, the family, which now included his younger brother James, settled in Wayland, Massachusetts. Richard attended Wayland High School, where he excelled academically and discovered his love for the stage and extraordinary talent for picking up languages. So advanced was his French, that he took part in a student exchange program in Caen, France. One local acquaintance from this time jokingly recalls of his language skills that "his French was better than mine... and I am French!" After high school, Richard attended Colby College in Waterville, Maine where he majored in French language and education. After college, he received a master's degree in teaching English as a second language (ESL) at St. Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont (not far from where his elder daughter currently resides). During his time in Vermont, Richard met Araxie Kazandjian at a Russian language summer program hosted by Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont. Araxie was a young woman who had immigrated from Soviet Armenia just four years prior, and who was herself completing a Master's in Russian Language and Literature. Araxie was instantly drawn to Richard's magnetic and charismatic personality. She was particularly impressed by his intense curiosity about other cultures and eagerness to learn from those who were different from him. One of many ways he won her heart was by enrolling in Armenian language classes in Watertown, MA to better

understand her and communicate with her family. Such was the kind of person he was — someone who happily applied their natural talents to make others feel welcome. The next few years saw Richard take on many interesting roles teaching foreign students ESL at various academic institutions, including George Washington University, American University, and Catholic University in Washington. He was loved by his students wherever he went. The Director of Admissions at George Washington University once commended his abilities in a recommendation letter: "One of Richard's outstanding traits as a teacher was his ability to take the well-ordered methodical lesson and bring it to life. ... Richard's attitude towards work is to do a good job and at the same time to enjoy it. He does not accept boredom easily. He has the ability to make even a tedious job more interesting." Araxie and Richard were married in 1982 and soon his career brought him to the Washington DC metro area. Araxie was working for the Voice of America, an International Shortwave Radio Broadcasting Federal agency, providing news in 44 languages. In 1989 Richard traded his teaching in academia for more cutting-edge work in corporate consulting at Booz Allen & Hamilton. These were happy and productive years, in the suburbs of Annandale, Virginia where both their daughters were born. Richard and Araxie gave birth to their first daughter, Anahid (Anna) Catherine Vann, in 1987. Less than two years later, their second daughter, Karine Christina Vann, was born. As two working parents with young children so close in age, the balance between work and family life grew challenging. In 1992 his company offered him the opportunity to make a move to Saudi Arabia to live and work there, Richard and Araxie surprised their friends and family by taking the leap. In Saudi Arabia, Richard continued his skills as a teacher and linguist providing English language instruction to Royal Saudi Naval personnel. The family looks back on this time as an idyllic and adventurous chapter of their lives, which included travels that spanned the entire globe. Richard's great joy in life was learning about other countries and cultures, and in 1996 he once wrote to his family and friends in a Christmas letter about his experiences. "If we didn't miss our friends and relatives, I would be perfectly happy to celebrate Christmas here in the Kingdom [of Sau-



di Arabia]. ...People have lovely parties here, and we certainly don't have to stand in line at the stores for Christmas gifts." In 1998 the family returned to the United States, eventually settling in Fairfax, Virginia, where they resided until Richard retired from Booz Allen in 2012 (following 23 years of service). In retirement, Richard continued to teach and explore community theater. In 2019, he received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, at which point Araxie and Richard bought a home in Massachusetts' Merrimack Valley to be closer to family. Though his language skills were fading quickly, his daughter Karine has precious memories of Richard reading children's books to his first grandson, Tigran, at their home in Arlington, Mass. Richard and Araxie were also pleased to be able to return to their memories in

Vermont while visiting their elder daughter Anna, who was continuing Richard's teaching legacy in developing technical training for Dell Technologies remotely. Richard was an enthusiastic and lifelong advocate for Armenian culture and history. He was an active member in St. Mary's Armenian Church in Washington, DC and later, Hye Pointe Armenian Church in Haverhill. He was also involved with the century-old fraternal organization Knights of Vartan, and due to his deep interest and investment in Armenian affairs, was the first non-Armenian member to be initiated. He leaves behind his loving wife; his daughter Anna; his daughter Karine, her husband Vahe Markosian and their two sons, Tigran and Levon; and his brother James. Richard was a true humanitarian in the sense that he revered those parts of life that showcase what it means to be human: art, music, theater, language, history. As a linguist and bibliophile, Richard always ensured there were interesting and unusual books from all over the world at his daughters' bedside tables, which he often read aloud to them at bedtime in their youth, opening their world view from a young age. He brought color and life into every community he was a part of, no matter what language they spoke, their background, or where they came from. Though Alzheimer's robbed him of his later years, he lived a full and fulfilling life and will be remembered for his welcoming spirit and natural stage presence. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Richard's memory to the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe in Haverhill, MA. His funeral service was held there on September 14 after which a graveside service took place at Lakeview Cemetery, Wayland, MA.

## Seth Bilazarian

### Genocide Survivor Descendant, Active in Diocese

BOYLSTON, Mass. — Seth Bilazarian passed away peacefully on September 18, 2024. Seth was born in Worcester, MA on March 5, 1929, to the late Aghavny (Baronian) and Haroutune Bilazarian, immigrant farmers who survived the Armenian Genocide. Seth graduated from Commerce High School, Worcester, where he played football, and attended Worcester Junior College. Seth enlisted in the Army and was assigned to Fort Bragg, NC during the Korean Conflict. A staff sergeant for the Army Signal Corp, Seth tested communications equipment from 1949-1953.

Following the Army, Seth began his career at Boylston Electric and then National Grid. Seth treasured his 40 years as a lineman, in the emergency room deployed in severe weather, and as overhead supervisor, passionate about power transmission, distribution lines and sub stations. For Seth, delivering and restoring power to communities was a meaningful opportunity of a lifetime.

Returning from the Army, Seth encountered the lovely and dynamic Tina (Gulbankian) of Southborough, MA at a church dance and they married in 1959. They built 65 years together with a spirit of love and generosity. Seth was active in the Armenian Church of Our Saviour, Worcester, in Sunday School, Youth Group leadership,

Nominating Committee, Parish Council and as Diocesan Delegate. Golf ranked among his favorite pastimes and Seth loved his years at Worcester Country Club. Seth also loved investing, which he learned from his uncle Sarkis, and he encouraged others to invest steadily, for fun and for their future.

Decency, quiet faithfulness and the simple things mattered most to Seth. That's



what made him so easy to love, because he cherished every tiny moment in life. Mowing the lawn, water fights, apples and ice cream, drawing a cartoon, humming songs, and picking fruit with the kids.

Seth leaves behind his devoted wife Tina, son Dr. Seth Bilazarian and his wife Melanie, their children Talene and husband Gary, Ara, Ani, Nishan and Emma; and daughter Laura Purutyan, her husband Herman, and their children Lorig and Jivan. Seth is predeceased by his brother Haroutune and brother-in-law Robert Haddon, and leaves behind his sister Ruth Haddon, sister Gladys and husband Nick Zeytoonian, brother-in-law Tony Gulbankian, and many devoted nieces and nephews.

Services were held on September 23, at the Armenian Church of Our Saviour in Worcester, MA, and burial followed in Pine Grove Cemetery. Donations in lieu of flowers can be made to the St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, <https://stnersess.edu/>, and the Armenian Church of Our Saviour, <https://acoos.org/giving/>.

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## OBITUARY

# Lucine Amara, 99, Dies; Familiar Soprano at the Met Saw Bias There

By Margalit Fox

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Lucine Amara, an American singer who continued a decades-long career at the Metropolitan Opera after she successfully brought the company up on age-discrimination charges in a widely publicized case, died on September 6 at her home in Queens. She was 99.

Her daughter, Evelyn La Quaif, a soprano and stage director, who had shared an apartment with her mother in recent weeks, said that the cause was respiratory illness and heart failure and that Ms. Amara also had dementia. She had lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan for decades.

A lyric soprano known for her clear, supple voice, Amara sang 748 performances with the Met between 1950 and 1991, an impressively long tenure.

Her dozens of roles there included Mimi in Puccini's "La Bohème," Nedda in Leoncavallo's "I Pagliacci," the title part in Richard Strauss's "Ariadne auf Naxos," and Donna Elvira in Mozart's "Don Giovanni" and Pamina in his "Magic Flute."

Appearing in a 1964 Met production of Gounod's "Faust," Amara was described by Theodore Strongin in *The New York Times* as "a first-rank Marguerite in all respects."

If Amara was not as well known to the general public as other singers in her cohort



But in many respects, those assets also turned out to be her professional undoing.

Lucine Tockqui Armaganian was born on March 1, 1925, in Hartford, Conn., to Kevork and Adrine (Kazanjan) Armaganian. Her parents had emigrated to the United States from Ottoman Armenia after surviving the Armenian genocide of 1915. The family later moved from Hartford to San Francisco, where Lucine's father ran a shoe-repair shop.

Lucine began violin lessons at 10 and played seriously for years. Though she also sang in her church choir, she never contemplated a career in vocal music.

"The funny part is, I never wanted to sing, and I never thought I had a voice," Amara told the *Washington Post* in 1965. "I wanted to teach violin."

But when she was a teenager, a friend, hearing her sing, urged her to take voice lessons. At 18, she began instruction with Stella Eisner-Eyn, a Viennese soprano, supporting herself by working as a typist for the Southern Pacific railroad and the Navy.

After little more than a year of instruction, the young Amara joined the chorus of the San Francisco Opera — as a contralto. (Her voice would rise of its own accord over time, and she would credit the sight-reading skill and keen sense of pitch for which she was known as a singer to her years with the violin.)

In 1948, she won the Atwater Kent competition, a national music contest on the radio. She embarked on a career singing principal roles that would lead her to the Met.

Amara's Met debut, on November 6, 1950, held two portents for her future there. The performance, Verdi's "Don Carlo," was the Met's first under its new, imperious steward, Rudolf Bing. Bing, the company's general manager from 1950 to 1972, would both help and hinder her career.

Perhaps even more prophetically, Amara's role that night, the Celestial Voice, was an offstage part. With hindsight, that role — heard but not seen — seemed to augur the marginalization that she said she later experienced at the company's hands.

Her other Met roles of the 1950s and '60s included Micaela in Bizet's "Carmen," Tatiana in Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," Euridice in Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice" and Ellen Orford in Benjamin Britten's "Peter Grimes." She also appeared in some of the country's foremost recital halls.

"Her artistry was impeccable, her musicianship wise and her voice crystalline and variegated in color," Strongin wrote in the *Times* in 1969, reviewing a recital by Amara at Carnegie Hall.

Besides singing her scheduled roles at the Met, Amara became the company's cover artist of choice — on more or less perpetual standby to fill in for indisposed sopranos, often at a moment's notice.

