

Turkey Bids to Join BRICS in Push to Build Alliances Beyond West

By Selcan Hacaoglu and Firat Kozok

ISTANBUL (Bloomberg) — Turkey has formally asked to join the BRICS group of emerging-market nations as it seeks to bolster its global influence and forge new ties beyond its traditional Western allies, according to people familiar with the matter.

The view of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s administration is that the geopolitical center of gravity is shifting away from developed economies, according to the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they aren’t authorized to comment.

The country’s new diplomatic push reflects its aspirations to cultivate ties with all sides in a multipolar world, while still fulfilling its obligations as a key member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), they said.

Straddling Europe and Asia, Turkey submitted an application to join BRICS some months ago amid frustration over a lack of progress in its decades-old bid to join the European Union, the people added. The bid is also partly a result of rifts with fellow NATO members after Turkey maintained close links with Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the people added. Turkey’s foreign ministry and presidency declined to comment.

“Turkey can become a strong, prosperous, prestigious and effective country if it improves its relations with the East and the West simultaneously,” Erdogan said in Istanbul over the weekend. “Any method other than this will not benefit Turkey, but will harm it.” see BRICS, page 6

Armenian Defense Minister Visits Georgia

TBILISI (Public Radio of Armenia) — On an official visit to Georgia on September 2, Armenia Defense Minister Suren Papikyan met with the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze.

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Armenia Defense Minister Suren Papikyan met with the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze

Baku Seeks More Armenian Concessions

By Nane Sahakian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Azerbaijan’s leadership has essentially rejected Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s offer to sign soon a framework peace deal and demanded more concessions from Yerevan.

A senior Azerbaijani official indicated that Armenia must not only change its constitution but also downsize its armed forces.

Pashinyan said on Saturday, August 31, that the two countries already fully agree on 13 of the 17 articles of a draft peace treaty they discussed.

“We propose to sign and ratify what has been agreed at this point and to continue discussing all remaining issues,” he told reporters. He said the agreed provisions cover “all basic principles of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said on Monday, September 2, that Baku received fresh peace proposals



Prime Minister Pashinyan at news conference in Yerevan, August 31, 2024.

from Yerevan reflecting Pashinyan’s offer just hours before the Armenian premier met the press.

“Several important points were left out of the text presented by them,” Azerbaijani news agencies quoted Bayramov as

saying. “Their draft treaty does not include important provisions and we were told that this is the problem’s solution [proposed by Yerevan.] In the context of the past historical conflict, every provision of the peace treaty is very important. Our advice to the Armenian side is to approach these issues more seriously.”

Bayramov as well as Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s top foreign policy aide, Hikmet Hajiyev, reiterated Baku’s demands for a change of Armenia’s constitution which they say contains territorial claims to Azerbaijan.

“Until this changes, we will see serious problems in negotiating a peace treaty between the two states,” Hajiyev told reporters on Sunday. He dismissed Pashinyan’s assertion that it see CONCESSIONS, page 4

Armenian-Azeri Border Agreement Publicized

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The delimitation and demarcation of Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan will not necessarily be based on a 1991 declaration championed by Yerevan, according to a new agreement signed by the two countries on Friday, August 30, and publicized on Monday,

September 2.

The agreement involves “regulations” for joint activities of their respective commissions dealing with the border delimitation process. It does not specify which maps, if any, will be used by the two sides. It only refers to the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration in see AGREEMENT, page 5

‘We Couldn’t Work Properly’

How Azerbaijan Obstructed Red Cross Relief During the Nagorno-Karabakh Siege

By Rasmus Canbäck

In February 2023, Ani Mangasaryan was watching her city die. She was terrified that her baby would die with it.

Nagorno-Karabakh, an isolated and contested region deep in Azerbaijani territory, was still in Armenian hands. But it had been under blockade for several months. Meat and fresh produce had vanished from the shelves in the capital city, Stepanakert. In the corridor of the children’s hospital, Mangasaryan’s son lay feverish with a lung infection.

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A protest at the ICRC office in Stepanakert during the blockade. Locals in Nagorno-Karabakh saw the organization as a representative of the outside world and sought to draw attention to their plight (Credit: Edin Pašović/OCCRP)

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The Art and Architecture Of Nishan Kazazian

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenian Shooters Win 3 Medals in Europe

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian shooters on September 3 won 3 medals at the 50 meters event of the European Running Target Championships. Gohar Harutyunyan, Lilit Mkrtychyan, Arusyak Grigoryan scored 1658 points in the women's team competition of 50 meters event, won silver.

Gor Khachatryan won the bronze medal in the individual youth competition with 568 points.

Mari Ghazaryan, Anahit Sargsyan and Aida Azatyan, also taking part in the youth team competition, won bronze with a score of 1495 points.

Echmiadzin Re-Consecrated on Sept. 29

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The historic Cathedral of Echmiadzin will be re-consecrated on September 29, according to the press service of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, the governing body of the Armenian Apostolic Church headquartered around the Cathedral in the town of Vagharshapat.

The day before, the ceremony of the blessing of Holy Muron will take place at the St. Trdat Open Altar of the church. The decision regarding both events was made on August 29, at the meeting of the Coordinating Committee chaired by Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II.

3,000 Karabakh Residents Granted Armenian Citizenship

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — More than 4,300 people forcibly displaced from Nagorno Karabakh applied for citizenship of the Republic of Armenia, of which about 3,000 were granted citizenship, the head of the Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Armen Ghazaryan, said at a session of the National Assembly on September 3.

“As of the 30th of the month, we have applications for citizenship of more than 4,300 people forcibly displaced from Karabakh. About 3,000 people have already been granted RA citizenship by the decree of the president of the republic. An important consideration should be taken into account here: minors do not apply for citizenship, because after granting citizenship to their parents, the minor becomes a citizen of the Republic of Armenia by changing the passport,” said Ghazaryan.

According to Ghazaryan, a simplified procedure is already in place for people forcibly displaced.

“According to the law on citizenship, 90 working days are defined, which is about four months, but in the case of people forcibly displaced from Nagorno Karabakh, the process lasts two months on average. The second circumstance ... is the first time we are using it: all our territorial divisions in marzes [provinces] are accepting applications for citizenship. And it significantly speeds up the process,” concluded Ghazaryan.

How Azerbaijan Obstructed Red Cross

RED CROSS, from page 1

“My child should really be in the intensive care unit, but there's no space,” she told a reporter present at the scene, pacing nervously back and forth. She paused only to press her hand against the baby's hot forehead.

The doctors were feeling desperate as well. “We've had to cancel four operations so far,” said pediatric surgeon Mari Grigoryan, rushing between overcrowded wards. “These children are suffering greatly.”

There was occasional relief. The hospital had just managed to evacuate an ailing four-month-old infant to Armenia with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) — virtually the only humanitarian organization still able to move supplies into Nagorno-Karabakh, or get people out.

But Grigoryan said it wasn't nearly enough. “The Red Cross's humanitarian aid is good. But it only covers a fraction of our needs,” she said.

The blockade would drag on for another seven months before a lightning Azerbaijani invasion in September 2023 sent Nagorno-Karabakh's entire population of more than 100,000 fleeing along a single mountain road.

The Azerbaijani government, whose claim to Nagorno-Karabakh is recognized by international law, insisted on its right to assume control of sovereign territory. It also defended its humanitarian record, saying it upheld the safety and dignity of civilians throughout the nine-month blockade and did not force anyone out.

The privations faced by Nagorno-Karabakh's people during the blockade were covered at the time by local and international media, but there has been less reporting on the challenges faced by humanitarian workers trying to help them.

Now, drawing on interviews, data about ICRC convoys provided by inside sources, and weeks of on-the-ground reporting, OCCRP has pieced together the most complete picture yet of how Azerbaijan impeded the work of one of the only international organizations that was providing life-saving humanitarian support on the ground.

For months, securing a spot on one of the ICRC's convoys of white Toyota Land Cruisers was the only hope for anyone in Nagorno-Karabakh to get out and receive advanced medical care. But while Azerbaijan was bound by the International Court of Justice in the Hague to ensure “unimpeded movement” along the enclave's only road to Armenia, OCCRP's reporting shows that, in practice, it severely limited the ICRC's ability to operate.

The ICRC convoys carried about 1,500 people, including more than 800 medical patients, out of Nagorno-Karabakh during the blockade. According to the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, the need was far greater. A former coordinator at the enclave's Ministry of Health told reporters that more than double that number of patients needed to be evacuated, but no room could be found.

This claim could not be independently verified. But convoy passenger data obtained by reporters suggests that the organization could have evacuated more people. It shows that its transfers sometimes stopped entirely, at one point halting for nearly a month.

A former senior ICRC employee said the process grew increasingly fraught as Azerbaijani authorities threw up more and more obstacles.

“Each next convoy was harder, harder, harder,” said the employee, who was directly involved in the organization's transports.

“They put pressure, starting from minor things on the spot, up to big things at the Azerbaijani [Foreign Ministry],” they explained, describing bureaucratic and logistical challenges, behind-the-scenes disputes about minor details, and outright bans on movement. “We couldn't work properly.”

The ICRC employee is not identified in this story because they had not been authorized to share politically sensitive information. However, reporters corroborated their account using the convoy data, statements from other ICRC and government officials, interviews with locals, and local news reports from that period.

OCCRP's reporting also highlights a substantial breach in the International Red Cross movement over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: A local branch, the Azerbaijani Red Crescent, publicly opposed the ICRC's work in the territory.

Though mandated to honor the official Red Cross principles, including neutrality, impartiality, and unity, Azerbaijan Red Crescent officials repeatedly embraced Azerbaijani government narratives, publicly questioned the suffering of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians, and challenged the authority of the ICRC mission.

How the Red Cross Works

What is commonly referred to as the “Red Cross” is actually a broader movement. It is led by two separate organizations, both based in Geneva: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which is an umbrella group for 192 national-level humanitarian aid groups, including the Azerbaijani Red Crescent. (“Red Cross” is the name used in traditionally Christian societies; “Red Crescent” is used in Muslim countries.)

In practice, national Red Cross or Red Crescent groups are sometimes unable to gain access to disputed or dangerous areas, or may be unable to work there. In such cases, life-saving humanitarian aid is provided by the ICRC, which specializes in conflict zones and is widely recognized as impartial and authoritative.

Both the ICRC and the IFRC are rooted in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, which has its origins in the 1864 Geneva Convention, a seminal international treaty governing the laws of war.

The movement's mandate — to provide humanitarian aid to all, regardless of origin or party to conflict — is safeguarded by its dedication to a set of fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. These empower its participants to operate in areas inaccessible to other humanitarian groups.

This is also the case in Nagorno-Karabakh. For decades, the ICRC was the only international humanitarian organization with an on-the-ground presence there.

The Azerbaijani Red Crescent is deeply enmeshed with the authoritarian regime of President Ilham Aliyev, who in more than 20 years of rule has left Azerbaijan near the bottom of human rights and democracy rankings. But the organization has never faced serious scrutiny of the kind undergone by its equivalents in countries like Belarus, where the local Red Cross's membership in the IFRC was suspended last year after it was found to have violated the movement's fundamental principles.

Melanie O'Brien, an expert in international humanitarian law and an associate professor at the University of Western Australia's School of Law, reviewed reporters'

findings. She said that, as a signatory of the Geneva Conventions, Azerbaijan was obligated to allow the ICRC to do its work unhindered.

“All parties have agreed to the ICRC's presence in Nagorno-Karabakh, and therefore it is concerning that a state was hindering their work,” she said.

Of the actions taken by the Azerbaijani Red Crescent, she added: “Based on the information I have seen, and if it is true, these are very serious alleged violations of the [Red Cross movement's] fundamental principles.”

In response to requests for comment, both the ICRC and IFRC provided statements that stressed the importance of the Red Cross movement's fundamental principles and the urgency of the work.

Neither criticized the Azerbaijani government, with the ICRC noting that the organization's commitment to “reaching vulnerable people” in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict meant “working with relevant authorities to gain access to people who needed humanitarian assistance, including medical evacuations.”

“The diplomacy and coordination it takes to reach people affected by conflict is done through bilateral dialogue,” the ICRC statement continued. “Years of practice have shown us this is the most effective way to carry out our work.”

Neither the ICRC nor the IFRC directly addressed the question of whether the Azerbaijani Red Crescent had violated the Red Cross movement's principles.

“The ICRC and the [IFRC] take alleged violations of the fundamental principles very seriously,” the ICRC wrote. “The IFRC works directly with its members, the national societies, to address issues or take further measures as necessary in close coordination with the ICRC.”

The IFRC wrote that it had “engaged in a dialogue with the Azerbaijani Red Crescent Society at a high leadership level, in a fast-changing political landscape.”

“Neutrality is critical in every context, even more so during a conflict,” the IFRC said. “Every National Red Cross Red Crescent Society needs to follow the Fundamental Principles and refrain from engaging in controversies of political nature.”

The Azerbaijani presidential administration and foreign ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The head of the Azerbaijani Red Crescent, Novruz Aslanov, did not respond to requests sent through the organization's public email addresses and through his assistant.

The Stage for a Tragedy

In Azerbaijani and other regional languages, Karabakh means “Black Garden” — an appropriate name for this highly-contested southern stretch of the Caucasus Mountains, its valleys dotted with lush forests and rivers.

Though historically home to Armenians, the territory was awarded to Azerbaijan by Joseph Stalin after both countries fell under Soviet rule. The conflict was thus tamped down for 70 years, only to erupt anew as they regained their independence.