"She became the house's leading specialist in the last-minute rescue," the music critic Richard Dyer wrote in the *Boston Globe* in 1979. "Fifty-four times Amara's name was announced from the stage as replacement for another artist."

Once, in 1975, Martina Arroyo, singing Leonora, was seized by a coughing fit in the middle of Verdi's "La Forza del Destino." Amara, relaxing backstage, was hustled into a costume and propelled on in her place. She had no time to change out of the anachronistic, patent-leather boots she had on.

So esteemed was Amara as a pinch-hitter that it seemed not to have occurred to the Met that a pinch-hitter might sometimes require a pinch-hitter herself. As a result, she once took the stage to sing an 11th-hour Antonia in Offenbach's "Tales of Hoffmann" with a fever of 102.

During Bing's reign, Amara's prowess as a replacement became something of a golden straitjacket.

"I always had to live in Manhattan," she told the northern New Jersey newspaper *The Record* in 2015, "because I had to be no further than 10 minutes from the opera house."

Her movements were restricted in far more serious ways.

"Mr. Bing didn't like the idea of her accepting contracts elsewhere, particularly going off to Europe, because he knew that the more she was heard in other places, the more in demand she would be," Burroughs said in 2017. "She was too valuable."

Amara did manage to sing at the Vienna State Opera, the Glyndebourne Festival in England and on other foreign stages. But the Met almost invariably summoned her home and kept her there, once keeping her from an engagement at La Scala, the Milan house considered the Olympus of operatic careers.

"When I was in Vienna, I received a telegram from La Scala to come do Aida," Amara told *Opera News* in 2005. "But Mr. Bing wouldn't release me. I almost said, 'Well, I'll go anyway,' and he said, 'If you go, don't bother coming back.'"

Yet as much as the Met seemed to need Amara, her vaunted status as a replacement began to wane once Bing's tenure ended. In late 1976, she filed an age-discrimination complaint against the company with the New York State Division of Human Rights.

In it, she charged that although the Met was paying her some \$50,000 a year to remain on call as a substitute (about \$277,000 in today's currency), it was increasingly bringing in other sopranos — often with more blazing marquee names — when last-minute replacements were needed.

The Met's actions, as she later told the

*Times*, left her feeling "like a football player on the bench."

At the time of her complaint, Amara was 51, an age at which opera singers can be considered past their vocal prime. She argued, however, that she was still in good voice.

"If the Met had ever said that I was artistically inadequate I would have bowed out," she told the *Globe*. "They told me I was 'too familiar' to the public — as if people didn't spend thousands of dollars on publicity in order to become familiar to the public."

In 1978, the Human Rights division upheld Amara's complaint, ordering the Met to conciliate the dispute.

While some music writers, among them Donal Henahan of the *Times*, criticized the Met for letting a singer dictate its casting



Ms. Amara as Nedda in Leoncavallo's "I Pagliacci" at the Metropolitan Opera in 1964 (photo Louis Melançon/Metropolitan Opera Archives)

decisions, others applauded Amara for her tenacity.

The company eventually offered her a four-year contract, starting with the 1980-81 season, that included the title roles in Puccini's "Turandot" and Ponchielli's "La Gioconda" and the leading role of Amelia in Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera."

Alas for Amara, that season was significantly shortened by a labor dispute at the Met. Retaking its stage in February 1981 after an absence of nearly four years, she sang just a single "Ballo," her only performance there that year.

Over the next decade, Amara made 16 more appearances with the Met. Her last performance there, on January 7, 1991, was as Madelon in Giordano's "Andrea Chénier."

In later years, she gave master classes and served as the artistic director of the New Jersey Association of Verismo Opera.

Amara's marriage, to Gil Rudy, an advertising and public relations executive, ended in divorce. La Quaif is her only immediate survivor. Until she moved to Queens in August, Amara had lived on the Upper West Side since the late 1950s.

Among her recordings is an esteemed "Bohème" (she sings Musetta), with Ms. de los Angeles, Jussi Björling, Giorgio Tozzi and Robert Merrill, conducted by Thomas Beecham.

In 2007 at the age of 81, Amara sang the role of the retired diva Heidi Schiller in a concert performance of the Stephen Sondheim musical "Follies" at City Center in Manhattan.

"Never look back," she sang, as Heidi. "One more kiss and goodbye."



Rudolf Bing, manager of the Met, with Ms. Amara in 1955 after she had performed in a production of "Tales of Hoffmann." He both helped and hindered her career (photo Bettmann Archive, via Getty Images)

— among them Roberta Peters and Victoria de los Angeles — it was partly, her admirers say, because she was damned by her own competence and by her matter-of-fact approach to her craft.

"She did not have a blazing temperament," Bruce Burroughs, a writer on opera and a longtime friend of Amara's, said in an interview for this obituary in 2017. "She made singing seem a little too easy: There was no evidence of struggle. We always knew that she was going to hit the high note, and it would be in the center of the pitch."

That reliability, together with her immense command of the operatic repertory and fine diction in a range of European languages, had carried Amara from an early career as a typist to entirely unplanned success as an opera singer.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian Stone Cross Installed at Pasadena School, Symbolizing Faith and Heritage

By Therese Edu

PASADENA (PasadenaNow.com) — In a significant move to preserve Armenian culture, [St. Gregory A. & M.] Hovsepien School in Pasadena has installed a *khachkar*, or Armenian stone cross, on its grounds. The consecration ceremony took place on September 12, marking a pivotal moment for the local Armenian community.

al ties for Armenian Americans, particularly the younger generation. Derderian emphasized the educational value of the stone cross, linking it directly to the school’s mission of imparting core values to students. “This sacred stone cross is a visual manifestation of the values our Church and school strive to instill in the hearts of our students – faith, resilience, and a deep connection to our heritage,” Derderian ex-



Consul General of the Republic of Armenia in Los Angeles Karen Israelyan addressing the students

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, issued a statement that underscored the *khachkar*’s dual significance. “The *khachkar*, installed in front of the Hovsepien School, stands as a testament of our Christian faith and a reminder of our identity, deeply rooted in Armenian culture,” he stated. The installation aims to reinforce cultur-

plained. The *khachkar* serves as more than decoration, functioning as a tangible symbol of Armenian identity within the diaspora. Its presence at an educational institution highlights efforts to maintain cultural connections in a new homeland. School officials hope the *khachkar* will foster a deeper understanding of Armenian heritage among students. It serves as an ed-



Hovsepien School Principal Shahe Mankerian



Students with the *khachkar*



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian consecrating the *khachkar* with the Holy Muron from Armenia

educational tool, teaching about faith, cultural resilience, and the importance of maintaining connections to their heritage. The installation underscores the shared values between the Armenian Church and Hovsepien School and aligns with broader efforts to preserve cultural identity within Armenian-American communities across the United States. For the Pasadena community, the *khachkar* stands as a silent yet powerful reminder of faith, resilience, and cultural pride, bridging the gap between ancestral homeland and the community’s new home.



Fr. Njdech Keshishyan singing a solo, father of two Hovsepien students





COMMUNITY NEWS



The Alexander family reunion, September 7, 2024 in Maryland (Photo Matthew Hubbard-Alexander)

# Historic Armenian Family Reunion Held in Maryland

By Harold Takooshian

MIDDLE RIVER, Md. — On September 7, 2024, over 100 descendants of Hagop and Helen Alexander filled the pavilion of Our Lady of Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Maryland for a family reunion that was historic in a few ways.

First, this was the largest reunion of the Alexander family – with 108 kin from a dozen states. This reunion was orchestrated by the family’s 90-year-old patriarch Michael “Sonny” Alexander, a retired Command Sergeant Major in the US Army, who is also the last of 7 children born to Hagop (1889-1960) and Helen (1900-1937). The family celebrated its many contributions to the U.S. military, law enforcement, technology, and other fields, and shared a lavish feast including Armenian delicacies imported from Kirichian Foods in New Jersey.

Second, this reunion was impacted by genetic testing on 23+me, after two young people in 2018 (Brittany Bangert in Maryland and Lori Dondiego in New Jersey) discovered an unexpected connection that revealed Hagop’s unknown first marriage in New York City in 1910-1914, with Mary Epremian and their two children Alfred (1911-1992) and Margaret (1913-1987). For unclear reasons, Alfred and Margaret never met their father. Hagop and Mary divorced in 1914, and neither spoke of their first marriage until genetic testing revealed the connection 104 years later.

With great hospitality on September 7, the Alexanders welcomed their 6 “new” family from New Jersey to their reunion for the first time, and celebrated this new connection. In fact, Sonny’s oldest brother Alfred was also a US Army veteran – a decorated soldier in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. Sonny’s oldest sister Margaret was an expert seamstress, the same life-long career as her father

Hagop. Throughout the September 7 reunion, people commented how closely their “new” family resembled their own members — their faces, mustaches, mannerisms.

Hagop and Helen Alexander settled in Baltimore around 1918 to raise their growing family of 7 children. Hagop originally migrated to the USA from the “magical” village of Evereg-Fenese in Central Turkey – a historic village that was brutally emptied of Armenians during the genocide of 1915. Remarkably, these villagers had formed the Evereg-Fenese Educational Society (EFES) back in 1879 to promote education among the village’s children. Even a century after this village disappeared in 1915, this EFES remains a vibrant global association which continues to offer scholarships to its young descendants 145 years later. Until now, the Alexanders have been uninvolved with their Armenian-American community, and unaware of their connection with this historic village.