In the First Nagorno-Karabakh War of the 1990s, hundreds of thousands were displaced and many killed on both sides. But Armenian forces won a decisive victory, resulting in a self-governing Armenian state on territory that was internationally recognized as Azerbaijani. This contradictory situation became the subject of prolonged peace negotiations under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In the end, the talks proved futile. President Aliyev, having fortified his military



ARMENIA

Relief During the 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh Siege

with drones, heavy artillery, and advanced technology purchased on the back of brisk oil sales, launched an offensive in 2020 that easily brushed aside Armenian defenses. His forces reclaimed most of Nagorno-Karabakh's territory, including its historic second city.

What remained in Armenian hands was an isolated enclave centered around Stepanakert (known in Azeri as Khankendi), its population fed and supplied by a single active road that wound its way through the mountains. This tenuous lifeline, known as the Lachin Corridor, was guarded by Russian peacekeepers who often seemed to defer to Azerbaijani demands.

The situation persisted for the next two years, during which the Red Cross's humanitarian efforts grew in scale and complexity. The annual budget of the ICRC's longstanding Nagorno-Karabakh mission more than quadrupled, to around \$48 million. By 2023, it had as many as 75 employees in the territory and hundreds more outside of it, handling everything from mine clearance to prisoner exchanges. But the biggest challenge was yet to come.

The Noose Tightens

In December 2022, Azerbaijan allowed a group of government-backed environmental activists to impose a blockade of the Lachin Corridor, ostensibly to protest damage wrought by ore mining on the territory. For the first time, Nagorno-Karabakh was almost completely sealed off from the outside world.

Facing new geopolitical challenges in the South Caucasus after its invasion of Ukraine, and perhaps unwilling to manage another hotspot, Moscow did not order its peacekeepers to remove the blockade. And though the peacekeepers continued to deliver food, at least for a time, it wasn't nearly enough.

The situation was especially dire for the ill. As hospital supplies dried up, the ICRC organized humanitarian convoys to evacuate the neediest patients to Armenia along the Lachin Corridor.

Azerbaijan's responsibility to keep this path open was enshrined in a February ruling by the International Court of Justice in the Hague, which was reaffirmed a few months later. But though the court decisions instructed Azerbaijan to ensure "unimpeded movement ... in both directions," in practice the ICRC's capacity to transport patients fell far short of demand.

"We applied to the ICRC for his transfer," one Stepanakert resident told the human rights watchdog Freedom House, explaining that a family member with a stomach tumor needed immediate evacuation. "There were many patients waiting. ... He died before his turn came."

Reporters obtained data about how many people the ICRC's convoys were able to evacuate on a day-to-day basis, which the organization had shared with the Nagorno-Karabakh government.

The data shows the transfers sometimes halted entirely. These periods correspond to the episodes of heightened Azerbaijani pressure described by the ICRC employee.

In late April, for example, the ICRC convoys were halted for five days while an official Azerbaijani checkpoint was built on the Hakari Bridge, at the Armenian end of the Lachin Corridor. The environmental activists were replaced by border guards.

After another week, the transports stopped again — this time for nearly a month — as Azerbaijan made new demands, including requiring advance copies of the passports of every passenger who would ride in a Red Cross medical convoy.

On June 15, after a clash between Azerbaijani soldiers and Armenian border guards on the bridge, Azerbaijan closed off the route for everyone.

The closure threatened the existence of the corridor itself. While ICRC transports were allowed to resume a few days later, regular Russian food deliveries never again reached Nagorno-Karabakh. Even the peacekeepers had to use helicopters to keep themselves supplied.

The ICRC did its best to step up and deliver at least some aid, the organization's employee said. But the mission had only a few trucks it could use, and these were not generally allowed to carry fuel into Nagorno-Karabakh, even for the ICRC's own needs. The organization resorted to bringing in fuel "discreetly," without the Azerbaijanis' permission.

"We shared 1,000-1,500 liters with the ambulance service of Stepanakert, and they shared with the regions [outside the city]," the employee said. "Sometimes we donated fuel to the hospital because there was a blackout, and they needed to run a generator." (This account was confirmed by hospital employees.)

As the situation deteriorated, the ICRC hired commercial trucks to try to bring in additional supplies. But some of the drivers were caught smuggling cigarettes and other goods to be sold for their own personal profit, prompting Azerbaijan to crack down. "Every day they [were] accusing the ICRC that we are smugglers," the employee said. The commercial trucking scheme was abandoned.

Seven months into the siege, at the end of July, the ICRC issued a rare public statement declaring that it was no longer able to bring in any supplies at all. The text was careful to assign no blame, addressing only "the relevant decision-makers" in its request to "allow the ICRC to resume its essential humanitarian operations."

"It takes a lot for the ICRC to speak out publicly," said O'Brien, the humanitarian law expert. "They won't do it unless the situation has come to an impasse."

As essential inbound supplies ground to a halt, emergency evacuations also faced growing challenges. Just days after the ICRC statement, a 68-year-old patient on a medical convoy was arrested by Azerbaijani officials for allegedly committing war crimes during the 1990s war. The incident prompted the ICRC to repeat its plea for "all concerned decision-makers to respect its strictly humanitarian mission."

"Oh, it was a nightmare," the ICRC employee said. "At that point, we couldn't guarantee that [passengers] would pass the Hakari Bridge freely." Many men who were fighting age or had served in the 1990s war became afraid to use the route; from then on the convoys carried mostly women and children.

An 'Internal Question'

Around this time, Baku began to make new demands. Instead of the Lachin Corridor, the Azerbaijani government said, the blockaded territory should be supplied via another route that linked Nagorno-Karabakh not to Armenia, but to the Azerbaijani city of Aghdam.

This proposition, frequently aired in public, was also insistently made to the ICRC mission in private, the ICRC employee said. But for many in Nagorno-Karabakh, the idea was unacceptable because it would seem to legitimize the Azerbaijanis' campaign to "integrate" them into Azerbaijan — and cut off their last link with Armenia.

"If the Aghdam road is open ... but the Lachin Corridor remains closed, we are still

in a cage like zoo animals & they just decided to feed us," tweeted Marut Vanyan, a journalist writing from besieged Stepanakert. (Vanyan also contributed reporting to this story.)

The ICRC argued that the Lachin road, and its vital lifeline to Armenia, be kept open. It was then, the employee said, that Azerbaijani officials began to question the organization's presence entirely. ICRC colleagues in Baku were told that the crisis was an "internal question of Azerbaijan," and that there was a local group perfectly placed to deal with it: the Azerbaijan Red Crescent.

These private discussions could not be independently confirmed, and the Azerbaijani Red Crescent did not respond to a request for comment. But in the last weeks of August, Red Crescent officials themselves made similar arguments in public.

"If the ICRC is having problems carrying out its mission, we're always ready to help," said the group's chairman Novruz Aslanov in a lengthy interview with a state media outlet.

He went on to cast doubt on the severity of the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"The Armenians are indicating where they want their humanitarian cargo from, and from what direction it should come," he continued. "It's strange for people whose children and old people are supposedly dying of hunger, isn't it?"

In an official statement made the same week, the Red Crescent went further. "Humanitarian operations in the area where Russian peacekeepers are temporarily based [are] not within the jurisdiction of ICRC," the statement read, using a formulaic description that emphasized Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the territory. "These operations are under the responsibility of the Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society."

In effect, the Red Crescent was claiming that the ICRC — which had been working in Nagorno-Karabakh for decades, on a mandate agreed by all sides — had no right to be there since the territory unquestionably belonged to Azerbaijan.

Moreover, the statement went on to claim that there was "no 'humanitarian crisis' in the region."

Reality on the ground suggested otherwise. That same week, Vanyan, the local journalist, had tweeted that kindergartens in Stepanakert were closing for lack of food. His photos from those last days of August also documented a pharmacy with empty shelves and a bread line that had stretched so long into the night that people were laying on the ground to rest.

Meanwhile, even as the ICRC continued to negotiate with the Azerbaijanis over resuming humanitarian deliveries along the Lachin Corridor, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent organized a protest by the Aghdam road, demanding access for itself.

The protest was joined by Hikmet Hajiyev, President Aliyev's foreign policy adviser, who tweeted from the scene that the Armenian government in Nagorno-Karabakh was an "illegal regime [that] must be dissolved and disarmed."

On September 8, Hajiyev told Reuters that Azerbaijan would open the Lachin Corridor for ICRC food shipments — but only if the Azerbaijan Red Crescent was also allowed entry through Aghdam.

'How to Write History in 24 Hours'

Less than two weeks later, the argument became irrelevant.

Azerbaijani troops invaded Nagorno-Karabakh on September 19, prompting nearly the entire Armenian population of the enclave to flee to Armenia along the

Lachin Corridor. Dozens of people, exhausted by months of hunger, were reported to have died during the miserable 30-hour journey. The last outpost of an ancient Armenian community was no more.

But Red Crescent officials' public statements evinced little concern for the humanitarian crisis. Instead, they celebrated their government's actions.

On September 21, the organization's head Aslanov tweeted a tribute to Ilham Aliyev — a fake book cover emblazoned with an image of the leader, with text superimposed over his body: "How To Write History in 24 Hours."

The next day, Aslanov posted a photo of a Red Crescent convoy in Nagorno-Karabakh. "Our honorable mission is completed," he wrote.

This wasn't the first time the Azerbaijan Red Crescent has advanced Azerbaijani government narratives.

When Ilham Aliyev became president in 2003, a title he inherited from his deceased father Heydar Aliyev, the organization awarded him the first honorary medal it has ever issued.

Since then, Azerbaijan has lost ground in nearly all measures of democracy, its prisons periodically filling with dissidents and journalists and its elections turned into coronations for Aliyev and his allies. According to researchers from Freedom House, Azerbaijan now surpasses Belarus as Europe's most repressive state.

Through it all, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent has stuck by the government's side.

Aslanov, the organization's president since 1999, is ostensibly an independent member of parliament. But in Azerbaijan, such distinctions don't mean much. Last December, he openly urged voters to support Aliyev in an upcoming presidential election.

So did the Red Crescent's secretary-general, Jeyhun Mirzayev.

"Ilham Aliyev, the national leader who led Azerbaijan from victory to victory, deserves to win the election more than anyone else; this is his full right," Mirzayev said at the organization's official annual assembly, which took place the same month.

At the event, Red Crescent members formally voted to endorse Aliyev's reelection — a decision state media reported as being unanimous.

"The connections with the government, that's in violation of how the Red Cross works. It's in violation of independence," said O'Brien. "It's hugely problematic."

Melanie O'Brien described several other Red Cross principles that appear to have been violated by the Azerbaijan Red Crescent.

"Impartiality means that the Red Cross doesn't take sides politically. So they don't discriminate based on any reason, such as nationality, religious beliefs, or political opinions."

"Neutrality is not taking a side on hostilities, and not engaging in controversies. They are neutral, and they need to engage with all sides of the conflict to try to get all sides to the conflict to comply with international humanitarian law. That's their job."

"Unity means that all Red Cross Societies should work together. ... The ICRC has a specific mandate under the Geneva Conventions to operate in conflicts. The task of the national societies ... is to support the ICRC in this regard, not to replace the ICRC."

(This article originally appeared on the website www.occrp.org, the site for the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, on August 29. Marut Vanyan contributed reporting.)



ARMENIA

Family of Woman Killed By Pashinyan's Motorcade Again Cries Foul

By Narine Ghalechian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The father of a pregnant woman who died in April 2022 after being hit by a police car escorting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's motorcade accused authorities on August 30 of dragging out the trial of the car's driver.

Mnatsakan Mnatsakanyan again alleged a cover-up of the accident that shocked many in Armenia.

Mnatsakanyan's 29-year-old daughter Sona was struck by the police SUV while crossing a street in central Yerevan. The vehicle did not stop after the collision. Its driver, police Major Aram Navasardyan, was arrested twice by investigators but freed by courts despite being charged with reckless driving and negligence. The Armenian police did not fire or even suspend him.

Navasardyan continued to deny the accusations when he went on trial in November 2022. His lawyers blamed the young woman for her death.

The lawyers failed to attend the latest court hearing in the case scheduled for Thursday, forcing the presiding judge to adjourn it. Mnatsakan Mnatsakanyan decried their absence, saying that it is part of

a deliberate delay tactics. He claimed that they want the judicial proceedings to drag on until the statute of limitations for the crime attributed to Navasardyan expires in 2027.

"In other cases that involve issues connected with the prime minister [suspects] are punished very quickly," he told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

One of the defense lawyers, Ruben Baloyan, rejected the claim as "absurd." He said they did not show up on Thursday because they represented another client in a murder case heard by an appeals court.

Sona Mnatsakanyan's parents have also been very critical of the pre-trial criminal investigation into her death. In particular, they have pointed to the investigators' failure to prosecute any members of Pashinyan's security detail or another policeman who was supposed to block pedestrians' access to the street section where the police vehicle ran over Sona.

The victim's family has also accused the investigators of withholding key evidence. That includes audio of radio conversations among security personnel that escorted Pashinyan that day. Security services told the investigators that they were not recorded due to a technical malfunction.



Sona Mnatsakanyan

"I think that the recordings were deleted because the upper echelons [of authority] interfered in this case," claimed Mnatsakan Mnatsakanyan.

Forensic tests conducted during the probe reportedly found that the police car driven by Navasardyan raced through Yerevan at almost 109 kilometers/hour (68 miles/hour), breaching a 100-kilometer/

hour speed limit set for government motorcades. Baloyan, the policeman's lawyer, again insisted, however, that he did not drive over that limit.