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# Arts & Culture

## Kosta Karakashyan

*Expanding Dance Limits  
And Language*



**By Artsvi Bakhchinyan**  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

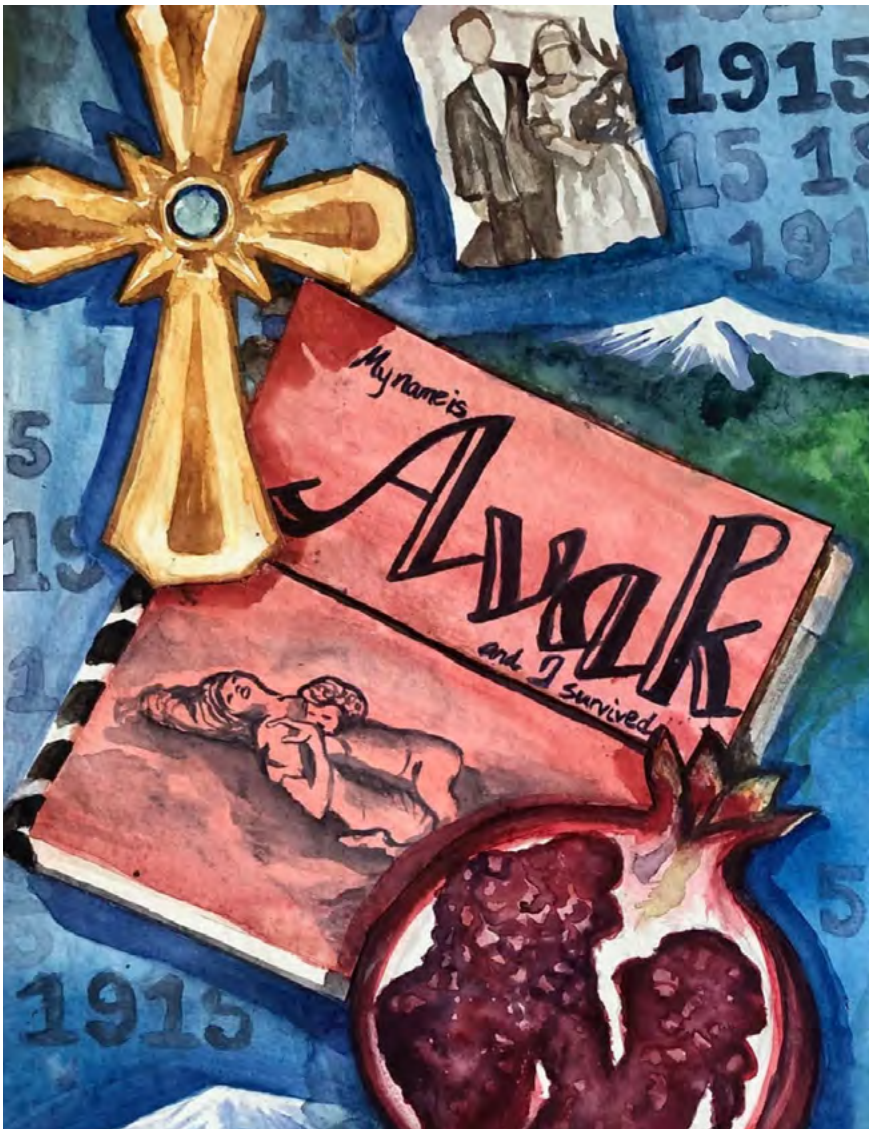
YEREVAN/SOFIA — Kosta Karakashyan is a Bulgarian-Armenian director, producer, choreographer, and writer. A native of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, he started training in ballroom dance at age five before winning two Bulgarian National Ballroom Champion titles, dancing on international stages across Canada, Germany, Norway, Egypt, Vietnam and Japan, and becoming the youngest professional dancer and choreographer on “Dancing with the Stars Vietnam” at 18 years old. Kosta is a graduate of Columbia University in New York (BA in Dance) and the Global Campus of Human Rights (European Master’s) in Venice.

His directing and choreography include films, music videos, commercials, installations, theatre and immersive performances produced alongside his production company Studio Karakashyan and multidisciplinary dance company Karakashyan and Artists. A two-time Bulgarian National Ballroom Champion, Kosta was selected as one of the Berlinale Talents in 2024 and as Forbes Europe 30 Under 30 2024 honoree in the Arts and Culture category for his commitment to tackling human rights through his art.

His films include “A Real Boy,” “In Her Skin,” “Surrender,” “Supersexual,” “Glance from the Edge” and “Waiting for Color.” As a commercial director, his recent clients include H&M, Calvin Klein, ELLE, iYura, Bellissimo Clinic, Studio Zard, etc.

Kosta also teaches improvisation, contemporary technique, camera performance, and dance film workshops around Europe. He is a contributing writer to various publications, writing essays and dance criticism in international periodicals. He just finished production on his upcoming short film “They,” which tells a love story between two university professors who are forced to keep their relationship a secret, and will be starting its festival run in the beginning of 2025.

see KARAKASHYAN, page 13



A work from the exhibition

## Ani Jermakian’s ‘The 1915 Portfolio’ Exhibition Opens at UMass Amherst

AMHERST, Mass. — Ani Jermakian, an artist and public elementary school art educator, will have a solo exhibition, “The 1915 Portfolio,” in the Student Union Art Gallery at University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) from September 25 - October 11. The 1915 Portfolio is an archive of 2D, 3D and digital work that tells the story of the Armenian Genocide through the eyes of a great-granddaughter of survivors.



Jermakian, a 2020 graduate of UMass Amherst, earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Art Education and Minor in Art History, and is currently a 3rd year graduate student pursuing a Master’s of Art Education.

The 1915 Portfolio series of work has been in progress since 2015. Through almost a decade of focusing on the historic and present struggles of the Armenian people, Jermakian has accumulated a collection of artwork that addresses the deep rooted feelings and generational trauma of the Diaspora.

Although history has repeated itself for over a century in the persecution of the Armenian people, many people outside of the Armenian community are still not aware of these atrocities. Having an entire gallery space dedicated to Armenia’s history, as well as accessible to a state university campus of over 32,000 students, will provide the opportunity for visitors to learn about Armenian history through art, which has become part of Jermakian’s life’s purpose. This exhibition is dedicated to her ancestors.

Jermakian is a parishioner of St. Mark Armenian Church in Springfield, MA and active in the Armenian community.

The exhibition will be open to view from September 25 - October 11, 2024. An opening reception will be held on Friday, September 27 at 7 p.m. For more information, see <https://www.artworkbyani.com/1915-portfolio>



The exhibition

## Armenian Film Society Provides Platform for Filmmakers

**By Karine Armen**  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

GLENDALE, Calif. — The second annual Armenian Film Festival was held on September 4-8 in Glendale, California. The opening night film was Atom Egoyan’s “Seven Veils,” which will be released in theaters in 2025. The closing night film was the Oscar-winning short documentary “The Last Repair Shop.” The Armenian Film Society (AFS), which was founded in 2015 by husband and wife Armen and Mary Karaoghlanian, organized the five-day film festival.

Armen and Mary noticed a new wave of Armenian filmmakers emerging around 2010. They decided to provide a platform for those filmmakers because of the lack of opportunities in the industry. “There was a noticeable lack of screenings and events centered around their films, so we set out to create a creative space in our community where people could



Armen and Mary Karaoghlanian with their son at the opening night of the film festival (photo Karine Armen)

watch these films and interact with the filmmakers,” said Armen. “We’ve evolved quite a bit since then, but that’s how and where the Armenian Film Society began.”

The Armenian Film Society held its first event at Abril Books in Glendale on September 11, 2015, with the support of Arno Yeretizian: a screening of Atom Egoyan’s directorial debut, “Next of Kin” (1984). The society champions Armenian films and unites Armenian filmmakers. It shines a spotlight on Armenian stories and highlight the contributions of Armenian filmmakers. It also lobbies for representation and create opportunities for Armenian filmmakers through partnerships with leading global organizations. “We don’t award prizes at the Armenian Film Festival because we want to celebrate Armenian films and filmmakers,” said Armen during the closing ceremony of the Armenian Film Festival. “We see our festival as an annual celebration of Armenian stories,” he added with pride.

seer FILMMAKERS, page 13





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Kosta Karakashyan: Expanding Dance Limits and Language

KARAKASHYAN, from page 12

**Dear Kosta, first I knew about you after your participation in “Bulgaria’s Got Talent 2021.” Your dance impressed me with high emotional drive and brilliant choreography. Where do you find your inspirations in creating choreographic pieces?**

Thank you for the kind words! For me choreography needs either a strong message or a pure, distilled emotion that you can feel clearly coming through the movement without being melodramatic. I am always looking through my emotional memory for bits of inspiration, and even if I am choreographing something that is not autobiographical, I always try to capture a distinct feeling from my own life in the work because I feel these authentic lived experiences can make the tapestry of any piece of art that much richer. In the case of the “Bulgaria’s Got Talent” performance, it had to do with the feelings of burnout and mental strain that I felt as a student in the US and how these sensations reverberated through my body.

**It seems nothing can be new in contemporary dance in terms of movements. You often set your company’s work in kitchens, landfills, public spaces, warehouses, caves, runways, even toilets. What is your main concern in doing this; does it come from choreography or you just show known dance movements in places unusual for choreography?**

While it can be difficult to create truly original or new movement languages, for me positioning the audience in an unusual location in an immersive or site-specific performance has more to do with the element of surprise that the audience will feel. I like to bring them out of the passive state that can happen when we are sitting down and taking in a performance, while sitting on a chair where we may be falling asleep. When we bring the audience to a new space, the experience is unusual from the beginning – we take a lot of time to craft an intriguing email, then when they arrive they are surprised by the vibes of the location, then we always have a moment of immersing them before they actually see any of the show being performed. All of these steps are important because they send signals to the audience that this work will be different, and they need to pay attention. Even if the movement is known, in this context it can feel much more intimate, when the dancers are dancing centimeters away from your face, talking to you, and interacting with you more sometimes.

It also has a lot to do with how we create the choreography itself. With the dancers, we play a lot of games that fuel their imagination when we use a new space. We imagine the history of the place, the people that passed through the halls and spaces, and we begin to invent new presences, building a very rich and three-dimensional world, which is difficult to do if you interpret a stage as a neutral space, where you don’t pay attention to the history of the space in the same way. I am very grateful for the dance artists in my company, who are all so talented and bring a very sophisticated awareness to the process, always proposing incredible ideas and being generous with their craft so that we can create the strongest version of the work that can exist at the time.

**You make films on dance. In Yerevan I participated twice in dance film workshops with watching a large selection of such films from around the world. Yet, I don’t recall films with social context among them, like your 2019 award-winning really shocking documentary**

**dance film “Waiting for Color” about the LGBTQ+ persecution in Chechnya. Have you received threatening from Chechnya and elsewhere for your courage in raising this issue?**

I have received some negative comments in Bulgaria when I decided to create the film. Working on the film also led to being invited to be one of the face doubles in director David France’s feature-length documentary “Welcome to Chechnya.” He and his team were able to capture the real



stories of Chechen LGBTQ+ people trying to flee Russia and find safety in Europe, but to preserve the anonymity and to protect the real subjects, they had to figure out a way to disguise their faces. So, one day I received a phone call telling me about a mystery project connected to Chechnya. At the time, I was really worried it could be something dangerous, but luckily it turned out that David and his team wanted to invite me to be one of the activists that gave our faces to be used in the film, which was an incredible experience – one more way I can show solidarity with the brave people from Chechnya.

**Your choreographic and film projects tackle other social topics as well, such as mental health, and the climate crisis. Have you seen any positive impacts of your socially oriented projects to certain**

**issues?**

Yes, one of the most valuable things for me is the conversations that have sparked from these projects. It’s moving to see an audience come to a screening or performance with one frame of mind and to leave with their mind open for debate, or with a new understanding how a different group of people lives. We’ve done this with our performance “KITCHEN” which shows the psychological trauma of professional chefs in the culinary industry and with another immersive performance called “The Last Sunset” which deals with the negative impact of fossil fuel on the environment and takes the audience to the Regional Landfill for Nonhazardous Waste in Gabrovo. That was an amazing experience. Sometimes it’s difficult to measure how many minds you have changed, but we always give the audience a space to reflect in writing, so we know that this type of soft work is doing.

That’s what I’m hoping will happen with the new film “They,” which follows two university professors who cannot reveal they are a couple. Unfortunately, over the last few days Bulgaria passed a new law banning the discussion of any LGBTQ+ topics in schools, labelling it as propaganda. By accident, the film became even more relevant with the current political and social situation, so when it’s time to present it in Bulgaria after its international festival run, it will start a lot of conversation for sure. We are really grateful to the National Culture Fund of Bulgaria for supporting the project with their Creation grant, which made it possible to create a queer film even with this more conservative climate.

**I loved your documentary “Surrender” about the masculinity in dance. Attending ballroom dance classes in Armenia and USA I can say that there is a lack of men in such classes not only in relatively conservative Armenian, but also in American society. The opposition of ballroom versus gym for men will al-**

**ways exist, although both do not disturb each other, don’t you think so?**

Absolutely! And if you look at dancers, they are incredible physical athletes that can be just as impressive as football or basketball players. There is a sensuality and freedom in dance that a lot of men are afraid of. There’s a social stigma about being vulnerable, playful and being perceived as “soft,” which is a shame because it creates a lot of unrealistic pressure for men to put up a strong front both physically and mentally. But sooner or later, we can’t push down all of our emotions and they want to come to the surface in some way, so I hope more men turn towards dance and other healthy forms of expression rather than toxic masculinity in all of its dangerous forms. There’s nothing inherently embarrassing about being vulnerable, and the more men realize this, the better!

**Please tell us about your Armenian heritage.**

On my father’s side of the family, which is Armenian, his father’s side of the family were living in a Turkish village and came to Bulgaria around 1920 via Greece. Half of the family left on a ship to France, while the rest came to Bulgaria, and after a few years the ones in Bulgaria told the others to rejoin them because they had found a stable way of life in Plovdiv, where the largest concentration of the Armenian diaspora is in Bulgaria. On his grandmother’s side, her father was a soldier whose whole family was killed in the Armenian Genocide in 1915 – his wife, two children, brothers and parents. His second wife was orphaned and they found their way to Bulgaria as well, where my father’s parents met.

In Bulgaria, I was raised by my Armenian dad and my Bulgarian mum, but we observe all the Armenian holidays as well. My brother and his kids, as well as me were all baptized at the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church Surp Kevork in Plovdiv, which was founded around 200 years ago, and we are close to the Armenian community in the city.

Nowadays I am following some younger Armenian creatives and artists thanks to my dear friend Theresa Voskanyan, who is an editor for *ELLE Magazine* in Bulgaria but regularly visits Armenia and shares what the local creative scene is up to. I have yet to visit! We were supposed to come with my immersive performance “KITCHEN” for a performing arts festival last year, but unfortunately the timing didn’t work out, so I am looking into other opportunities to come to Armenia with some of my performances or films. That would be the next dream come true!

## Armenian Film Society Provides Platform for Filmmakers

FILMMAKERS, from page 12

AFS partnered with the Los Angeles Philharmonic on their Stravinsky and Khachaturian program in July 2024. It also collaborates with other organizations and co-present screenings and events together. It hosts an Armenian Women in Film and Entertainment panel every year, which has become one of their flagship events. It has many other projects in the works as well.

The programming for the Armenian Film Festival combines films that their team invites and films that are submitted. Atom Egoyan was unable to attend the festival’s opening ceremony due to prior commitments with the Toronto International Film Festival. However, one of the main characters of “The Last Repair

Shop,” Steve Bagmanyan, attended the closing ceremony, during which Armen Karaoghlanian held a Q&A with him after the screening. Bagmanyan is the supervisor of the Los Angeles Unified School District’s instrument repair supervisor. Armen said, “I made sure Steve could be present at our event.”

“I have always been a lover of film,” Armen said during an interview after the festival. He added, “The happiest memories I have growing up are movie nights with my family, either at home or at the theater.” Armen went to the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts and studied film. That was a very formative time for him, personally and professionally. He started out making films but later pivoted to building the

Armenian Film Society with his wife, Mary, and they have worked tirelessly for the past decade. AFS is not an overnight success. This is the result of almost a decade of hard work, perseverance, and pure passion. Armen boasted, “We are incredibly proud of our successes, including the Armenian Film Festival and our partnerships with some of our favorite organizations who share the same values we do.” They have faced many challenges, but with a clear purpose in mind, they overcame those challenges.

AFS has an extensive website where Armen does all the research for their posts and news: <https://www.armenian-filmsociety.com/>. AFS continues with different projects to promote Armenian films globally.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE



Guests viewing four works from the Self Isolation series at the Armenian Museum (photo Aram Arkun)

## Hyper-realism Comes to Watertown's Armenian Museum

EXHIBIT, from page 1

Sohigian asked Armenian Museums Collections Curator Gary Lind-Sinianian about Igityan, and the latter replied that Igityan curated a show of children's art years ago at the Armenian Museum, so it is possible that Tsitoghdzian's works may have been included in it.

Sohigian also noted that the model for one of the paintings on display was present



Museum Executive Director Jason Sohigian (photo Aram Arkun)

that evening (he did not point her out, leaving the audience to try to identify her later), another artwork was of an Armenian, and a third of a well-known celebrity.

Tsitoghdzian had come from New York City, where he has been living for some 15 years, for the opening. He took the microphone to speak about the two series of his recent artworks on display, "Mirrors" and "Self-Isolation." He recalled that the custom of taking "selfies" with cellphones, which seemed to have become ubiquitous among women in particular, inspired the "Mirrors" series. He said that portraits until then seemed a bit old-fashioned, but that he took up the idea, with some influence from classical art, in particular Renaissance artists and later painters like Rembrandt. His paintings examine the relationships between self and image, and reality and beauty.

Tsitoghdzian said he was fascinated with the Armenian concept of "*jagadakir*," or fate, which literally means writing which is on the forehead. That led him in one painting, "Vanity Mirror," to add inside the lines, swirls and outlines of faces and hands which imperceptibly surround the actual portrait various words written in the Armenian alphabet.

When the coronavirus pandemic con-



Tigran Tsitoghdzian (photo Aram Arkun)

fining everyone to their homes in New York, he recalled being stuck in his high-rise apartment and thinking about people's lives. This led to his "Self-Isolation" series.

After the formal program, when asked for this newspaper what the origin was of his surname – an unusual one for Armenians, and where his family originated, he said that it is derived from the name of their ancestral village of Tsitogh (Dzitogh), which is in the plain of Garin (Erzurum). The family was a prominent one there and after emigrating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Gyumri, in Eastern Armenia, continued as such until Soviet times. In fact, an Internet

search reveals that the family house in Gyumri in 1984 was turned into a museum, the Dzitoghtsyan Museum of National Architecture.

Tsitoghdzian also said that he does not watch television or read the news, as whatever is important will eventually reach him. Consequently, he does not always know who is a celebrity. Although he has painted a number of the latter, and has met many socially, he does not want to become known primarily as a celebrity painter and does not make

any special efforts to paint them.

He gave the example of the Indian-American author, model and television host Padma Lakshmi, who had come to see some of his paintings. He said that since he had not painted an Indian before he asked whether he could paint her. Afterwards, people said, oh, that is Padma, but Tsitoghdzian said that he had not known that she was famous.

The exhibit will continue at the Adele and Haig Der Manuelian Galleries of the museum until February 23, 2025, open from 12 noon to 6 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.

## Composer Konstantin Petrossian Receives Komitas Award

YEREVAN — On August 23, at the Music Society of Armenia, Prof. Davit Ghazaryan, the president of the Music Society of Armenia, awarded composer Konstantin Petrossian with the Komitas commemorative medal of the Music Society of Armenia for his significant contribution to the development of Armenian compositional art, as well as on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the foundation of the Music Society of Armenia.

The award ceremony took place in a warm atmosphere, where Ghazaryan emphasized the merits of Maestro Konstantin Petrossian for his contribution to the Armenian composer's art, particularly in various genres of academic music. The maestro, in turn, thanked Ghazaryan for this important award, as well as for his selfless service to Armenian culture, always keeping his hand on the pulse of Armenian music and following the activities of cultural figures. At the end of the ceremony, Petrossian presented Ghazaryan with his newly published *Selected Songs* collection, expressing hope that the songs included in the collection will become part of the playlists of conservatory and college students and many soloists.



Davit Ghazaryan, at left, gives composer Konstantin Petrossian the Komitas commemorative medal





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



## Taste of Beirut: Original Stuffed Grape Leaves in Mexican Chile Salsa

BEIRUT — Respected Lebanese food stylist, cookbook author, blogger, and photographer Joumana Accad loves Mexican cuisine. At her TasteofBeirut.com food blog, she says, “I love Mexican cuisine as much as I love Lebanese cuisine, and I’ve always been interested in fusing these two great cuisines in a harmonious way. Here I’m making our country’s classic stuffed grape leaves the traditional way, but I’m adding Mexican homemade salsa in the broth as well as in the stuffing. Of course, if you don’t have access to these dried or smoked chilies, you can substitute your favorite bottled chili sauce or salsa. I was pleasantly surprised by the results: the *warak enab* comes out moist and tasty, and the sauce adds a layer of flavor without adding too much spiciness. Anyone who enjoys Lebanese grape leaves will enjoy the unique taste of this Mexican-style version,” she adds.

Enjoy Joumana’s stuffed grape leaves with Mexican red sauce made with dried chilies that add a spicy layer of extra flavor.

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb. meat (from chuck or skirt meat) for lining the pan (or bones or cutlets)
- Olive oil, as needed

### Stuffing:

- 1 cup all-purpose white rice
- 2 lbs. ground meat (can be pork, beef, or lamb)
- 1 large onion, chopped fine or grated (keep the juice to use in the broth)
- 3 or 4 garlic cloves, chopped and mashed with 1 teaspoon of salt into a paste
- 2 tablespoons beef seasoning or a spice mix of your choice (cinnamon, all-spice, cumin, black pepper, etc.)
- A few sprigs of fresh parsley, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup Mexican chile salsa (see recipe below)

### To serve:

- 2 or 3 large lemons or limes (optional)
- Yogurt to serve (about 1/2 lb.)
- 2 jars preserved grape leaves

### For the chile salsa:

Makes about 3 cups.