Pashinyan's limousine and six other cars making up his motorcade drove past the dying woman moments after the accident. The prime minister never publicly commented on her death.

H. Hovnanian Family Foundation Announces Third Quarter Grant Focus Targeting Support for Primary Health Care Initiatives

YEREVAN — The H. Hovnanian Family Foundation announced recently that its grants program for the third quarter of 2024 will take a targeted approach to addressing one of Armenia's most pressing challenges — the accessibility and quality of Armenia's primary healthcare (PHC) system. This is critical to improving health outcomes and ensuring the long-term well-being for all Armenians.

Over the years the Foundation has supported hundreds of initiatives across a wide-range of sectors. However, for this

quarter, the Foundation will be soliciting and only accepting proposals that aim to improve the landscape of Armenia's healthcare system.

In recent years, Armenia has been actively taking steps to improve its primary healthcare system, collaborating with international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank. These efforts aim to enhance the quality of care, address workforce challenges, and integrate digital technologies to better serve the population. The Founda-

tion's decision to focus on primary healthcare via its grants program aligns with the country's national priorities and the ongoing reforms designed to create a more effective and equitable healthcare system.

The foundation's current call for proposals focuses on three main goals:

(1) increasing healthcare provider capacity; (2) enhancing the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases at the primary healthcare level; and (3) strengthening PHC management. Proposals should address at least one or a combination of these objectives to qualify for funding. Interested organizations can visit the Foundation's website for more detailed information about these goals and to complete the Eligibility Quiz on the Foundation's website to begin the application process.

Eligible organizations, including public health facilities, are invited to apply before the September 30th deadline. The Foundation is particularly interested in projects that demonstrate innovative approaches

to primary care, have a clear institutional framework, and can operate effectively outside of Yerevan, where healthcare access is often limited.

Third quarter funding of \$250,000 has been allocated for distribution among the selected projects. It is anticipated that three to six grants will be awarded, although the exact number will vary depending on the scope and quality of proposals received. Collaborative proposals that bring together multiple organizations or stakeholders to maximize impact and resources are strongly encouraged.

Since the Foundation's establishment in 1986, H. Hovnanian Family Foundation has earmarked over \$97 million for hundreds of initiatives and projects for charitable, educational, scientific, cultural, and other related purposes with a primary focus on assisting Armenian communities worldwide as well as organizations in Monmouth and Ocean Counties in the state of New Jersey.

Yerevan to Host Second Global Armenian Summit Sept. 17-20

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — From September 17 to 20, the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs will host the Second Global Armenian Summit in Yerevan.

The summit will provide a unified platform to discuss the current challenges and issues facing Armenia and the Diaspora, as well as opportunities for sustainable development. Topics ranging from national security to high technology, economics, science, repatriation, and the vitality of Diaspora communities will be addressed across various formats. Approximately 1,000 representatives from both the Diaspora and Armenia will convene to engage in these crucial discussions about the present and future.

In an interview with Armenpress, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Zareh Sinanyan said several advisory groups worked jointly with his office to develop the agenda of the summit. More than 180 speakers from 20 countries will also participate in the event.

Guests will include officials from Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Poland and other countries. The list of speakers includes members of the US Congress, as well as state and city

officials, academics and other renowned individuals.

"The first summit was actually the first step that helped us develop new relationships, new approaches, and make adjustments in our work, because we heard numerous opinions, views and issues, and made conclusions," Sinanyan said. High Commissioner Sinanyan stressed the importance of promoting the projects of his office during the conference to involve more people. "And our compatriots expect the same, they come here to present their projects and companies to involve new partners. And it is no coincidence that we organize the most various expos during the summit," Sinanyan added. This year's summit will have a different format: instead of the many panel discussions where not everyone gets the chance to speak, this year organizers have limited the number of such discussions and substituted it with workshops: meetings of small groups where every participant will engage in the debates.

Discussions will also cover the situation in the Armenian communities around the world, such as in Ukraine, Syria and Lebanon, given the current developments.

Baku Seeks More Armenian Concessions

CONCESSIONS, from page 1 is the Azerbaijani constitution that lays claim to Armenian territory.

Hajiyev also said that "restrictions should be imposed to the armed forces of Armenia." The international community has slapped such sanctions on other "aggressor states" such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, he said. Bayramov likewise complained about what he called Armenia's "intensive" military buildup, saying it poses another hurdle to peace.

Hajiyev said Yerevan should also end the European Union's monitoring mission along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan launched in February 2023. He argued that Baku and Yerevan reached on Friday a fresh agreement on the border's delimitation.

Meanwhile, Armenian opposition leaders denounced Pashinyan's offer to sign a partial peace deal with Azerbaijan, saying

that it would not commit Baku to recognizing Armenia's borders. They claimed that Pashinyan is desperate to sign even such an incomplete document in hopes of misleading Armenians into thinking that he has achieved peace and thus increasing his chances of holding on to power.

Opposition groups had similarly condemned Pashinyan for ceding several disputed border areas to Azerbaijan this spring. They said the land transfer will only encourage Baku to demand more Armenian concessions.

Aliyev renewed his demands for a change of the Armenian constitution shortly after the announcement of the unilateral transfer. In July, he again described much of modern-day Armenia as "western Azerbaijan" and said Yerevan must ensure the safe return of ethnic Azerbaijanis who had fled it in the late 1980s.



INTERNATIONAL

In Talks With Russia, Iran Again Warns Against ‘Geopolitical Changes’ In Caucasus

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Following Russia’s renewed criticism of Armenia’s reluctance to open a land corridor for Azerbaijan, Iran has reportedly reaffirmed its strong opposition to “geopolitical changes” in the South Caucasus.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry said on September 3 that the head of its Eurasia Directorate, Mojtaba Demirchiloo, discussed with the Russian ambassador in Tehran, Alexei Dedov, “his views on the ongoing developments in the Caucasus.”

A ministry statement cited Demirchiloo as telling Dedov that “Tehran is against any change in the internationally recognized borders and geopolitical changes in the region.”

“The Iranian diplomat also stressed the need to take into consideration the legitimate concerns and interests of all countries in the region,” added the statement.

Demirchiloo met with Dedov two weeks after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the Armenian government of “sabotaging” a Russian-brokered agreement to open transport links between Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia’s Syunik province.

The accusation sparked a fresh war of words between Moscow and Yerevan that added to heightened tensions between the two estranged allies. Lavrov repeated it on Monday.

He and other Russian officials point to



The Armenian flag is hoisted at a military base on the border with Iran, October 7, 2021.

Paragraph 9 of a November 2020 ceasefire deal that stopped the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. It says that Yerevan will “guarantee the security of transport links” between Nakhichevan and the rest of Azerbaijan and also stipulates that Russian border guards will “control” the movement of people, vehicles and goods through Armenia’s Syunik province.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have disagreed, at least until now, on practical modalities of doing that. Baku wants people and goods moving between Nakhichevan and the rest of Azerbaijan to be exempt from Armenian border controls.

The Armenian side insists, for its part, that the two South Caucasus states should have only conventional transport links guaranteeing their full control over all transit routes passing through their respective territories. Lavrov complained in January

that Yerevan “doesn’t want neutral border and customs control” in Syunik, the only Armenian region bordering Iran.

Iran also opposes the extraterritorial “Zangezur corridor” demanded by Baku. Its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reaffirmed Tehran’s stance when he met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on July 30. The Zangezur corridor would be “detrimental to Armenia,” Khamenei was reported to say.

“We have seen statements by Iranian officials expressing concern about the idea of opening the so-called ‘Zangezur corridor’ and explaining the reasons for this attitude,” the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, told reporters last week.

Zakharova did not say whether there are major differences between Moscow and Tehran on the issue.

Armenian Defense Minister Visits Georgia

VISIT, from page 1

The Ambassador of Armenia to Georgia, Ashot Smbatyan, also attended the meeting.

The sides emphasized the strategic relations between Armenia and Georgia, highlighting the effectiveness of regular high-level contacts between delegations.

The Prime Minister of Georgia welcomed the strengthening of Armenia-Georgia cooperation in the defense sector and expressed his full support for this ongoing process.

Minister Papikyan, in turn, underscored the importance of enhancing defense cooperation and conveyed greetings from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Irakli Kobakhidze and Suren Papikyan emphasized the importance of establishing long-term and stable peace in the region.

The Georgian side expressed its readiness to continue supporting efforts to establish peace in the region.

Papikyan met with his Georgian counterpart, Irakli Chikovani. The Defense Ministers were then joined by the delegations of the two countries.

The ministers highlighted the intensification and enhancement of cooperation in the field of military education, as well as the importance of establishing long-term and stable peace in the region.

The parties agreed to explore the possibilities of further expansion of bilateral defense cooperation embracing new fields through mutual visits of different groups.

The defense ministers also discussed a number of other issues related to Armenia-Georgia cooperation in the field of defense and regional security.

Armenian-Azeri Border Agreement Publicized

AGREEMENT, from page 1

which Armenia, Azerbaijan and other newly independent republics recognized each other’s Soviet-era borders. The declaration does not contain detailed descriptions of those borders.

“If in the future the [separate] agreement on the establishment of peace and interstate relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan provides for other regulations, then this fundamental principle will be brought into conformity with the principles defined by the above-mentioned agreement,” reads the document released by the Armenian government.

The six other articles of the “regulations” are also short on specifics. One of them envisages the possibility of “optimizing” the heavily militarized frontier for humanitarian, cultural and economic reasons. According to Ruben Galichyan, a leading Armenian cartographer, this means two governments could “deviate” from Soviet maps to delineate at least some border sections.

Speaking at a weekend news conference, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan touted the agreed “regulations” as a “significant positive change of the situation.” He said Baku

and Yerevan have yet to agree on which sections of the border will be delimited first and when. The publicized document also says nothing about that sequence.

It came more than four months after Pashinyan’s government controversially agreed to cede four disputed border areas to Baku. The unilateral land transfer sparked massive anti-government demonstrations in Yerevan in May and June.

The border areas handed over to Azerbaijan in May and June had been occupied by Armenian forces in 1991-1992. For its part, the Azerbaijani army occupied at the time large swathes of nearby land belonging to several villages in Armenia’s northern Tavush province. It has not withdrawn from that land in return for the Armenian concessions.

Azerbaijan has also refused to withdraw from Armenian border areas seized by its troops in 2021 and 2022. It has dismissed, at least until now, Armenian calls for using Soviet military maps drawn in the 1970s as a basis for the border delimitation.

Pashinyan’s domestic critics believe that Baku has no intention to withdraw from any Armenian territory. The prime minister himself has not clearly answered questions about the chances of such a withdrawal.

INTERNATIONAL

Turkey, Azerbaijan ‘Evaluate’ Peace Progress

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov have discussed the peace processes in South Caucasus, *Daily Sabah* reported on August 28.

The two held talks on August 27 in Ankara on several sticking issues including ongoing peace negotiations between Baku and Yerevan.

“In our meeting today, we reaffirmed our common desire for lasting peace and stability to be established in the South Caucasus as soon as possible,” Fidan said.

Armenia, Slovenia MFA Officials Meet

YEREVAN (news.am) — Armenian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Vahan Kostanyan on September 3 met with State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovenia, Marko Stucin, within the framework of the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Armenia reported.

The two expressed satisfaction with the dynamic development of Armenia-Slovenia relations. Strengthening and further deepening of cooperation within the framework of Armenia-EU comprehensive partnership was also highlighted.

The two exchanged views on regional security issues.

Lavrov Says Armenia Free to Negotiate with Azerbaijan Directly

MOSCOW (Tass) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on September 2 that Armenian authorities are free to hold direct negotiations with Azerbaijan without Russia’s participation.

“We are also worried about the fact that the trilateral agreements concluded at several summits between Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020-2022 have also flopped,” Lavrov said at a meeting with students from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

“I mentioned the resumption of transport links and also mentioned the trilateral commission that was working on this, but it is now practically not meeting. Yerevan believes that this should be done directly with Azerbaijan, but if they succeed, then for God’s sake (Russian phrase that means “be my guest” – Ed.)”

Lavrov also noted that when it comes to the delimitation of the state border, the Russian Federation is supposed to consult the parties, but this is not happening.

“At the same time they (Armenians) are constantly trying to attract the West, the US, the European Union, Paris, to provide their aegis to any processes. This is their choice, but they need to agree, first of all, with their Azerbaijani neighbors. There is no other way,” Lavrov said.

Azerbaijan Calls for ‘Restrictions’ on Armenian Army and Withdrawal of EU Mission

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Azerbaijan has demanded the withdrawal of the EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia and for “restrictions” to be placed on the Armenian armed forces.

On August 31, Azerbaijani presidential aide Hikmet Hajiyev told Politico that a new agreement on their joint border commission “should be seen as sufficient for the withdrawal of the EU contingent,” adding that progress had been made in talks with Armenia.

The statement came a day after the two sides announced they had agreed details of how the border delimitation commission would work to determine the remainder of their shared border. The agreement still needs to be ratified. Both sides had previously agreed to reach this stage in the process by 1 July.

The EU deployed a civilian observer mission to the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan in February 2023 at Armenia’s request, and after several incursions by Azerbaijani forces that led to swathes of Armenian territory being occupied. Both Russia and Azerbaijan have criticised the mission since its deployment.

In February Azerbaijan’s Foreign Min-

istry accused the mission of becoming “an agent of “binoculars diplomacy” facilitating the visits of different European officials and unofficial delegations to the border areas”. They added that such visits “without exception, are used for disseminating anti-Azerbaijani hate and replicating unfounded Azerbaijan-phobia”.

The following day, Hajiyev also demanded that “restrictions” be imposed on the Armenian armed forces similar to those imposed on Iraq after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

Hajiyev called Armenia an “invader” and “aggressor” state, claiming that it has been among only a few such states since World War II.

On Monday, September 2, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov also criticised Armenia, stating that its military budget had “increased by almost 50%,” which he said was an “impediment to peace and stability in the region.”

“The wrong policy of Armenia in this field and the inflammatory support provided by some countries to Armenia remain a threat in the region. Armenia should seriously reconsider the steps it is taking if it is sincerely interested in the peace process,” he said.

Hajiyev’s statements were condemned in Armenia, with Seyran Ohanyan, a member of the opposition Armenia Alliance and former Defense Minister accusing Azerbaijan of being a “criminal, aggressor state”.

“Azerbaijan itself, being a criminal, aggressor state, wants to wrap the necks of the Armenian people with various sanctions applied against an aggressor state. All those sanctions must be implemented against Azerbaijan,” he said.

Hajiyev’s statements came in response to statements made by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Saturday, in which he denounced Azerbaijani criticism of Armenia’s acquisition of foreign weaponry. Pashinyan pointed out that Azerbaijan was also purchasing weapons from other countries, including EU member states.

“There is the following trend in Azerbaijan, they say that extra-regional countries are arming Armenia, referring to France. But it is obvious, and public, that Azerbaijan, for example, is buying weapons from Italy. It’s a country next to France, why can Azerbaijan acquire weapons from Italy, and Armenia can’t acquire weapons from France?” asked Pashinyan.

“They say the EU, the West are arming Armenia. But Azerbaijan is acquiring

weapons from Slovakia, Serbia, Bulgaria. At least three EU member countries have military-technical cooperation with Azerbaijan,” he added.

Pashinyan also reiterated his offer to develop bilateral arms control mechanisms, and stressed that it was the right of every country to have a “strong and combat ready army”.

He also cited experts as suggesting that Azerbaijan’s claims that Armenia’s constitution contained territorial claims against Azerbaijan was meant as a distraction to territorial claims against Armenia in the Azerbaijani constitution.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.ocmedia.org on Sept. 2.)

Two US Soldiers Assaulted by Nationalist Youth Group in Turkey

By Victoria Bekiempis

ISTANBUL (*Guardian*) — Two US military service members were “physically attacked” in the port city of Izmir in western Turkey on Monday, September 2, by members of an anti-American youth group, authorities said.

Fifteen suspected assailants were detained in the attack on the two service members, who were dressed in civilian clothing at the time of the incident. Five other US service members joined in the incident after seeing the violent encounter, officials said.

Those detained were members of the Turkey Youth Union (TGB), a youth offshoot of the nationalist opposition Vatan Party. Police intervened in the incident and authorities are conducting an investigation, officials said.

“We can confirm reports that US service members embarked aboard the USS Wasp were the victims of an assault in Izmir today, and are now safe,” the US embassy to Turkey said on the platform formerly known as Twitter. “We thank Turkish authorities for their rapid response and ongoing investigation.”

An apparent TGB social media account posted a video on X that purported to show a group of men holding a US soldier and placing a white hood over his head.

“No one will be able to respond to the cries for help from U.S. soldiers. Your hands are stained with the blood of our brave soldiers and thousands of Palestinians,” @YouthUnionTR said in its X mis-sive.

TGB posted a video on X in November 2021 where members boasted about putting a sack on a US soldier. “YANKEE GO HOME!” TGB said in a caption on the post.

The US embassy in Ankara said earlier Monday that the Wasp was on a port visit to Izmir, a coastal town. The ship arrived on Sunday following joint training with Turkish military ships in the Mediterranean.

The US has ramped up its military presence in the Middle East as the Israel-Gaza war continues. An aircraft carrier, the Abraham Lincoln, and its strike group are presently operating in the region’s waters of US Central Command, according to Navy Times.

(Reuters contributed to this report)

Pope Francis Appoints New Ordinary for Armenian Catholics in Eastern Europe

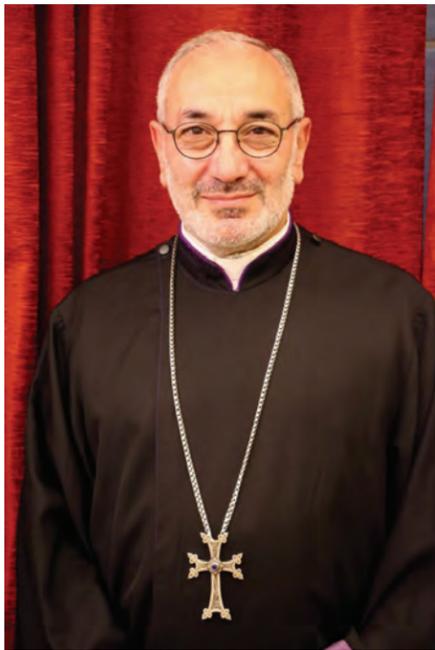
By Nicolás de Cárdenas

MADRID (Catholic News Agency) — The Holy See Press Office on August 21 announced the appointment of Archpriest Kevork Noradoungian as the new Ordinary for Armenian Catholics in Eastern Europe, assigning him the title of Archbishop of Sebaste of the Armenians.

Until now, Noradoungian served as patriarchal vicar of the Institute of the Clergy of Bzommar and superior of the Convent of Our Lady of Bzommar in Lebanon.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, on November 16, 1968, he obtained a licentiate in educational sciences from the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome in 1997. Two years earlier he was ordained a priest in Aleppo for the Institute of the Patriarchal Clergy of Bzommar.

Throughout his pastoral service, the new archbishop has served as rector of the minor and major seminary, administrator and general bursar of the Institute, pastor of the Armenian Catholic community of Moscow, rector of the church of St. Nicholas of Tolentine and rector of the Pontifical Armenian College of Urbe, apostolic administrator ad nutum Sanctae Sedis (at the



Archbishop Kevork Noradoungian (photo armenianchurchco.com)

disposition of the Holy See) of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate of Jerusalem and Amman and pastor of the Armenian Catholics of Lyon, France.

The Armenian Catholic Church is one of the 24 particular churches in communion with Rome and follows the Armenian liturgy. The church is organized as a patriarchal church under the authority of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.

The origins of the Catholic Church in Armenia date back to the preaching of St. Jude Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew in the 1st century, which was brought to fruition by St. Gregory the Illuminator in the 4th century.

The Armenian Apostolic Church, from which the Armenian Catholic Church derives its origins, fell out of communion with Rome in a dispute over the definition of the natures of Christ decreed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The Armenian Catholic Church has been formally united with Rome since 1742 and its followers are present in different countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Egypt.

(This story was first published by ACI Prensa, the Catholic News Agency’s Spanish-language news partner. Nicolás de Cárdenas has been the correspondent for ACI Prensa in Spain since July 2022.)

Turkey Bids to Join BRICS in Push to Build Alliances Beyond West

BRICS, from page 1

The BRICS grouping, named after Brazil, Russia, India and China and South Africa, includes some of the biggest emerging economies. It got four new members at the start of this year when Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and Egypt joined its ranks. Saudi Arabia was invited to join, though the kingdom is yet to do that.

The group’s further enlargement could be discussed during a summit in Kazan, Russia,

from Oct. 22-24, said the people. Malaysia, Thailand and Turkey’s close ally Azerbaijan are among other countries looking to join.

The BRICS touts itself as an alternative to what its members see as Western-dominated institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. New members can potentially get access to financing through its development bank as well as broaden their political and trading relationships.

Erdogan’s ruling Justice and Development Party has long accused Western nations of thwarting Turkish aspirations for a self-sufficient defense industry and strong economy. The president has repeatedly called for an overhaul of the United Nations Security Council to broaden its five permanent members, and expressed interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, set up by Russia and China as a rival to NATO.



INTERNATIONAL

Artsakh NGOs Appeal to OSCE Chairman to Continue Activities of Minsk Group

On September 2, 2024, about 50 organizations of the civil society of Artsakh sent an appeal to the acting chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Jan Borg, demanding that the Minsk Group continue its activities. "The OSCE and its Minsk Group are obliged to focus on the issue of determining the status of Nagorno Karabakh and protect the entire complex of rights of the people of Artsakh." The document is reproduced below, edited for space.

"As you know, as a result of Azerbaijan's large-scale military aggression against the Republic of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh and its people, in 2020 From September 27 to October 4, 2023, 150,000 Armenians were forced to leave their historical homeland, where the Armenian cultural heritage has a history of thousands of years, under the threat of physical extermination. Currently, the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh is occupied as a result of Azerbaijan's military aggression, 10-month complete blockade, ethnic cleansing and other genocidal actions.

The fact-finding mission of Freedom House, International Partnership for Human Rights, Democracy Development Foundation, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor, Protection of Rights without Borders NGO, Law Development and Protection Foundation and Truth Hounds confirmed that there is enough evidence to conclude that the Azerbaijani authorities and the actions of the military, as well as other acts recorded in the Mission's report and published under the title "Why are there no Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh?", are considered crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, including Article 7/crimes against humanity/ and Article 8- h/war crimes/ and meet the definition of deportation and forced displacement of the population.

After the implementation of the above-mentioned criminal actions and in order to secure the achieved results, the leadership of Azerbaijan has not stopped attempts to dissolve the OSCE Minsk Group, the only one with an international mandate for the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict. In order to give legiti-

macy to its illegal intentions, the Azerbaijani side cynically demands from Armenia to jointly apply to the OSCE with a request to dissolve the Minsk Group and other structures of the organization related to it. At the same time, the legal rights of the most interested party of the conflict, the people of Nagorno Karabakh, are being ignored.

For the fourth year now, the president of Azerbaijan has been trying to convince the international community that Azerbaijan has unilaterally resolved the Karabakh conflict by "military-diplomatic" means, and such a concept as Nagorno Karabakh no longer exists.

The co-chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group have not once publicly mentioned the inadmissibility of using force as a tool in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict.

The co-chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group and other involved actors have repeatedly stated that the Karabakh conflict remains unresolved, therefore, the military occupation of Nagorno Karabakh is illegal, and the OSCE Minsk Group should continue its activities according to its mandate.

In the December 9, 2023 application of the political and civil forces of the Republic of Artsakh to the international community, an assessment was made of the current situation and five indisputable conditions were mentioned for the peaceful, safe and dignified return of our people to their Motherland. We reaffirm that we do not intend to give up our principles, convictions and our rights to our Motherland, neither against force, nor against the threat of annihilation, nor in exile, nor in any other physical and political circumstances.

According to the decisions adopted by the OSCE, the mission of the Minsk Group is to determine the status of Nagorno Karabakh and eliminate the foundations of conflict relations. In 1992, the international community recorded the disagreements over the status of Nagorno Karabakh, recognizing the given territory as disputed. In the same year, Armenia and Azerbaijan joined the OSCE, under the condition of accepting the fact of existing disagreements over the issue of Nagorno

Karabakh's membership and agreeing that the future status of Nagorno Karabakh will be decided at a conference to be held under the auspices of the OSCE. The two states undertook to resolve the issue exclusively by peaceful means.

At the same time, in 1992, all OSCE member-states recognized the right of the elected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh to participate in the OSCE international conference dedicated to the settlement of the Karabakh conflict. Later, the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh, together with the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia, was recognized as a party to the conflict.

However, by joining the OSCE, Azerbaijan immediately violated its international obligation to settle disputes peacefully. Official Baku has used illegal force against the disputed territory of NKR in order to thwart the holding of the international conference on the determination of the status of Nagorno Karabakh.

From the very beginning of the Minsk process, a key circumstance was ignored by all the member-states of the IC, the violation of the obligation to settle the conflict exclusively by peaceful means. Such an approach has promoted sentiments of a military solution of the problem in Azerbaijan, and the negotiation process has been used by it as a cover to oppose international efforts to develop military potential, as well as to determine the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The people of Nagorno-Karabakh, being the victims of the carefully planned and executed military aggression by Azerbaijan, appeals to the OSCE to fulfill its obligations under the international mandate in a dignified manner and not to give in to the whims of a state like Azerbaijan, where hatred and Armenian hatred are cultivated and practiced at a high state level.

Azerbaijan recognized the disputed status of Nagorno Karabakh from the beginning and agreed to determine this status at the international conference. Therefore, his attempts to ignore the existence of the problem of determining the status of Nagorno Karabakh have no real basis.

The OSCE and its Minsk Group are obliged to focus on the issue of determining

the status of Nagorno Karabakh and protect the entire complex of rights of the people of Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh. No transformation of power in the conflict zone can be considered legal and change the primary functions of the OSCE, which were defined on March 24, 1992 at the additional meeting of the CSCE Council in Helsinki, in particular, regarding the determination of the status of Nagorno Karabakh at the International Peace Conference. The issue of the status of the given territory has remained unresolved, which preserves the root cause of the conflict. No legal changes have been made in the functions of the Minsk Group. The reluctance of the OSCE Minsk Group to work together due to the war in Ukraine cannot be an excuse for freezing the activities of the Minsk Group. The preparation and holding of the international conference on the determination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains as before the OSCE task and maintains its relevance.

The international organization, which is responsible for security and cooperation in Europe, cannot become a hostage of those member-states that openly violate the obligations assumed to the OSCE and ignore the fundamental principles of international law.

The civil society of Nagorno-Karabakh recalls the right of its elected representatives to participate in the OSCE international conference on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh under the auspices of the OSCE, and conveys its demands, concerns and suggestions to the authorities of the Republic of Artsakh, as well as the Republic of Armenia.