- 12 to 15 assorted dried chiles: Guajillo, Ancho, California or New Mexico
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped and mashed with salt into a paste
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano or za’atar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 medium onion (optional)
- 1/3 cup of piloncillo syrup or 1/2 piloncillo, broken up into chunks (OR replace with 4 tablespoons of dark brown sugar or date syrup or maple syrup or honey or grape molasses)\*

Makes about 80 stuffed grape leaves

Prep Time: 3 hours

Cook Time: 1 hour

### PREPARATION:

Rinse the grape leaves in running water and remove stems. Set aside.

Place chiles in a large pot and cover with water. Bring to a simmer and let them cook for a few minutes, then turn off the heat and cover. Let them rest an hour or longer (they can soak overnight).

Wearing gloves, chop off the stems of the chiles and place the chiles in a blender with the other ingredients (garlic, seasonings) and about 2 cups of chile soaking water or plain water (if you want the salsa to be less spicy). Puree and then transfer to a sieve set over a bowl. Using a spoon or a whisk, vigorously stir the salsa to strain it as soon as possible. Taste and adjust seasoning, adding some water to temper the spiciness if desired.

The next step is to quickly brown the piece of meat. (Joumana says: “The meat in Lebanon is a rather inexpensive cut that I found at the market which has a twofold purpose. Normally, my teta and all Lebanese classic cooks used to brown lamb chops or lamb bones. I am not finding lamb much these days in the market in the U.S. So the idea is: A.) To protect the stuffed grape leaves from burning if they are placed right at the bottom of the pot. B.) To infuse the dish and the broth and rice and leaves with the meat flavor. Pour a little oil in the pot and fry the meat for a couple minutes over medium heat. Sprinkle some seasoning on the meat, and turn off the heat and start stuffing the leaves.”)

In a large bowl, place the stuffing ingredients including about 1/4 cup of chile sauce and combine well.

Lay the grape leaves on the counter over paper towels and start stuffing them. Place about a tablespoon of stuffing in each leaf and fold neatly. Start laying the grape leaves on top of the meat side by side. Once the pot is filled, sprinkle about a cup of salsa on the grape leaves. Add about 2 cups of water and cover with a plate to keep the leaves well packed (so they don’t fall apart). Bring to a slow simmer, cover the pot and cook for about one hour (or a little longer). At the end of cooking, taste and add fresh lemon juice to the leaves if desired (optional). Serve warm with yogurt and extra lemon or lime slices.

\*Note: Joumana says, “I added the piloncillo syrup to temper the spiciness of the salsa. The piloncillo is sold in cones in Latino supermarkets and the syrup is obtained by soaking the piloncillo in water and boiling the mixture with some spices like cinnamon or anise until the chunks of piloncillo are melted and well mixed with the water to form a type of liquid syrup. The operation takes a few minutes. The piloncillo can be soaked in water overnight.”

ORDER TODAY: Go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Taste-Beirut-Delicious-Lebanese-Contemporary/dp/0757317707>

Joumana Accad, creator of the blog TasteOfBeirut.com, is a native Lebanese, a trained pastry chef, and professional caterer. In her debut cookbook, *Taste of Beirut*, she shares her heritage through exquisite food and anecdotes, teaching anyone from novices to foodies how to master traditional Lebanese cuisine. With 175+ recipes inspired by her Teta (grandmother) in their family’s kitchen, Accad captures the healthful and fabulous flavors of the Middle East and makes them completely accessible to home cooks. While *Taste of Beirut* brings to life the rich, complex, and delicious flavors of the Middle East, each recipe is refreshingly easy to make. The author’s passionate, conversational style will make readers feel like they have a friend from Lebanon right in their kitchen, teaching them everything from cooking techniques to how to stock a kitchen with the best ingredients.

## ‘Ripley’ Director Steve Zaillian Takes Home Emmy for Outstanding Directing

By Destiny Jackson

Steve Zaillian garnered an Emmy Award on Sunday for Outstanding Directing for a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie for Netflix’s “Ripley.”

In his speech, Zaillian said he was enamored by the beautiful landscapes that Italy provided, alongside being grateful for his cast and crew. “Making ‘Ripley’ in Italy was its own reward. It was like a dream. I

didn’t need anything after that,” the director said. “The work is its own reward and I still really appreciate this honor though, and I share it with literally hundreds of people who worked on Ripley, the actors, Andrew [Scott], Dakota [Fanning], Elliot [Sumner], Johnny [Flynn], Maurizio [Lombardi], and all the other wonderful Italian actors, the producers, the incredible department heads and crew—all of ’em artists in their own right. I thank them. The Academy, Netflix

and my family.”

“Ripley,” written and directed by Zaillian, is an eight-episode limited series based on the psychological thriller novels by Patricia Highsmith. The show revolves around Tom Ripley (Andrew Scott), a grifter scraping by in early 1960s New York, who is hired by a wealthy man to travel to Italy to try to convince his vagabond son to return home. Tom’s acceptance of the job is the first step into a complex life of deceit,

fraud and murder.

The Netflix series has 13 nominations for categories and four wins already Sunday for categories that include Outstanding Special Visual Effects in a Single Episode, Outstanding Sound Editing for a Limited or Anthology Series, Movie or Special.

(The above article first appeared in Deadline Hollywood (deadline.com) on September 15, 2024.)



# 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

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

**OCTOBER 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 18-19** — St. James Armenian Church 77th Annual bazaar: Fri. 12-8 p.m., Sat. 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. Delicious Armenian food, mezze, pastries, and baked goods. Silent Auction, Raffle, Children's Activities, Booths and Local Vendors. St. James Armenian Church – 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. For more information please visit [www.stjameswatertown.org/bazaar](http://www.stjameswatertown.org/bazaar).

**OCTOBER 19** — AFA Kef Time is here again! Join the fun at the Armenian Friends of America (AFA) Dance. Open to all. Saturday, 6.30 p.m. to midnight. Featuring the live music of: Leon Janikian, Jason Naroian, John Berberian, Bruce Gigarjian and Bob Raphaelian. Event held at The Armenian Church at Hye Pointe; 1280 Boston Road; Haverhill. Individual tickets \$55; Tables of 8 - \$425. Ticket price includes Dance, Individual Mezza platters, coffee & dessert. Advanced tickets only - no tickets sold at door. There is a capacity limit. Online Ticket Sales at [www.Armenianfriendsofamerica.org](http://www.Armenianfriendsofamerica.org) or call Mary Ann #603-770-3375 or Kathy #978-902-3198.

**OCTOBER 20** — "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. Trn-patsek (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

**December 15** — Yerevan Chorale & Orchestra Christmas Concert, Sunday, 7 pm, Holy Trinity Armenian Church, 145 Brattle St., Cambridge, MA. Featuring soprano Tatev Baroyan, soloist of Metropolitan Opera and City Opera of New York, winner of numerous international voice competitions; and Rev. Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian, tenor. Details to follow.

### RHODE ISLAND

**OCTOBER 27** — The 100th Anniversary of the Choir of Saints Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, following the Divine Liturgy (approx. 12 noon), Sunday, Egavian Hall, 70 Jefferson St., Providence, RI 02908. Complimentary lunch. Everyone is invited and welcome. Donations are gratefully appreciated.

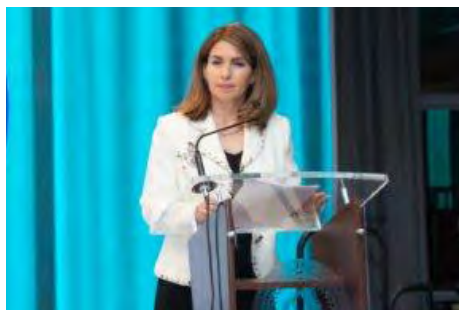
**DECEMBER 13** — Christmas Concert @ Sanctuary of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, 70 Jefferson St., Providence, RI, featuring Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island, Junior Choir, Soloists. 7 p.m. Details to follow. Details to follow

Send Calendar Items to the Mirror-Spectator: To send calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator, email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com), and find the "calendar" section under the heading "More." You can also mail them to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

## TCA Metro LA Celebrates Life Of Hampartzoum Berberian with Concert

BERBERIAN, from page 1

A recent recording from Fr. Zaven Arzoumanian was also shared with the audience. Arzoumanian fondly recalled his days as a seminarian at the Armenian Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon where he was taught nationalist songs and music no-



Co-MC Hasmig Karayan

Her — text by Tlgadintzi] and *G'Antsreveh Dughas* [It's Raining My Son — text by Vahan Tekeyan], among others. Also featured was the talented violinist Angela Amirian, who performed Berberian's *Prelude and Variations*, also accompanied by pianist Ripsime Rshtouni. Tenor Berj Karazian masterfully sang Berberian's *Ser* [Love — text by Zareh Melkonian] to the delight of the audience, among others, accompanied by Rshtouni on piano. The audience enthusiastically applauded each time the talented Nersisyan, Karazian, Amirian and Rshtouni performed one of Berberian's works.

Dikran Ekizian, a lifelong member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, spoke on behalf of the former students of Berberian. Ekizian's heartfelt words were a great tribute to the legendary Berberian, to whom



Dr. Karen Israyelyan, Consul General of the Republic of Armenia Los Angeles

tation by Berberian. He recalled a conversation he had with his classmate, the late musicologist Krikor Pidedjian of New York. Arzoumanian stated that Pidedjian felt that only Gomidas Vartabed ranked ahead of Berberian as an Armenian musicologist.

The concert brought back to life the music of Berberian with songs some of which have not been heard by his students since their childhood in Lebanon. Well known soprano Anahit Nersisyan, accompanied by the graceful pianist Ripsime Rshtouni, performed Berberian's well known *Anor* [To



Former students and choir members of Hampartzoum Berberian

even decades later, his students still speak of with great reverence. Ekizian also spoke eloquently of the other giants of that period, who along with Berberian, were instrumental in shaping their nationalistic aspirations.

Parsegh Kartalian, also a lifelong leader of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, ceremoniously cut the cake in honor of the 55th anniversary of the founding of the Tekeyan Cultural Association in the United States. Kartalian sang in a choral group organized

by Berberian in Egypt.

The program concluded with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, commending Berberian's life and works and recalling his first meeting with him in Boston. He praised the musicians who masterfully performed Berberian's works. Derderian commended the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter for organizing a memorable concert and program.





## COMMENTARY

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
UNITED STATES

## 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

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is  
published weekly, except two weeks in  
July and the first week of the year, by:

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA  
02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.A.	\$80 one year
Canada	\$125 one year
Other Countries	\$200 one year

© 2014 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator  
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston,  
MA and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

Postmaster: Send address  
changes to The Armenian  
Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount  
Auburn St.,  
Watertown, MA 02472

Other than the Editorial, views  
and opinions expressed in this  
newspaper do not necessarily  
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publisher.