We emphasize once again that Nagorno-Karabakh is the most interested party in the settlement of the conflict. Azerbaijan has grossly violated its international obligations and, using its military superiority, has also reached the point where the Armenian authorities refused to protect the interests of the people of Artsakh. Thus, the protection of the entire complex of rights of the people of Artsakh, including the right to self-determination, is the task of the international community and, first of all, the OSCE.

China Southern Airlines Operates Maiden Direct Flight to Yerevan

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — China Southern Airlines operated its maiden direct flight to Yerevan on September 3. Flights on the Urumchi-Yerevan-Urumchi route will be operated with twice a week -on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Armenia's Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Gnel Sanosyan, Deputy Minister Armen Simonyan, Armenia's Ambassador to China Vahe Gevorgyan Chargé d'Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Armenia Chen Min, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Committee Mihran Khachatryan, airport director Marcelo Wenden, airline representatives and other guests were at Zvartnots Airport today to welcome the first plane from China.

Sanosyan described the flight as historic. "We think there is a great

demand in this direction and it will make life easier and save a lot of time for people who intend to fly from Armenia to China or vice versa. The flights will certainly increase passenger traffic, promote educational and cultural communication between the two peoples." He noted that the direct flights will also boost trade between the two countries. "This is the result of a consistent policy. We aim to have new directions in the aviation sector, to constantly expand the geography of flight from and to Armenia, which will eventually raise the interest in our country. We will not stop, because there are a number of new directions, and consistent work in this direction is under way. In the near future, we will have similar new flights to major cities and countries of the world," the minister emphasized.



The China Southern Airlines flight in Yerevan

Community News

Dr. David Zakarian Appointed as Haig And Isabel Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies at Fresno State

FRESNO — Dr. David Zakarian has been appointed as the Haig and Isabel Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies at Fresno State, joining the Armenian Studies Program for the fall 2024 semester. He was previously an associate faculty member of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford.

“The Armenian Studies Program welcomes Dr. Zakarian,” said Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian, Berberian Director of the Armenian Studies Program. “We look forward to his contribution to the continuing success of the Program.”

Zakarian received his DPhil in Oriental Studies from St. Antony’s



Dr. David Zakarian

College, University of Oxford. His dissertation was titled “The Representation of Women in Early Christian Literature: Armenian Texts of the Fifth Century.”

He has extensive experience teaching classical and modern Armenian and the focus of his research is on the representation of women in early Christian Armenian sources, as well as the colophons of medieval Armenian manuscripts. He is the co-editor of *Armenia Through the Lens of Time: Multidisciplinary Studies in Honour of Theo Maarten van Lint* (Brill, 2022) and the author of *Women, Too, Were Blessed: The Portrayal of Women in Early Christian Armenian Texts, Armenian Texts and Studies Series* (Brill, 2021).

“As the Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies, I am eager to contribute my expertise and experience to further strengthen Fresno’s outstanding Armenian Studies Program,” said Zakarian. “I look forward to engaging with the community, fostering a deeper understanding of Armenian history and culture, and inspiring a new generation of students to explore and appreciate our rich heritage.”

Zakarian was drawn to apply for the Haig and Isabel Berberian Endowed Chair of Armenian Studies at California State University, Fresno because it represents one of the most esteemed positions in the field.

“It is both a tremendous honor and a profound responsibility to follow in the footsteps of the distinguished see ZAKARIAN, page 10



Rear center left, Armenian Honorary Consul Oscar Tatosian with Amb. Lilit Makunts, meeting with Chicago area Armenian youth on August 18

Armenian Ambassador Makunts Attends Democratic National Convention in Chicago

WASHINGTON — From August 18 to 23, Ambassador of Armenia to the United States Lilit Makunts was in Chicago to participate in the US Democratic Party’s National Convention. In addition to participating in the main program of the congress, Makunts was present at discussions on domestic and foreign political priorities of the Democratic Party organized for representatives of the diplomatic corps, at which Democratic Party members, congressmen, experts and journalists participated.



Amb. Lilit Makunts speaking at the August 18 evening reception

On the first day of her visit, Makunts participated in a meeting with Armenian Honorary Consul Oscar Tatosian with the youth of the Armenian community of Chicago. During the meeting, ideas were exchanged on Armenia-diaspora relations, including youth programs, the main directions of Armenia-US bilateral relations and prospects for their development, as well as the question of the security of Armenia in connection with its neighboring countries. Makunts told the youth about Armenian state policies on topics they were interested in. She spoke about the Crossroads of Peace project, as well as projects implemented by high-tech industry and the Diaspora High Commissioner’s Office.

On the same day in the evening, the office of the Honorary Consul hosted a reception in honor of Makunts, attended by Illinois Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, Armenian parliamentary delegates Sargis Khandanyan, Tsovinar Vardanyan and Sona Ghazaryan, who had come from Armenia to participate in the Democratic National Convention, Armenia’s honorary consuls in Fresno and Ohio, members of the Chicago-area accredited diplomatic corps, representatives of the Armenian community, professional circles and scholars.

Tatosian, Krishnamoorthi, Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of Belgium Paul Van Halteren and Makunts gave speeches in the official part of the event. In her speech, the ambassador praised the activities of the office of the honorary consulate, expressed her thanks for the warm reception, and touched upon Armenia-diasporan relations, stressing the importance of the involvement of the diaspora’s potential in the development and security of the Republic of Armenia.

Previously, Makunts also had attended the Republican Party’s National Convention on July 15 to 18 in Milwaukee.



Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia Oscar Tatosian

Thousands of Miles from Silicon Valley, Armenia Is Building a Booming Tech Sector

By James Rogers

NEW YORK (Marketwatch) — Over the years, a slew of global locations have been touted as tech hubs — from Manhattan’s Silicon Alley, to Scotland’s Silicon Glen, to South Africa’s Silicon Cape. Now, 7,000 miles from Silicon Valley, another technology center is developing deep in the Caucasus.

More than a quarter of a century since gaining its independence following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Armenia has built a thriving tech sector that encompasses Western technology giants and a slew of local startups. Last year, the country’s then-Minister of High-Tech Industry Robert Khachatryan said that the number of IT companies operating in Armenia had doubled compared to 2022, with the number of employees increasing by 30 percent.

Further underlining its status as a tech hub, in October the World Congress on Innovation and Technology will be held in Armenia for the first time since 2019.

American companies are playing a big part in the country’s tech boom. In 2022, Nvidia Corp. opened a research center in Armenia. Other US tech giants operating in the country include Adobe Inc., which opened its new office in the capital of Yerevan last year, Cisco Systems Inc. and Microsoft Corp., which has had an Innovation Center in the country since 2011. American electronic-design automation software company Synopsys Inc. describes itself as one of the largest IT employers in Armenia, with over 1,000 employees.

There is also plenty of activity around home-grown tech companies. One of the big success stories is AI photo and video editor Picsart, which was founded in Armenia in 2011 and had racked up a valuation of over \$1 billion 10 years later. Picsart moved its headquarters to the U.S. in 2015 after receiving an investment from Sequoia Capital, but still has a large office in Armenia. The company told MarketWatch that approximately 500 of its roughly 700 employees worldwide are based in Yerevan.

“There’s no question there’s a new world order,” Arda Nazerian, a New York-based communications professional and founding board member of the Armenia Project, a nonprofit that forges links between Armenia and the international community, told MarketWatch. “Whereas people used to say, ‘This region is for this product or that region is for that product,’ people are starting to see Eastern Europe and what was the former Soviet republics in an extremely new light.”

But Armenia, which is about the size of Maryland, also faces challenges. The country of around 3 million people has few natural resources and is in a region fraught with tension. In 2020, Armenia fought a bloody war

continued on next page



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia Is Building a Booming Tech Sector

from previous page

with Azerbaijan over the long-disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Yet the country is targeting technology as a vehicle for economic growth. “As a landlocked country with restricted land access due to tensions with Turkey and Azerbaijan, the Armenian ecosystem still manages to create substantial innovation,” said global startup-research center StartupBlink in its 2024 startup-ecosystem report. “The Armenian government has long understood that innovation is critical to the future of the country, and resources have been allocated to grow local ecosystems.

“Armenian startups are built to target the global market from inception, and the country offers a sizable amount of tech talent,” the report added.

In 2022, Armenia experienced “impressive” GDP growth of 12.6 percent, emerging as the fastest-growing country in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, according to World Bank data. The services sector — particularly IT, trade and transportation — played a significant role in driving that growth, the World Bank said.

The roots of the country’s tech industry can be traced back to the Soviet era, according to Ashot Arzumanyan, co-founder and partner of venture-capital firm SmartGateVC, which is based in Los Angeles and Armenia.

“In Soviet times, [Armenia] used to be called the Silicon Valley of the Soviet Union,” he told MarketWatch. “Armenians from major educational institutions moved back to Armenia in Soviet times and created this ecosystem of research institutions, of

universities and also R&D centers.”

The country is also harnessing the vast Armenian community around the world, a legacy of the Armenian genocide in the early 20th century. Armenia has one of the largest and oldest diasporas in the world, with an estimated 8 to 10 million people of Armenian descent living outside of the country, according to the United Nations. It is speculated that there could be as many as 2 million people of Armenian descent living in America.

Arzumanyan, whose VC firm has invested in 31 companies since 2018, says the country’s connection to the diaspora, particularly in the U.S., is critical. “The Armenian diaspora is strongly linked to Armenia,” he said. “That’s an important mindset that makes a big difference.”

Vahe Kuzoyan, president and co-founder of ServiceTitan, a U.S.-based software company for home and commercial contractors, is a prominent figure in the diaspora. Born in Armenia, he moved to America as a child. He founded ServiceTitan in Glendale, Calif., in 2012 with Ara Mahdessian.

“We met each other through the Armenian network and if you look at the journey of ServiceTitan, whether it’s the first set of investors or the first set of employees or the first set of customers, the Armenian network was a big part of our story,” he told MarketWatch.

The company now has approximately 2,800 employees, of whom around 400 are in Armenia. Kuzoyan explained that ServiceTitan opened its Armenian operation in 2019 when the company needed additional engineering skills.

“Initially we were just looking at engineering talent, and that was the big turning point,” he said. “And what we saw was there’s such an interesting dynamic that

kind of mixed together. A fire in the belly you just saw in peoples’ eyes — they were really hungry to do something meaningful and make an impact, both on themselves personally and the bigger picture within the country.”

ServiceTitan ended up building “a full stack” of R&D teams in Armenia, and many functions within the company now have a team in the country, Kuzoyan noted. The software company, which has attracted IPO chatter, has been valued at \$9.5 billion, according to CBInsights.

“I’d say we have maybe 10 to 15 startups that have been financed by non-Armenian VCs,” Samson Avetian, the Yerevan-based chief executive and co-founder of the Angel Investor Club of Armenia, told MarketWatch. Some of them were on their Series A funding rounds while others were on their Series D and E rounds, he added.

Avetian describes CodeSignal, which provides skills assessments and AI-powered learning tools, as one of the country’s rising tech stars. Founded in 2015, CodeSignal counts Robinhood Markets Inc., Uber Technologies Inc., and Meta Platforms Inc. among its customers.

One factor cited as a boost to the Armenian IT sector is a recent influx of Russian nationals following that country’s armed-forces mobilization effort amid its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Estimates suggest that up to 100,000 Russians, mostly IT specialists, migrated to Armenia in the wake of the February 2022 invasion, according to a November 2023 article for the Italian Institute for International Political Studies by Benyamin Poghosyan, founder of the Yerevan-based Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies and senior fellow on foreign policy at the Applied Policy Research Institute Armenia.

“In general, the influx of Russian IT specialists has played a positive role in the further development of the already booming IT sector in Armenia,” he wrote.

Amalya Yeghoyan, executive director of the Gyumri Information Technologies Center in Armenia’s second-largest city, told MarketWatch that the influx of Russians had a “huge impact” on Armenia’s economy, although many have since left. “During this last year, they left Armenia for other countries,” she noted.

Experts who follow the development of Armenia’s IT industry told MarketWatch that, as of 2023, there were around 10,000 non-Armenian citizens working in IT in the country, of whom nearly 90 percent were Russian.

Like Arzumanyan, Yeghoyan highlights the American impact on Armenia’s tech sector — not just in terms of investment, but also expertise. “They bring technology know-how to Armenia,” she said. Yeghoyan is focused on developing future Armenian tech workers and engineers through the GITC, which was founded in 2005 by the U.S.-based Fund for Armenian Relief. The organization, which covers all of Armenia’s 11 regions, has graduated more than 15,000 young people with certifications in skills such as web technology and electrical engineering.

San Francisco-based design executive Peter Michaelian was born in the U.S. but is actively involved in the Armenian tech diaspora, serving as a board member of GITC.

“It’s a small country, landlocked, not many natural resources. There’s this historical factor of this underdog mentality,” Michaelian said. “The other byproduct of that is around the never-give-up entrepreneurial spirit that exists within the people in Armenia and the diaspora community.”



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

Burlingame Store Owner Has Been A Longtime Pillar Of the Broadway Business District

By Sharon Chin

BURLINGAME, Calif. (CBS News Bay Area) — A local shop owner who some call the Mayor of the Broadway business district in Burlingame has long been the go-to person when area merchants have a problem.

John Kevranian and his wife, Nora, have enjoyed success at their Burlingame shop, Nuts for Candy & Toys, for 30 years. In that time, he says he's grown sweet on the store's business district.

"I love the community. I solve their problems," Kevranian said.

He has proven to be a powerful advocate for 120 businesses as president of the Broadway Burlingame Business Improvement District for the last decade.

He has volunteered thousands of hours



John Kevranian (photo courtesy CBS News Bay Area)

helping small family-run shops with everything from grant applications to social media promotion to securing a million-dollar federal grant to install dozens of lamp posts for street safety.

"75 percent of the businesses on Broadway are minority business owners. Usually, minority business owners are not vocal. I am their voice," Kevranian explained.

His community service is rooted in his own immigrant story. His family fled the civil war in Lebanon 1976. He arrived in the

COAF Launches Back to School Appeal to Support Children's Center in Rural Armenia

NEW YORK — Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) is excited to announce its annual Back to School appeal, which will provide support for the COAF Child and Family Center (CFC) located in the village of Karakert (Armavir region of Armenia). The CFC serves as a safe haven for 400 young children, offering a range of programs including early childhood education, speech therapy, and mental health support. COAF strives to foster a love for learning, enhance creativity, and build resilience among children from 5 underserved communities.

The campaign aims to reach a fundraising goal of \$120,000 which will cover the annual operations budget of the Center. The funds raised will allow COAF to continue to tackle significant challenges that hinder child development in Armenia's rural regions, including limited access to quality early childhood education, social services, speech therapy, and psychological support. The Center aims to bridge these resource gaps by providing comprehensive services designed to meet the diverse needs of children and their families.

"Our Back to School appeal is about more than just getting kids ready for the classroom," states Gayane Vardanyan, Village Programs Manager at COAF. "It's about creating a safe, supportive environment where children can grow, learn, and

dream of a brighter future. The Karakert CFC is a lifeline for these communities, and with the help of our generous supporters, we can continue to provide these vital services."

The Karakert CFC has a proven track record of success. In the last year, 192 children have enrolled in early childhood education programs, 197 individuals received psychological support, 108 children overcame speech and learning difficul-



ties through targeted therapy, and 178 families benefited from social work services.

All contributions will go directly toward the operation of the Karakert CFC, helping to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn, play, and grow in a supportive environment. Donations can be made online through <https://www.coaf.org/donations> or by mailing a check to 149 5th Ave, Suite 500, New York, NY 10010.

US as a 9-year-old who knew no English.

His dad owned a shoe repair store on Broadway on the same spot where John would eventually open his own candy shop. Kevranian understands the challenges of small business owners, like Haci Kurt of Ristorante Rocca.

Kurt says his restaurant and others survived the pandemic because Kevranian helped him secure government relief grants and outdoor dining space. He also got the county to waive nearly \$6 million in fees for more than 5,400 businesses.

"If there's a chance for Broadway mayor, he will win by far," Kurt said. "Everybody will vote for him. He's the one."

Kevranian is also the one students turn to. He's helped hundreds of teenagers find

jobs and learn soft skills. He shared resources and connections so Cal student Ryan Luftman could display a pop-up museum exhibit on anti-Semitism.

Currently, Kevranian is working with high school student Anjali Mishra to help merchants certify their shops as green businesses to save on energy bills and get a county rebate.

Kevranian is a role model and mentor to both students.

"He's always doing something that's really inspirational and that makes me want to do more community engagement," Luftman said.

"I've definitely learned the importance of community and taking the time to know people and listen," Mishra added.

In addition, Kevranian is a big donor to the annual Central County Fire Department holiday toy drive. His store has collected more than 20,000 toys in nearly 30 years.

So for helping the Broadway Burlingame business community and young people thrive, this week's Jefferson Award in the Bay Area goes to John Kevranian.

(Sharon Chin is a general assignment reporter who also profiles Jefferson Award winners for KPIX 5 Eyewitness News. Since she joined KPIX 5 in 1997, Chin has reported everything from fires to features, from politics to perspective pieces, but she feels a special sense of pride bringing viewers the stories of Jefferson Award winners. She herself feels inspired as she shares the stories of community heroes.)

Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and the Shahbazian Foundation presents

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Zakarian Appointed Professor of Armenian Studies at Fresno State

ZAKARIAN, from page 8

scholars, such as Dickran Kouymjian and Sergio La Porta, who have previously held this chair," stated Zakarian. "At this stage in my academic career, I feel fully prepared and energized to embrace this challenge and contribute meaningfully to the legacy of excellence associated with this position."

Zakarian was born in Hrazdan, Armenia, into a family of educators, with an Armenian father and a Pontic Greek mother. From an early age, his family instilled in him a deep appreciation for education, as well as a love for literature and history, which largely determined his future choice of career. It was during his time as a student at the Institute of Foreign Languages after V. Brusov in Yerevan that he met his wife, Marianna. They are proud parents of two children: son Robert, who is a scientist working in a biotechnology company in Oxford, and younger son, Dimitrios Levon, who is still in school and aspires to become a lawyer and a professional chess player.

Zakarian will be teaching Armenian language and Armenian literature courses for the fall semester.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Dispersion The Podcast

A Podcast that navigates identity, home & belonging through storytelling.

Dispersion is a podcast by the Zoryan Institute that analyzes and celebrates both the diverse and common experiences of diasporas living away from, and returning to, their homeland.

Having published its academic journal in the field of diaspora studies for 30 years, the Zoryan Institute is excited to bring the conversation of diaspora to a new platform.

Through conversations with diverse communities in Canada, Dispersion will challenge stereotypes, discrimination, and aim to bring people together through conversations that navigate identity, home, and belonging.

Episodes feature topics such as; immigration, culture shock, racism, identity, language, family, activism, art and representation.

DISPERSION

The Zoryan Institute is a non-profit organization that serves the cause of scholarship and public awareness relating to issues of universal human rights, genocide, and diaspora-homeland relations.

Listen Now!



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OBITUARY

IN MEMORIAM

Suzy Sahakian

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Many in Armenia and the diaspora knew Suzy Sahakian — a woman of extraordinary beauty, charm and boundless positivity. She was especially beloved among art enthusiasts and repats and expats from around the world. Suzy was a generous soul, sharing her smile, love, and positive energy with everyone she met.

A true multicultural individual, educated by Iranian, Swiss, French, American and Spanish cultures, she considered Armenia her home for over 20 years, with Yerevan being the city of her heart, even though her children lived abroad.

“I live in Yerevan and still I miss it,” she often said. When asked, “Do you live in Armenia permanently?” she would reply with the words from a “L’Oréal Paris” perfume advertisement: “Yes, because I am worth it!”

She always found beauty everywhere in Armenia — from the street dogs and blooming bushes to the appearance of a

passerby. She appreciated the efforts of street cleaners and gently reproached those who littered. With her background in contemporary art and her visits to the world’s best museums, galleries, concert halls, and theaters, she was an avid supporter of all cultural events in the Armenian capital.

I was fortunate to be Suzy Sahakian’s friend for 21 years. She was one of the brightest individuals I have ever met, accompanying me to countless cultural events and excursions throughout Armenia. “Suzy, let’s go...” I would say, and she would agree without needing to know where we were headed.

“I am ready to go with you even to *jehennem!* (hell in Persian),” she would joke with her sweet Persian-Armenian accent.

Her appearance never failed to impress: even after 70, she always looked elegant and beautiful, dressed with impeccable taste, and her smile was ever-present. Sometimes, strangers would approach her to compliment her refined appearance.

“Your glamorous granny!” some friends would jokingly say. My friends became her friends, and she always introduced me as “my cultural minister.”

After attending the Venice Armenian intensive summer course (where I teach) in 2011, she also began calling me “my Armenian teacher.” Fluent in French (her mother tongue), English, Persian, Spanish and also Russian, she spent her life perfecting her Armenian, proudly announcing her progress.

With her walking stick, she even climbed to the Davit Bek fortress in Syunik with the group! She continued practicing piano, reading books in various languages, and remained full of life, joy, and optimism, surrounded by friends and family. Despite her declining health, she never complained and always kept her spirit strong. “I lived a wonderful life and I do not care about leaving this world. That would be another interesting journey,” she once said.

On August 29, our beautiful, caring, and generous Suzy Sahakian passed away in Geneva at the age of 74. Yerevan has lost one of its brightest colors.

“She was one of my life’s inspirations for how to live and love,” a friend wrote about her, and many of us share that sentiment.

Every word of this tribute is written with tears and deep affection

for the extraordinary person named Suzy Sahakian... Her “minister of culture” and all those who love her will keep her memory alive from now on, always remembering her lessons of humanity and cheerfulness.



In recent years, Suzy faced mobility challenges but continued to attend Pilates classes and cultural events with her ornately decorated walking stick, often leaning on my arm (“I never refuse an amiable arm,” she would say in French).

Sirak Melkonian

Founder of Modern Iranian Art Movement

By Camilla Alvarez-Chow

TORONTON (*Art Asia Pacific*) — On August 17, Iranian Armenian abstract painter Sirak Melkonian passed away in Toronto at the age of 93. Melkonian was considered one of the founders of the modern Iranian art movement and was best

known for his limited color palette, with works that emphasized lines and forms inspired by nature.

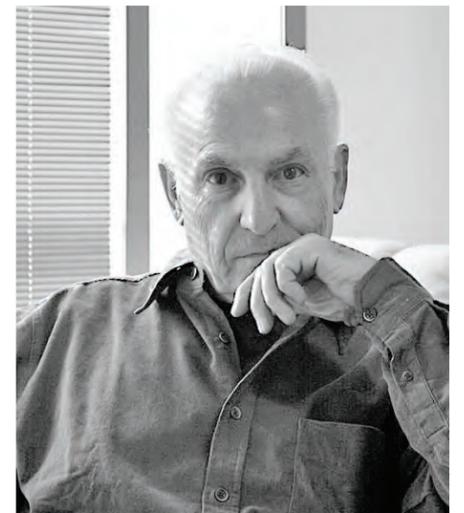
Born in 1931 in Tehran, Melkonian met fellow Iranian Armenian artist Marcos Grigorian (1925–2007) after graduating from high school, a friendship that introduced him to modern European art as

Grigorian sent him Italian magazines and newspapers. Inspired by these resources, Melkonian began his artistic career, creating figurative paintings that explore social issues and folk traditions in a style closely aligned to expressionism.

In 1957, Melkonian’s career began with his first solo exhibition at the Estetic Gallery in Tehran. The same year, he also won the Contemporary Iranian Artists Award at the Iran-America Society. The painter continued to garner acclaim as he won the Imperial Court Prize of 1958 at the inaugural Tehran Biennale. He was awarded for the oil-on-canvas work *The Prayer* (1957), depicting a solemn, kneeling figure in warm, dark tones, and his long-running untitled linocut series (1957–2015) that features the everyday lives of Iranian citizens in monochromatic colors. Melkonian’s success kicked off immediately: he gained international recognition through his participation in the 29th Venice Biennale in 1958, and in the Paris Biennale the following year.

Melkonian went on to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma in Italy, with the encouragement of his long-time friend Grigorian. However, Melkonian—who was a self-taught artist up until that point—dropped out of the institution to continue experimenting independently. By the early 1960s, abstraction had become prominent in his work. Around the same time, Melkonian traveled to the south of Iran as well as Sistan and Baluchistan, inspiring him to incorporate topographical elements from natural landscapes. His work from then on featured linework intersecting and branching off on the canvas, creating marks that resemble patterns found on tree trunks or jagged mountain sceneries in pale earth tones.

Melkonian founded the “Azad Art Group,” formally known as The Indepen-



dent Artists Group, in the early 1970s along with Grigorian and other important artists living and working in Iran at the time, including Massoud Arabshahi (1935–2019); Abdolreza Daryabeigi (1930–2012); Morteza Momayez (1936–2005); Gholamhossein Nami (b. 1936); and Faramarz Pilaram (1937–1983). The group was officially introduced to the world at the Tehran International Art Fair in 1974, establishing itself as a collective that, as stated in *Honar-e Jadid: A New Art in Iran* (2022), a compilation of essays edited by art historian Hannah Jacobi, “challenged the status quo, criticized the prevalence of superficial modern expressions in society and the increasingly profit-driven art world, and were closely aligned with the conceptual art movement.”

Over the course of his long life and career, Melkonian participated in more than 140 exhibitions worldwide. Today, his work can be found in major public and private international collections, such as the Niavaran Palace in Iran, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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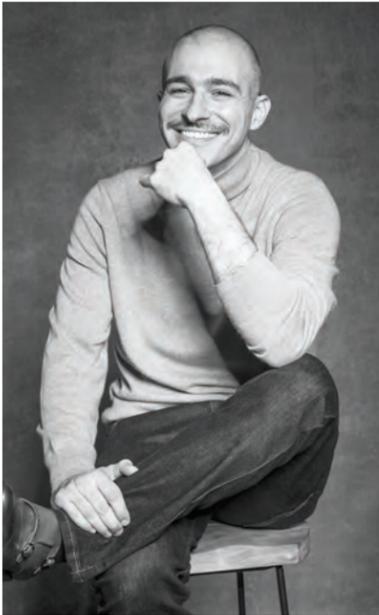
The Cherkian Family Foundation, Inc. of Milwaukee, WI donated \$1,000 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.



Arts & Culture

Antranik Zekian

'We Are the Masters of Our Own Destiny'



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

VENICE — The first I met Antranik Zekian, an avid traveler and Armenian Diasporan activist, was in 2018 as a student of Venice Armenian Summer School, where he returns regularly with his partner, French-Australian Florence Micol and later also with their baby, Azad. Antranik or Anto, as his friends call him, was born in 1983 in France to an Armenian father and a French mother. He is an engineer by profession. He currently lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland and runs his own travel blog (<https://www.lespassengers.com>).