## Artsakh Was Certainly Not a Dream nor an Illusion *Armenia and Diaspora Cooperating Must Plan Its Resurrection*

Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, C.M.

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

This September 19 marked the sad anniversary of the short-lived glorious independent Artsakh's tragic end. The purpose of this article is to develop the seeds of a serious and planned strategy in order to put Artsakh on a realistic trajectory towards resurrection, based on the use of all the resources that the Armenian world can provide.

As I was putting down the last words of my thoughts in my draft of this article, I received and read with great interest the most pertinent article that my good friend and international law expert Philippe Raffi Kalfayan had just published in [this paper](#), entitled "Analyzing Legal Options for the Return of Artsakh Armenians, on First Anniversary of Ethnic Cleansing."

As I have no pretensions of any legal expertise, I was delighted to confirm that my entirely pragmatic approach as a longtime community leader ran on a parallel course fundamentally consistent with Kalfayan's legal arguments and would benefit from all of Kalfayan's legal prescriptions. My current article exhorts Armenians to push their efforts further. Examples of conflicts throughout the world indicate that efforts based on mere legal justification do not lead in practice to justice prevailing.

Artsakh was certainly not a mere dream, nor an illusion. Independent Artsakh was a vivid reality which was achieved in 1994. It provided from that moment on, unprecedented stamina, optimism, enthusiasm and national pride for the Armenian world, which lasted for almost three decades. It became a lighthouse radiating pride to all, especially to young Armenians across the planet, in the wake of Armenia's independence in 1991. Many fiery patriotic songs, dances and poems about Artsakh have filled the classrooms of Artsakh, Armenia and the diaspora's Armenian schools, and over the years, brought tears to the eyes of thousands at almost any Armenian gathering or event.

This was the fruit of a difficult and victorious – arguably even holy – war of a kind that Armenians had not experienced for several centuries. Though this may sound like some kind of idealized exaltation, it genuinely evokes the mindset of Armenians in the nineties of the last century.

"Artsakh-e meren eh!" was the slogan that rang out in the streets and squares of Armenia in early 1988. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians raised their fists defiantly, encouraged by the prevailing Perestroika mood across the USSR. That mood spread like wildfire across the continents to the different corners of the diaspora, following a crusade headed by the likes of Zori Balayan touring its largest communities. The author of this article recalls one such defiant big protest in Montreal, Canada, which he headed, together with religious and lay community leaders of all organizations of this vibrant community. It took place in front of the austere and intimidating General Consulate of the USSR in Montreal, where the initial weak attempts of the consul general to qualify the Karabakh movement as "hooliganism" was quickly squelched by our uncompromising demand for justice and freedom for the multimillennial Armenian Artsakh.

The entire Artsakh saga of those years is well recorded and documented. After a referendum, in line with the laws of the land of that time, held in Artsakh in December 1991, and then a victorious liberation war, which stopped with a ceasefire in 1994, Artsakh became a legitimate independent republic. However, the recognition of this independence was withheld by the inconvenienced international community. For some still not satisfactorily explained reason, that independence was not even recognized by the independent Republic of Armenia itself, even though the latter had been the staunchest ally and even leader of the Artsakh liberation war.

It is now evident that all the arguments that were offered over the years by all the successive authorities both in Armenia and Artsakh to justify such a hesitant and cautious Armenian policy were misguided and fruitless in providing any so-called "expected strategic benefits" to the cause of Artsakh. Quite to the contrary, it can now be justifiably argued that the Armenian hesitance and reluctance to promote and outright defend the independence of Artsakh, right from the very beginning, has actually led to its ill fate, which ended with the final blow brought by the genocidal complete evacuation of some 120,000 [PROBABLY only 100,000 were left by this point, as others fled during the 2020 war when various territories were occupied] Artsakh Armenians within 24 hours, on September 19, 2023.

Today, one whole year beyond that latest Artsakh catastrophe, the big elephant in the room is the haunting question as to what's next for Artsakh.

Both the uneasy silence on this critical issue maintained by the present authorities, as well as the random noisy attempts of protest made by different groups in Armenia, are in fact signs of uncertainty and inability to propose a clear answer to this fundamental and persistent question. Certainly, silence, vagueness

as well as mere populist noise is worthless when facing such a momentous issue. Armenians need to confront the problem and must come up with a strategy that takes into consideration all the hard realities presently surrounding this issue. We then need to act on it without hesitation.

Presently, the absence of a clear policy leads sometimes to unthinkable situations. It is indeed reported that some officials representing the current authorities when cornered with disconcerting questions even go so far as to openly declare that there is no more Artsakh issue: it is now resolved – "Artsakh is part of Azerbaijan." Such a statement is outrageous. It would have been condemned as being nothing short of being the most shameful treacherous blasphemy less than a few years ago!

The author of this article cannot believe that deep down, even those who make such statements truly mean what they say. It is certainly an unacceptable outburst motivated by mere political expediency. There is little doubt that the individuals now making such an unthinkable statement were, a few decades back, among those raising their fists in 1988 and shouting "Artsakh-meren eh!"

On the other hand, it is equally true that none of those who express today outrage for such a blasphemy have so far been able to offer any realistic alternative, beyond the mere expression of outrage. Let us be fair. Outrage is neither a strategy nor any action that leads to any solution.

I strongly believe that both the current authorities and the vociferous opposing factions are equally convinced that for many different and perhaps unrelated reasons their rhetoric on Artsakh is an expression of mere frustration.

Armenians must instead seek a realistic forward-looking plan. For such an effort, we need first to squarely face a number of cold realities which, at first sight, may look like unsurmountable hurdles, but which nevertheless need to be dealt with, in order to bring us back on a realistic course leading to the resurrection of the Artsakh issue. The ultimate sought-for result is the revival of an independent Artsakh, populated by its legitimate Armenian owners, just as it has been for multiple centuries, and which was restored only three decades back, in 1994.

The first undeniable cold reality of these days is that Armenia has lost the war against Azerbaijan. It is by now evident that one big reason for this defeat was an ill-organized Armenian army, fighting with totally inadequate military equipment.

The second and equally disastrous reality is that Armenia has miserably failed diplomatically, throughout its three decades since its independence, to build a solid legal case and has failed to create strong international public opinion for the unquestionable right of Artsakh Armenians to live in their independent homeland.

The first and foremost precondition for any promising strategy that aims at the resurrection of Artsakh, and which may pretend to even start giving any hope of success to achieve that goal, is to correct and erase the above two fundamental deficiencies.

Let us, therefore, proceed by identifying the avenues that may lead Armenians to concrete solutions in this respect.

In order to recover from the demoralizing stigma of a defeated nation, it is absolutely necessary that the Armenian army be fundamentally upgraded both in terms of the reorganization of its structure, and in terms of its being equipped with the most efficient and relevant modern equipment. This task is evidently within the exclusive terms of reference, the rights and the obligations of the current authorities. Needless to say, this is a highly sensitive matter of national security and confidentiality. We certainly cannot expect the authorities to disclose their actions nor give any open account of their current efforts in this respect.

We do, however, welcome a definite and visible increase of Armenia's activity to improve its position in this respect. The successful current diversification of sources to acquire military equipment, from India, France, and possibly eventually from the USA is praiseworthy. Concerning the uneasy balance of East-West relations in this respect, I submit that Russia should be the preferred alternative, provided, however, that Russia also changes and becomes as generous with Armenia as we all once hoped and believed that it was.

Beyond the external source, however, Armenia must develop also its domestic military equipment production industry. Armenia used to be one of the main providers of USSR's most sophisticated military equipment. As a well-known example, Armenia was indeed, from the start, at the forefront of developments within the laser field. One unpardonable failure of all governments of Armenia since its independence, has been the evident complete neglect of its inbuilt pre-independence definite advantage in this respect. Overall, the revival and consolidation of Armenia's military top readiness is evidently of highest urgency not only as part of Artsakh's revival strategy but certainly also for the security of Armenia itself.

see ARTSAKH, page 18





## COMMENTARY

# Iranian-Russian Tensions Over the ‘Zangezur Corridor’

By Suren Sargsyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

Recently, the “Zangezur Corridor” has become a significant source of tension between Iran and Russia, with various regional players pursuing their own interests. For Turkey, it connects the Turkic world; for Azerbaijan, it links to Nakhchivan; and for the US, it offers a route for transporting Central Asian energy to Europe via Armenia and Georgia, bypassing China and Russia. In contrast, Russia aims to prevent this and plans to enhance its border security in the corridor to maintain its military presence in the South Caucasus. Armenia and Iran are especially concerned about the implications of the corridor; while the Armenian government has its perspective, Iran views the corridor as a crucial red line that must not be crossed.

It all started when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speaking in Baku, accused Yerevan of undermining agreements to unblock communications through Armenia’s Syunik region, while emphasizing Moscow’s support for a swift peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan. “We advocate for the prompt signing of a peace treaty and the unblocking of communications. Unfortunately, it’s the Armenian leadership that is sabotaging the agreement signed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The rationale for such a stance is hard to understand,” Lavrov stated.

Lavrov’s remark elicited a strong reaction from Tehran, rather than Yerevan. Mohsen Rezaei, former chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and current secretary of the Expediency Council, stated, “The behavior of the Russian statesman was unacceptable and contradicts their declaration of friendship with Iran; these ambiguities must be resolved.” It is worth noting that Iran’s leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had previously made it clear to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Pashinyan that Tehran opposes the opening of any corridor, though his rhetoric was never as harsh. Days later Iran’s ambassador in Armenia told local reporters that “the dreams some have about Armenia under different names, including the so-called corridor, will never come true.”

On September 3, Iran took a rather tough step and did not limit itself to mere statements. According to official information, the Russian ambassador to Tehran, Alexey Dedov, was summoned to Iran’s Foreign Ministry in connection with Moscow’s recent support for the “corridor” project

that should connect Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan through the territory of Armenia, Iranian media reported. Tehran expressed its concern and said it opposes any geopolitical changes that could violate established borders in the region, proclaiming: “This move underscores the importance for Iran of maintaining territorial integrity and stability in the Caucasus, which is central to its national interests and regional security.”

From a diplomatic point of view, calling an ambassador to one’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the toughest ways of expressing the official position of the receiving country. But this was not enough for Tehran and official Iran continued to insist on its position. On September 10, while in Armenia, the Iran deputy foreign minister told reporters Iran welcomes and is ready to facilitate the conclusion of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but it is important to oppose any hidden agenda aimed at changing internationally recognized borders. “We are in favor of the concept of a unified region, developing the form of neighborliness. Of course, we also agree to the unblocking of regional communications. At the same time, we emphasize the principle of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries, as well as recognizing the sovereignty of the roads passing through their territories. We respect the interests of mutual interest in this region,” said the deputy foreign minister of Iran.