Our conversation concerns his travels and on maintaining Armenian identity in today's world.

Dear Antranik, I always admire people with unusual biographies, especially when they are my compatriots. I was thrilled to learn about your around world travel and to see your photos in Antarctica. Could you please tell us about that trip?

After completing my engineering studies, I worked in the United States and then in the United Kingdom. I've always had a taste for adventure. After spending several years in the field of banking IT, I felt the need to explore the world with my own eyes. Some years earlier, I had done some bicycle touring and really enjoyed traveling on two wheels. So, it was quite natural for me to decide to embark on a world tour by motorcycle. Motorcycles, like bicycles, allow you to be in touch with the elements. When you travel on two wheels, you experience your journey with all your senses: you taste the dust of the trails, feel the rain droplets trickle down your neck, and shiver when it's cold. You also connect more easily with locals, who wonder what you're doing there.

I grew up in France, so I decided to start my journey at the Eiffel Tower. The trip was supposed to last a year, see ZEKIAN, page 16



"Aeolian Variations" The Impact of Environmental Change on Transformative Structures.

Hope and the Sublime

The Art and Architecture of Nishan Kazazian

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Rare are those artists who can sustain a lifelong, holistic vision which contributes to both culture and progress in the broadest sense of the term. A native son of Beirut born into a family that managed to recover and flourish after the Armenian Genocide, Nishan Kazazian is one of those rare individuals.

Kazazian's practice — from his dazzling deconstructed and reconstructed metal sculptures, to his creative reimagining of museums, aquariums, houses and alternative ZOO — integrates the visual arts and architecture in a cohesive manner whose goal is ultimately to uplift the viewer's spirit. Sadly, this deeply humanistic vision has fallen out of favor in the post-modern world, hence its importance increases.

Ever since walking away with many of Lebanon's top art prizes as a teenager at institutions such as Haigazian College, the American University of Beirut, the Sursock Museum and later a Fulbright Fellowship to the US, Kazazian has steadily developed an expertise and renown as an artist and a licensed architect in New York State.

After completing a master's degree in architecture and another in art and art education from Columbia University, and earlier earning a BFA with Distinction from AUB, Kazazian worked for leading international firms. In 1985, he co-founded and currently serves as the principal of the A&A Design Group, headquartered in Chelsea, New York. The practice covers an array of creative disciplines including art, architecture and interior design, with a particular emphasis on integrating art within architectural spaces, with a portfolio of projects that spans the United States, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

When he's not creating new structures and artwork, Kazazian can be found teaching on the faculty of Parsons School of Constructed Environment or guest lecturing at diverse institutions such as Columbia University, Haigazian University, the see KAZARIAN, page 14



Nishan Kazazian



Alternative Zoo, 2020-2023

'Dispersion' Podcast Navigates Identity, Home and Belonging through Storytelling

In 2012, medical student Tareq Hadhad's family home and chocolate factory in Syria were destroyed. His family fled the country and became refugees in Lebanon. After three years, they arrived in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Today, Hadhad is a successful entrepreneur and the owner of Peace by Chocolate, a company built on the bonds of family, community and a desire to give back.

In a season three episode of "Dispersion," the Zoryan Institute's podcast about diaspora experiences in Canada, Hadhad recounts how he and his family settled in a new place vastly different from their hometown of Damascus, Syria. The episode, titled "Everybody Loves Chocolate," describes Hadhad's journey not only as a newcomer to Canada but also as someone navigating the process of finding support in community, embracing new opportunities, and overcoming challenges and uncertainty. His story mirrors many others featured on "Dispersion" — stories of finding new beginnings and opportunities away from the homeland and as part of the diaspora. As Hadhad explains in the episode: "One of my favourite inspirations, since I came to Canada, is a friend of mine, a Canadian friend, who would tell me, 'You know that we are born human beings with legs, not with roots like trees, for a reason.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Because we have the opportunity to move. If we don't find an opportunity, we can go and create one.'"

The podcast centers its episodes around important theories, topics, and diaspora experiences, navigating identity, home, and belonging while challenging stereotypes and discrimination. Shortly after the launch of its first season, *Dispersion* was ranked as one of the leading educational podcasts worldwide, with many professors incorporating it into their classrooms. One such professor is Dr. Sushan Karapetian, director of USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies, who uses "Dispersion" as an educational tool. She says, "I used the episode ['The Generational Cappuccino'] as required course material to jumpstart a conversation on the Armenian diaspora(s) and just how heterogeneous it is. The pairing of father and daughter, different generations, gender dynamics, upbringings, and so on, were just so ripe for discussion... My students had such visceral reactions, which sparked an excellent class conversation."

Season one, episode two, "The Generational Cappuccino," features Zoryan Institute's President K.M. Greg Sarkissian, in conversation with his daughter, Talar Sarkissian, about the generational differences of growing up in the diaspora. The two discuss their identities as members of the Armenian diaspora, delving into the complexities of being multi-see PODCAST, page 17



ARTS & CULTURE

The Art and Architecture of Nishan Kazazian

KAZARIAN, from page 13

British Psychoanalytic Institute, the Parrish Art Museum and the American Institute of Architects, NYC. He also happily grants interviews to prominent publications such as *ArchDaily*, *ArteDossier* (Italy), *Middle East Architect Magazine*, *Oculus NYC*, *Hyperallergic* and the *New York Times*. He is currently completing a book titled, *Beyond Boundaries: Art + Architecture*.

Youth in Beirut

Growing up in Beirut, Kazazian was profoundly shaped by his surroundings and by the resilience and strength of his fellow Armenians who had survived the Genocide. Rather than color the world negatively, these experiences instilled in him a deep sense of empathy and a commitment to contributing positively to the world: “Recognizing that I am not alone and that my actions are part of a larger whole provides a powerful perspective. It emphasizes the importance of community, solidarity, and the collective effort in and creating positive change. My understanding of this interconnectedness inspires me to contribute to the world through my creative endeavors... Art, storytelling, and other forms of expression have the power to inspire, educate, and unite people. Hence, I can contribute to building empathy, understanding, and resilience in others.”

Kazazian brings up the example of people who talk about Bourj Hamoud as “an Armenian enclave” but don’t realize that it’s a tremendously reconfigured space. Before Nor Marash, Nor Sis and Nor Adana there existed enclaves of serene and sophisticated people, with names like Armaven, Alazan and Shmavon, who preceded the Armenian refugees who later settled there. These survivors belonged to diverse social and religious backgrounds and fostered a new vibrancy that fostered excellence. Presently, the urban enclave has been unrecognizably altered due to many reasons: “This is a global phenomenon,” noted Kazazian: “Some spaces have undergone planned alterations, while others are the result of political, social, and greed-driven factors. The question then becomes: how does the human experience react to it through the lens of artistic and architectural expression?”

As Kazazian reiterated during a long studio visit, artists create for various reasons, including self-expression, communication, exploration, reflection, connection, beauty and social commentary. Their motivations stem from a deep inner compulsion to express themselves, share ideas, evoke emotions, and connect with others. Whether driven by personal experiences, societal issues or aesthetic pursuits, they contribute to the rich tapestry of human expression and understanding.

Said Kazazian: “I create because I feel a profound inner compulsion; it’s not something I can choose not to do. I perceive it as a duty, an imperative to record and communicate a purposeful message, a response to negativity — countering the negative forces in the world. This expression is rooted in the personal, social, psychological, and intellectual context of a particular time and place, encompassing both the past and present, as well as an imagined future.”

In transforming despair into triumph, Kazazian proposes a new paradigm for Armenian culture, one that finds echoes in the work of the curator Tamar Hovsepian, theorist Marc Nichanian and a new generation of forward-thinking cultural workers in both the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. In 2016, for example, a new Armenian Genocide Museum was erected in Byblos, Lebanon. Kazazian



Kazazian’s Proposed Alternate Museum Exhibit as imagined



Kazazian’s Proposed Alternate Museum Exhibit as built

pointed out that the surviving orphans are represented as helpless and sad, “waiting like beggars for their next meal.” A *World Peace Magazine* article on the museum described sufferings and sad songs, a dirge-like state all-too-familiar to the descendants of survivors.

For Kazazian this type of despair propagates a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. He believes that representing survival as sadness plays into the hands of the perpetrators whose atrocities succeeded in inflicting pain on their victims. His alternative vision is meant to generate a positive message of hope instead of defeat. Kazazian expounded, “In my rendition of an alternate museum exhibition, we see children at work and play who were taught about their culture and traditions so they could eventually fly off on their own and build a future for themselves and their global community.”

This vision concurs with his belief that artists and architects have a responsibility to generate uplifting and positive messages of hope: “This should be their ultimate goal — to bring light from darkness, and hope from where there previously was none.”

In many of his works Kazazian blends disparate elements into a cohesive whole to create a tapestry-like feel. Each piece weaves together diverse threads of storytelling and emotion and invites viewers to engage with rich layers of meaning and artistic expression. His plexiglass sculptures, for example, blend vivid colors with tender geometry to great effect. The resulting layers resonate with multiple meanings — history, archeology and society interweave temporally with various human emotions and conditions.

For Kazazian, “each layer embodies the shadows of passing time, reflecting the imprint of resilience in the face of adversity. Through these layers, I acknowledge the complex interplay between personal nar-

atives and broader societal contexts.” To make these and other artworks, Kazazian breaks the pieces apart and puts them back together again. This process of breaking down and rebuilding symbolizes the resilience of both the material and human worlds. These new beginnings also bring with them a sense of ludic fun and renewal, and embody the strength required to overcome challenges. Or as Kazazian cleverly stated: “I embrace transformation by creating space for fresh starts and growth. I see this as a testament to the human spirit’s capacity to adapt and thrive amidst adversity, and to embrace change as a catalyst for reinvention and renewal.”

History and Healing

For someone with such bittersweet family story, history becomes an unavoidable theme, a meditation almost. In a series of large wood artworks, the veneer itself reflects the passage of time and history, or as Kazazian elegantly told me, it becomes a metaphor for carrying history: “By juxtaposing and reconfiguring layouts and arrangements, I contemplate the evolution of human interactions and personal psychological displacements, considering various conditions and circumstances.”

In Kazazian’s case, this history includes a childhood spent in the sophisticated streets of mid 20th-century Beirut, alive with cross-cultural influences. And behind that now-lost Beirut, the rupture of the Armenian Genocide survived along with his family. Yet through art, he transcends this rupture, as averred by noted British psychoanalyst William Badenhurst: “As a psychoanalyst, I have come across people whose un-mourned losses trap them in a sort of mausoleum. This is emphatically not the case in Kazazian’s work, which like wood carries living connections to the past, and possibilities for a re-imagined present and future.” It is in this imaginative aspect that

Kazazian’s unrealized architectural projects come into play: a virtual alternative zoo lures in the viewer, while a futuristic round aquarium for Beirut’s waterfront juts out of the Corniche to become a living part of the Mediterranean landscape.

In order to heal the past, Kazazian becomes a kind of architectural witchdoctor, incorporating significant historical and archaeological objects and replicas, to enrich the environment. This approach transcends boundaries, emphasizing the holistic fusion of space and human experience. “My inspiration stems from Caucasian and Middle Eastern architecture, drawing on forms and spaces created by Mesopotamian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Sassanian and Zoroastrian senses and functions of space,” he said.

In his self-initiated project, the Hydro Healing Center 2014 – Yerevan, Armenia, Kazazian advocates for Armenian architecture that expresses identity and cultural uniqueness, drawing from the nation’s rich historical and cultural heritage. He emphasizes that Armenian architecture should incorporate influences from Caucasian and Middle Eastern traditions, rather than merely imitating contemporary trends.

This project embodies Kazazian’s philosophy by using architectural and artistic transcendence to address collective trauma. The design harmonizes indoor and outdoor spaces through the integration of water features and carefully selected materials, creating transformative environments that evoke emotions of loss, discovery, jubilation and celebration. Prioritizing physical, emotional and psychological well-being, the center seamlessly incorporates natural elements — such as light and connections to nature — to enhance healing and comfort. The inclusion of historical and archaeological objects, both authentic and replicated, further enriches the space, imbuing it with a sense of continuity and depth.

In another part of the world, the Metropolitan Museum’s 2022 show “Beyond the Light: Identity and Place in Nineteenth-Century Danish Art,” emphasized the role that art and the construction of a national art movement played in helping the then-bankrupt Danes heal from the disastrous results of the Napoleonic Wars, the bombardment of Copenhagen by the English and increasing German antagonism. Art helped Denmark to develop the sociocultural and philosophical wherewithal to overcome these seemingly insurmountable obstacles and thrive as a modern state, now considered one of the most prosperous and happy in the world. How were the Danes both similar to yet different from their neighbors? Their art tells the story at a deep and otherwise unknowable level, much like Italy saw itself reflected through its Renaissance masters and France through its stunning Impressionist and then Cubist artists, or even later on New York through Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. Kazazian’s work seems to argue for the need of a similar artistic and cultural reawakening for the global Armenian community, especially after recent setbacks in Artsakh and elsewhere. His art involves remembering and memorializing the past in a vibrant, positive manner to envision a future of resilience, optimism, and boundless possibility. Serving as both a model to others, artists ensure that the trauma inflicted on humans never succeeds in defining our identity or our future. It’s a message well worth listening to from an artist and architect whose work is only now beginning to attain the full renown it deserves.