At the same time, he emphasized the need to respect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and jurisdiction of countries. “We believe that the South Caucasus should not become a field of competition for the struggle of foreign forces. In this context, we emphasize opposing any hidden agenda aimed at destabilizing the region and creating grounds for changing internationally recognized borders,” the Iranian diplomat stated. Why is Iran concerned, and why are its reactions so harsh? Tehran believes the proposed Zangezur corridor would hinder its land access to Europe via Armenia and Georgia, a conclusion supported by the map. Iran will not accept any corridor in Armenia that divides the country. Additionally, Iran opposes any corridor under the control of another party, including Russia, as it would make its communications with other nations reliant on a third party. Iran perceives the potential corridor as a threat to its borders and regional influence. The opening of this route would diminish Tehran’s status as a regional superpower and significantly reduce its

transit revenues.

Additionally, Iran is concerned that the corridor would bolster the positions of the EU and NATO near its borders, particularly given Armenia’s close ties with the West and military drills with the US, which Iran carefully monitors with suspicion. Iran’s firm position has obstructed the corridor’s establishment, leaving Yerevan awaiting external players to reach an agreement on its own territory. On September 17, the Russian national security adviser visited Iran to soften Russia’s position on the so-called Zangezur corridor. As mentioned in an official Russian statement, Sergey Shoigu, secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, during negotiations with Ali Akbar Ahmadian, secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, confirmed his support for the Islamic Republic of Iran’s policy on corridors and communication routes with Azerbaijan, reported the Iranian Mehr Agency. It was noted that Shoigu met with Ahmadian in Tehran on September 17 and conveyed a message from Russian President Putin to the Iranian side. “The senior Russian security official arrived in Tehran on the instructions of the Russian president to implement the agreements reached during the visit of the representative of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution and Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ahmadian to Saint Petersburg,” the statement concluded.

Hours later, the response came from Turkey. The head of Turkey’s intelligence service emphasized that a comprehensive peace agreement between Yerevan and Baku is extremely important for ensuring long-term stability in the Caucasus and for the development of communications along the Azerbaijan-Armenia-Nakhchivan [Nakhichevan]-Turkey-Europe route, including the opening of the so-called Zangezur Corridor. We see now that Russia chose not to hurry at this point and did not contradict the Iranian position as Tehran is very determined to push its agenda. We also notice that Turkey is trying hard to push Russia to join the club of Zangezur corridor supporters and to put additional pressure on Armenia to agree on the Baku-Ankara project.

(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.)

## Artsakh Was Certainly Not a Dream nor an Illusion

ARTSAKH, from page 17

Armenia’s second major deficiency relative to Artsakh concerns the diplomatic and international public opinion handling domains. Unfortunately, at this point in time, this actually requires certainly a more refined approach. Indeed, today, the handling of this issue needs a much more serious and subtle handling than it would have needed only a few years back, before Armenia suffered a defeat in the battlefield and where it consistently failed to forcefully defend the legitimate rights of the Artsakh Armenians.

Let’s be fair and realistic. Today, while a defeated Armenia is insistently pursuing the signing of a peace treaty with victorious Azerbaijan and while it appears to have succeeded in securing strong international support in that respect, one can hardly demand and realistically expect that Armenia could and should also demand explicitly from that same Azerbaijan the return of Artsakh to its legitimate Armenian owners.

It certainly could and should have held such a position rather forcefully all along the past thirty years. It certainly could and should have argued its case at that time, without any restriction, as many, including the author of this article urged repeatedly that Artsakh’s right for independence must be justifiably demanded forcefully from international instances, such as the International Court of Justice and the UN Security Council, using Kosovo’s case as a natural and perfectly consistent precedent.

Today, truly nothing has changed, nei-

ther from historic facts which support that Artsakh has been overwhelmingly a multi-millennial Armenian populated land while Azerbaijan did not even exist on the map, nor from the parallel that can be made with Kosovo, and hence its right to be given internationally, a similar treatment. Therefore, the Artsakh Armenians must still immediately be allowed to return to their homeland which must further be given all the privileges of an independent country.

What needs to be subtly restructured are the names of the entities that will undertake the roles played in conducting this legitimate yet most difficult effort.

Whereas the government of Armenia may strategically and at least temporarily have to keep a relatively low profile in this respect, and even perhaps diplomatically may remain mute on this issue, it definitely must, at the same time, actively help Armenians to develop an effective alternate well-structured plan, and quietly help its implementation.

In any case, Armenia never does need to go as far as denying that Artsakh is Armenian. As much as Ararat may be in Turkey, yet it is eternally Armenian, equally, Artsakh may be in Azerbaijan, but it too is eternally Armenian.

To be practical, for the immediate short term, the actual Artsakh rhetoric on the international scene may have to be conducted in a format where Armenian authorities take a back seat. Instead, based on expert legal advice, an “Artsakh Government in Exile (AGE)” or its equivalent, bearing an

appropriate name, must be established and must be given a welcome home in Armenia. The AGE must then officially take ownership of the Artsakh case. The AGE must be given generously broad help comprising all necessary legal, human and financial resources. In addition, and most importantly, this is where the so far badly underused, not to say largely wasted, resource of the Armenian diaspora must be brought into active duty.

It has been frequently pointed out, not the least by the author of this article, that the diaspora, with its geographic immensity and equally vast human and financial resources, has the potential to play a key role in favor of all Armenian issues. The Artsakh revival effort is one specific most invigorating issue that must be started with. However, to accomplish this mission seriously, the diaspora needs to have, over and beyond its existing dispersed and uncoordinated otherwise valuable entities, one well-structured body devoted exclusively to the mission of connecting diaspora organizations and individual contributors to Armenia. This requires a professional and nonpartisan structure seriously supported by both the Armenian government, and all serious diasporan entities. In this respect the revival of the Ministry of the Diaspora in Armenia is an absolute necessity. As its counterpart, this leads me to propose that within such a structure, a “Diaspora Central Committee for Armenia (DCCFA)” must be created with affiliates in all major diasporan Armenian communities to echo

amplify and complement internationally, the work and actions undertaken by the above proposed AGE, the DCCFA and the Ministry of Diaspora. In terms of international diplomatic issues, the greatest advantages of such a diaspora-based structure is obviously its complete independence from any foreign, ally or adversary nation’s self-serving pressures that currently weighs heavily on Armenian authorities.

The discussion of the details of effective structures and the backing financially and in human resources of both the AGE and the DCCFA are outside the scope of this article. It is also obvious that such task is essentially nonpartisan and is expected to be wholeheartedly backed by all Armenian entities within Armenia and the diaspora.

The key question is if we are capable, as Armenian individuals, and more importantly, through our Armenian organizations, whether political, religious, academic, and nonacademic, including rival institutions, to respond willingly and effectively to such a patriotic need. There lies the great challenge that is offered to us to meet.

As I expect this plan to be easily deemed to be too optimistic, as I insist that in fact it is not, I also remind readers that otherwise the next challenge is to advance a better alternative on the occasion of this first sad anniversary of proud Artsakh’s destructive dismantling.

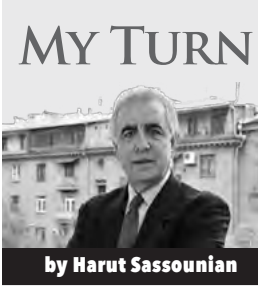
Artsakh was certainly not a dream. To let it now fade in the past is certainly not a permissible option for the Armenian world.

Let us remind ourselves of the days where every Armenian raised their fists defiantly and shouted “Artsakh-e Meren eh.” Has something changed since then?





COMMENTARY



MY TURN  
Pashinyan’s Remarks at  
Diaspora Summit: Wrong Ideas,  
Wrong Timing, Wrong Place

I would like to comment on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s shocking statements at the Global Armenian Summit in Yerevan on September 18, 2024. For an hour and a half Pashinyan answered the moderator’s questions in front of the gathered hundreds of diasporan Armenians from around the world. Before we delve into the substance of Pashinyan’s answers, his basic problem is that he often says whatever comes to his mind at the moment, without giving it much thought.

Pashinyan made three major mistakes: 1) he said very wrong things; 2) he said them to the wrong people (diasporan Armenians); and 3) he picked the most inappropriate time, a few days before the anniversary of Armenia’s Independence, to disparage his own patriotism as well as the patriotism of all Armenians.

Here are excerpts from Pashinyan’s shocking remarks on patriotism: “I will tell you as I tell my family, the biggest problem we had is our patriotism. Moreover, there is no derision, no sarcasm in what I am saying. The biggest problem we had, the biggest problem I had was my patriotism with the perception that this model of patriotism has nothing to do with our homeland. It is simply an imperial model of patriotism, which was introduced into our social psychology through books, films, texts, speeches, heroes, characters, names and images.”

Pashinyan illogically told the audience that “this model of patriotism is aimed at excluding the existence of an independent and sovereign state.... But, this model of patriotism is so that we should not have a homeland, but only love it in theory, have a theoretical Armenia and love it, hanging it on the wall, in toasts, on cakes, but not on the ground, which is what happened to us in the last several hundred years.”

Thereafter, Pashinyan blamed Armenians and ‘others’: “I’m talking so much about a garrison. I understand that many people think I have in mind that others have turned us into a garrison. No, we have turned ourselves into a garrison. We have turned the Republic of Armenia into a garrison by believing that this is not a country which has to secure the well-being of its citizens, but rather a base through which we should reach other goals.... Others saw that there is a lot of fertile ground and planted seeds to reap the fruits necessary for them .... For our own good, we must recognize the destructive aspect of our patriotism. It would have been in the best interests of the Republic of Armenia if I were not a patriot. That is the greatest harm I have caused – the love I have given to my country and my people.... However, the main problem is that neither you nor I are the creators of that love. That is an imperial love, shaped by the empire, instilled in us,” Pashinyan said.

Pashinyan then falsely attributed Armenians’ efforts to commemorate the Armenian Genocide to manipulations by the Soviet Union, ‘allowing’ Soviet Armenia to commemorate the Armenian Genocide, in order to counter Turkey and NATO. He wrongly claimed that the Soviet Union allowed the Geno-

cide Monument to be built in Yerevan at a time when the Soviet Union and the United States were on the verge of a nuclear war. Thus, he denigrated the Armenian Genocide by shamefully describing it as a tool for Soviet propaganda.

Most of what Pashinyan said was wrong, disrespectful and anti-Armenian. Pashinyan made these statements in front of the hundreds of patriotic Armenians who had come all the way to Yerevan from around the world to show their support for the homeland, only to be told that patriotism is a ‘destructive’ and foreign-inspired concept. His words were also ill-timed coming just days before the 33rd Anniversary of Armenia’s Independence. This is the deliberate policy of the Pashinyan regime to create a split between Armenia and the Diaspora, and divide Armenia’s population into supporters of the former and current leaders.

During the same interview, Pashinyan made another erroneous and highly inappropriate remark, criticizing and dismissing the humanitarian aid sent by the diaspora, in front of the gathered hundreds of Armenians from around the world.

He said: “I would like very much that Armenia stop being an object of compassion – to get out of that situation. Of course, I don’t know if – it is not always that my instructions are correctly implemented – for example, I have forbidden – I don’t know how much they are implementing it – that they [the diaspora] send whatever used clothing, whatever used cars, I don’t know, send half worn out tires, send half worn out shoes for state institutions, I don’t know, for orphanages. Pardon me, but the Republic of Armenia is in a position to provide the minimum for institutions falling under its responsibility. In other words, from the perception of sending used things to Armenia, and then for months to publicize that – I don’t know – so much medicine has been sent which has a one-week expiration date. I am not happy with that. I am in conflict with that perception of the Republic of Armenia. The Republic of Armenia is a sovereign state which has complexities [difficulties]. But, pardon me, which country does not have complexities?”

Pashinyan’s disparaging remarks about the aid sent to Armenia by the diaspora are deeply insulting. He should not talk about things he knows nothing about. I am the president of Armenia Artsakh Fund which has sent to Armenia in the past 35 years over one billion dollars of aid, mostly medicines. We strictly follow all Armenian laws and procedures. No one can send to Armenia medicines that expire in one week. Donors need to obtain in advance an import license from the Ministry of Health which requires that all medicines have a minimum of one year expiration date. Otherwise, they are confiscated and destroyed by customs officers.

Instead of criticizing the diaspora’s aid, the Armenian government should issue a list of priority items that the population needs and encourage the potential donors to send those items. Pashinyan is acting as if he is the prime minister of a wealthy country with a population that needs nothing. Regrettably, that is not the case. Instead of disparaging the aid sent by the diaspora, the Armenian government should express its gratitude to all donors and encourage them to do more.

The prime minister’s false statements about patriotism and humanitarian aid left many in the audience in shock. Pashinyan does not seem to realize that his words have consequences on Armenia and Armenians. He is no longer an irresponsible street protester who can say anything that comes to his mind.

Is COP29  
Berlin 1936?

By Michael Rubin  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Next month, dozens of heads of state, hundreds of diplomats, and thousands of activists will gather in Baku, Azerbaijan for the 29<sup>th</sup> annual UN climate change conference. The UN rotates hosts on a geographical basis. This year, both Armenia and Azerbaijan sought the honor. Rather than ostracize Baku for its ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Biden administration urged Armenia to drop its bid. President Ilham Aliyev freed a few Armenian hostages and prisoners of war, but not all. Keeping Azerbaijan happy, the White House and State Department logic went, might encourage Aliyev to be flexible in peace talks.

This was naïve. Across both Democratic and Republican administrations, diplomats have a tendency to view motivation for terrorism and aggression through the lens of grievance rather than ideology. This in turn leads diplomats to base strategy on concessions. If the root of Aliyev’s dispute with Armenia was Nagorno-Karabakh, then that Armenian territory’s return to Azerbaijani control should bring peace. Peace was never Aliyev’s objective, though, and so he cites an ever-growing list of grievances as excuses for his hostility. Today it might be return of exclaves; tomorrow it could be Armenian embrace of Ararat as a symbol. The State Department then beseeches Yerevan to concede to deny Aliyev any excuse for in-

transigence. The problem is such disputes were never the problem; Aliyev’s ideology is. He harbors deep-seeded racism toward Armenians; he rejects Armenian cultural, religious and political legitimacy in its entirety.

This is why allowing Aliyev to preside over COP29 is a mistake. Rather than advance peace, the festivities instead normalize and launder the regime. This should not surprise. Often, those who accept the logic of sporting

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diplomacy point to the 1936 Berlin Olympics to show its potential. By winning four gold medals in the heart of Berlin, they say African American runner Jesse Owens discredited Nazis on their home turf. Owens’ triumph may have represented a temporary embarrassment, but not a significant one. Owens’ gold medals did not discredit Hitler’s Aryan supremacism in German eyes; the Holocaust still happened. Hosting an international sporting event simply legitimized Hitler’s rule on the world stage.

Many hope that Azerbaijan’s selection as host could be a Pyrrhic victory; after all, Azerbaijan will not fare well if the international spotlight is upon its record. This is wish-

ful thinking. In 2012, Azerbaijan hosted Eurovision; rather than advance human rights and democracy, the event convinced Aliyev the world would not hold him accountable for repression. Despotism deepened. Corruption increased. Likewise, after Qatar won the right to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, labor activists critical of Qatar’s migrant worker record sought to transform the spotlight to force the Persian Gulf state to adhere to international norms. The benefits Qatar derived as host more than offset criticism in a few British and American publications.

While some foreign officials like Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo refuse to allow themselves to be a backdrop for Azerbaijani propaganda and so will boycott, many other officials convince themselves that the environment and climate change are too important and so will share the stage with Aliyev. This need not be a bad thing, especially if they use it to force Aliyev to address his own record. American diplomats, for example, might wear wristbands with the names of Armenian hostage. Rather than participate in staged tours for Baku to trot out Azerbaijani Jews or Christians as museum exhibits on behalf of the Azerbaijani regime, they might instead insist on a visit to Ruben Vardanyan, the former state minister of Artsakh, or any of the hundreds of Azerbaijani political prisoners who languish in Aliyev’s prisons.

To participate in the festivities absent sustained advocacy risks transforming COP29 into a new Berlin 1936. Nazi Germany’s worst aggression, of course, followed the Berlin Olympics. The question now is whether Aliyev too may leverage the legitimacy he hopes to derive from COP29 into outright aggression after his VIP visitors return home.

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





# Travelling with Cardinal Agagianian, ‘Apostle to the World’

By Dr. Cara Aghajanian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

This week marked seminal events for the Armenian community, Lebanon, and the world. As part of his cause for canonization, the mortal remains of Servant of God Cardinal Gregorio Pietro XV Agagianian (Կարտինալ Գրիգոր Պետրոս ԺԵ Աղաճանեան) were transferred from his tomb in Rome to his newly dedicated chapel in the Armenian Catholic Cathedral of St. Elias and St. Gregory in Beirut. The preparations for this solemn event were surrounded by a sense of profound joy and love. In his many travels representing the Holy Father around the globe, Cardinal Agagianian was met with crowds from all faiths and all walks of life. However, I think even he would be surprised by the crowds that greeted him on his return to Lebanon.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, in a quiet ceremony, he began his trip back to Beirut. As we left the church in Rome and made our way to the airport, I found myself thinking of his first trip from his home in Akhaltsikhe [today in Georgia], to Rome at the age of 11. I think of the many emotions both for him and his mother. At that moment, they could have never imagined the places he would see, the events he would influence, or the lives he would change. I could not help but think how he is still influencing the world.

As a child, I often heard about Cardinal Agagianian. However, it’s only as I became an adult that I really understood who he was and what his impact was on the world. So, “who was Cardinal Agagianian?” He was truly multifaceted. He was a devoted follower of Christ whose mission was to spread the Gospel and Christ’s love around the world. As a devoted priest, he cared for his Armenian people during some



Carrying the mortal remains of Cardinal Agagianian in Beirut, September 12

cardinal he participated in two papal conclaves, 1958 and in 1963. His intellect and spirituality were recognized and led him to key roles in the Church.

A pivotal moment was his appointment in 1958 as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. This role gave him the responsibility for all Catholic missionary work and related activities. For him, it was more than an administrative role. He actively went out to the missionary areas in some of, what was then, the most

baptized brothers among whom you live. Religious doctrines, beliefs, traditions, and habits separate us, but an essential value unites us: that we are all, without exception, creatures of God and linked to each other by the closest brotherhood. In the great human family, no one is isolated and abandoned to himself.”

This “respectful greeting” and “signs of affectionate brotherhood” was tangibly evident on his arrival in Beirut on the afternoon of September 12. Accompanied from Rome by the current Armenian Catholic Patriarch of Cilicia, Raphael Bedros XXI Minassian, his mortal remains were met at the airport in Beirut with full state honors. When his body arrived in Beirut’s Martyr’s Square, he was greeted by a crowd of over

4,000 people. His casket was carried in procession by 12 Lebanese men from different religious groups as a symbol of interfaith unity. This joyous ceremony brought together people from many faiths, cultures, and walks of life. It gave a glimpse of unity that can transcend differences.

While the ceremony may be over, the spark is lit. As we go forward, may his life and works continue to be an inspiration to work for unity and respect in all of our interactions and relationships as well as a reminder of the joy and hope of the Gospel.

(Dr. Cara Aghajanian is the Director of Language Testing, Technology, and FAO programs at the Defense Language and National Security Education Office.)



Tomb in Rome



The new tomb in Beirut

of the most tragic moments in our history. Going beyond our community, he brought this love and dedication to the whole world through his many travels representing the Holy Father. He was multilingual with a sharp intellect, able to enliven the teachings of the Church. He was a person with whom anyone, regardless of faith or social status, could relate to and seek advice. In such a chaotic world, we could learn from his example of bringing people together to build a common peace.

Cardinal Agagianian was not only a pastor for the Armenian Church, but for the wider Catholic Church. He was ordained a priest in 1917. After serving in his home parishes, he returned to Rome and in 1921 became assistant rector of the Pontifical Armenian College in Rome. He was made rector in 1932. In 1937 he was elected as Patriarch of the Armenian Catholic Church. In 1946 he was made a Cardinal, one of only two Armenians in history. As a

remote areas of the world. In a time when the Pope did not travel, he represented the Pope around the world.

Cardinal Agagianian went beyond the island of our community into the open, often uncharted waters of the bigger Catholic Church, and the world. Yet he carried our island with him. He maintained his spiritual and cultural identity while adding to it. He exemplified the beauty of our multifaceted church. His direct understanding of the suffering of the Armenian people gave him a spiritual and social reference for understanding ethnic and religious conflicts. His faith and love were evident in his words and actions.

In a letter to the missions he once wrote, “You are the Church of hope: ignited and alive not by the strength of numbers, but by the favor of charity and for the joy of bearing witness to the Gospel among all men. Bring our respectful greeting and signs of our affectionate brotherhood to all the un-

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