Follow Kazazian on Instagram: www.instagram.com/nishankazazian/

Learn more about Kazazian at: <https://nishankazazian.com/>



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Egyptian Yellow Lentil Soup

“Magda Mehdawy, author of *My Egyptian Grandmother’s Kitchen*, says that those working to preserve Egyptian cuisine have an important role, as it forms a key part of the country’s culture, particularly as many crops and ingredients have been lost in Egypt over the years.”

“This recipe is adapted from Magda Mehdawy’s book *My Egyptian Grandmother’s Kitchen*. Lentils are a very ancient food staple, and have been the basis of diets in the Middle East for millennia. To perk up the flavor of this soup, cooks often add a spritz of lemon juice to each serving at the last minute. Note: Ghee is available at Middle Eastern markets. Yellow lentils are actually orange when you buy them in the package, but they quickly turn yellow when cooked. Unlike brown lentils, they take very little time to cook. The amount of cumin can be adjusted to taste.”

A 2019 study in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* found that people who eat more healthful plant foods have a lower chance of dying from cardiovascular disease and all causes. Lentils are a plentiful source of fiber, folic acid, and potassium. These nutrients all support heart health.



INGREDIENTS:

1 tablespoon ghee (or clarified butter)*
2 rounds pita bread, each cut into 9 wedges
1 pound dried yellow lentils
1 medium tomato, quartered and seeded
1 medium potato, peeled and cut into 1 inch slices
1 medium carrot, peeled and cut into 1 inch slices
2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon corn oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
3 cups beef stock or canned beef broth (or vegetable broth)
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
Fresh lemon as garnish

PREPARATION

In large skillet over medium heat, heat ghee. Working in batches of 6, sauté pita pieces until crisp, about 4 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels and set aside.

Wash lentils well in several changes of water until water runs clear. Drain. In a large saucepan, combine lentils and enough water to cover by 2 inches. Add tomato, potato, carrot, and salt and bring to boil. Cover and simmer 30 minutes, skimming any foam that forms on top.

Remove from heat. Strain, reserving cooking liquid. In a blender, purée solids, adding enough reserved liquid to make mixture smooth. Set aside.

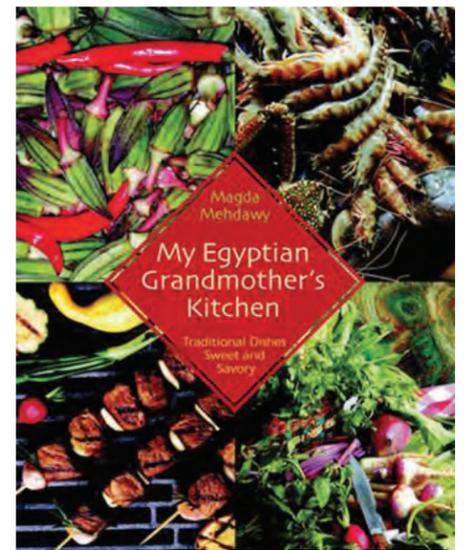
In medium pot over moderately high heat, heat the corn oil. Add the onion and sauté until golden, about 10 minutes. Add the puréed lentils, beef stock, and cumin. Simmer until soup thickens, about 10-12 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Ladle soup into bowls and sprinkle with chopped parsley. Serve with fried bread wedges and lemon wedges as garnish.

Serves 4-6.

* Ghee is a type of clarified butter, originating from India. It is commonly used for cooking, as a traditional medicine, and for Hindu religious rituals.

In this beautifully illustrated volume, Magda Mehdawy has gathered in one book the most complete collection of Egyptian recipes ever assembled. Drawing on the traditional recipes she learned from her grandmother and other members of her generation, Mehdawy offers a surprising range of sumptuous recipes and unusual flavors that are part of Egypt’s millennia-long cultural heritage. She reveals the historical depth of the national cuisine, beginning with a section on food and wine-making techniques used by the ancient Egyptians. For readers interested in more recent traditions, Mehdawy provides lists of typical menus served on Islamic holidays and feasts, and a fascinating overview of traditional beliefs regarding vegetables and spices. Mehdawy holds a degree in archaeology from the University of Alexandria. In 2004, she was awarded the Al-Ahram Appreciation Prize for the original Arabic edition of *My Egyptian Grandmother’s Kitchen*. She is also the winner of the Gourmand World Cookbook Award, Best in the World 2007. Originally published: 2006. She lives in Alexandria. To order, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/My-Egyptian-Grandmothers-Kitchen-Traditional/dp/9774249275>



Legacy Businesses In San Francisco Neighborhood Say They’re Forced out By Billionaire

By Tim Johns

SAN FRANCISCO (MSN) — Walk down Fillmore Street in the heart of San Francisco, and you’ll be greeted by several familiar businesses - some of which have been here for decades. But that may soon be changing.

Since the start of the year, a billionaire venture capitalist has bought several of the buildings in this area.

And many of these business owners say they’re being forced to leave.

“We’re scared. We don’t want to lose everything,” said Steve Amano.

Amano is the co-owner of Ten-Ichi, a sushi bar that was opened by his Japanese immigrant parents back in 1978.

Amano feels they’re being strong-armed into closing next month.

“I signed that termination agreement because they were saying things like we’re going to charge you this. All these numbers they were firing at us that we’d have to pay. That was freaking us out,” said Amano.

Across the street at La Mediterranee, we were told a similar story by Vanick Der Bedrossian.

His restaurant was opened by his father, a Lebanese immigrant, around the same time as Ten-Ichi.

Their lease isn’t up until May, Der Bedrossian says the new landlord has shown no interest in negotiating a new lease.

“We have 20 plus employees who work here. We have a very strong following here in the community. And we want to have clarity about our future,” said Der Bedrossian.

The buildings that both Ten-Ichi and La Mediterranee operate out of have been bought by entities connected to venture capitalist Neil Mehta.

Mehta could not be reached for comment but nightlife entrepreneur Cody Allen who has worked with the venture capitalist’s nonprofit SF Reserve Foundation sent us this statement:

“Our investment in Upper Fillmore has been made on behalf of our nonprofit, SF Reserve Foundation, with the objective of

bringing in more small businesses, rather than introducing chain or formula retail tenants. Our foundation’s aim is to bring in an even wider variety of food and beverage operators; to revitalize the iconic Clay Theater; and to restore Fillmore storefronts.”

On Monday, Supervisor and mayoral candidate Aaron Peskin held a news conference on Fillmore Street to announce a plan to introduce legislation making it harder to kick out legacy businesses.

“It’s important for the family, in this case a multi-generational family that’s been here for literally almost half a century. It’s important for the community that sees this as a gathering space. It’s important for the fabric of a neighborhood,” Peskin said.

Welcome news for people like Amano, who says while he’s trying to find a new location for Ten-Ichi, he doesn’t know what will come next.

“I mean we have no option. There’s no other option. But we’re not going to lay down. I can’t. We have to keep working,” he said.



La Mediterranee restaurant in San Francisco

Antranik Zekian: ‘We Are the Masters of Our Own Destiny’

ZEKIAN, from page 13

but it ended up spanning two and a half years, allowing me to cross 41 countries and cover over 91,000 kilometers overland. Traveling by road lets you witness the world change gradually. You focus more on what connects people rather than on what sets them apart. As you mentioned, I was fortunate to participate in an Antarctic expedition. Arriving in Ushuaia, at the southern tip of Patagonia, I thought I had reached the end of the world. Thanks to a few encounters, I was able to board a ship and spend two weeks on the white continent. It's a unique experience: crossing Cape Horn with albatrosses trailing the ship's wake, spotting the first distant icebergs, and then seeing penguins watching us on the horizon while humpback whales breach near our boat.

Observing nature in its wild state is a rare privilege. This passage through Antarctica also confronted me with a truth we often forget: we are tiny compared to nature's elements. This becomes even more evident when you're on a boat surrounded by icebergs, with the closest human presence 1,400 kilometers away.

I had packed a few favorite t-shirts to comfort me during the adventure, including one with my name, Anto. Armenia seems to follow me everywhere!

Not many people of your generation, even those with partial Armenian heritage, are as engaged in Armenian affairs and as committed to preserving their Armenian heritage within their families. It's very moving to hear you speak exclusively Armenian with your son! Why is it so important for you to preserve the Armenian identity?

I'm not a fan of the term “half-Armenian.” I don't believe in the importance of blood. In this regard, I'm very proud of both my French and Armenian roots. I'm not կէս - կէս (half/half), but լման - լման (fully both). To paraphrase Charles Aznavour, I feel luckier than others because I'm 200 percent.

More seriously, as Armenians, we should be proud of our heritage, but above all, we must work to keep it alive. By mutual agreement with his mother, we decided that I would speak to our son in Armenian. We want him to absorb this language and develop an intimate connection with it.

I'm convinced that language is essential to preserving our identity. Learning it takes effort, but it remains the most effective tool to stay Armenian. After all, Mesrop Mashrots created the Armenian alphabet precisely to protect our people's uniqueness during uncertain times.

My dad and my mom also played an important role. While never proselytizing and allowing me to make my own choices, they exposed me to the Armenian community. I was part of the Armenian Scouts in Lyon (France) from my 6th birthday; it gave me the chance to participate in the first summer camp in Tsaghkadzor in 1995. They also enrolled me in the Markarian-Papazian weekly school. This helped me appreciate early on the advantage of having a dual culture.

My dad being a graduate from the Mekhitarian College in Paris, he has excellent knowledge of Armenian culture. This also pushed me speak at home in this “secret language” that my mother did not understand.

Today, one of my greatest pleasures is hearing my father speak to my son in Armenian. The loop is closed, and the story continues.

“Unfortunately,” my son and I do not have this secret language. My partner, who isn't Armenian herself, made the effort to learn how to read, write, and speak. She has

been studying for six years in Venice, taking intensive language courses offered by the Padus-Araxes association. She knows much more about Armenian culture than many of my Armenian friends. Our culture is rich and appeals to many non-Armenians. We should welcome them with open arms and not close ourselves off. We should also ask ourselves what it means to be Armenian today.

Armenians need allies, and like many other nations, we must consider how we can “create new Armenians.”

My Armenian identity has given me so much in life, from my closest friends to my most incredible experiences. Even my world tour by motorcycle was born from friendships made at the AGBU France summer camp. Being an Armenian living in Europe also allows me to understand the



Antranik Zekian in Armenia, not far from Mastara village, with the jezve that has travelled all the time with him during his around world journey.

world with multiple perspectives and better grasp its complexity. This benefits me in both my personal and professional life.

I want my son to have this open-mindedness and the same opportunities I had.

Every Armenian family's history deserves to be told – what's yours?

My grandmother is from Merzifon. She fled the massacres and was taken in by several missions during those troubled times. She retained mastery of many languages, including English. She eventually ended up in Constantinople with her mother and brother, where they managed to board a ship bound for France, the country that welcomed them and where they rebuilt their lives.

My grandfather was originally from Yozgat. When the genocide began, his family was protected by a Kurdish chief with whom they lived. After some time, when the situation had somewhat calmed, they returned to Yozgat and resumed living in their old house. For several months, they tried to reclaim the property that had been taken by their neighbors during their absence. After a dispute, they were betrayed by an Armenian convert to Islam. Turkish gendarmes arrived and killed my great-grandfather by throwing him out of a window. The family then fled, first to Lebanon. My great-uncle settled there, while my grandfather chose to continue his journey to France. He was an intellectual who dreamed of living in the land of human rights and the great thinkers Rousseau and Voltaire. France welcomed him, and he rebuilt his life and met my grandmother there.

I had the chance to leave with my grand-

mother Varsen for several years. She was an inspiring woman, and a great Grand Mother. I often recalled of her and her happiness and great sense of humor. Her story and her resilience continue to inspire me every day.

For the past three years, you've also been in charge of the AGBU France summer camp. What does this project involve?

In 2020, like so many Armenians around the world, I was traumatized by the tragedy unfolding in Artsakh before my eyes. I asked myself many questions about how I could be of use.

During my childhood and teenage years, I attended the UGAB (AGBU's acronym in French) France summer camp. This camp had a profound impact on me, and I forged strong friendships there that, for many,

now into the fourth or even fifth generation. After integrating, Armenians have moved on to assimilation. In more and more families, the only link to Armenian identity is through memory. Remembering tragic events is important, but the diaspora needs to look to the future. Some say that fighting against assimilation is like swimming against the tide. I love challenges, and this is one we must take on. It requires effort and raises the question of what it means to be Armenian today in the diaspora.

In Europe, no one threatens us, and it's up to us to mobilize the necessary efforts to keep our community alive. The diaspora must rethink its relationship with its identity. It shouldn't take the attachment of younger generations to Armenia for granted. For them, the concept of Armenian identity is abstract; their parents and, increasingly, their grandparents were born in Europe. We need to work on making this connection to Armenian identity more tangible.

We must also not neglect Armenia. Plants cannot grow without roots; the diaspora should see Armenia as its homeland and draw strength from it. The relationship between Armenia and the diaspora should be viewed as bilateral: with the diaspora, Armenia is much stronger; without Armenia, the diaspora disappears.

We also need to consider how to facilitate transmission. We should develop more schools, raise our educational standards, and be demanding of ourselves. We should work on making Armenian culture more accessible. Since I started trying to teach my son Western Armenian, I've been astonished by the challenges I face in finding quality materials.

You're also among the diaspora Armenians who frequently visit Armenia. What are your non-touristic impressions of Armenia's evolution?

My partner took me to celebrate my 40th birthday in Armenia in November 2023. It had been several years since I had last been there, and I was impressed by the changes.

Due to the combined effect of the immigration of Armenians from the Middle East, the increasing number of Diaspora Armenians living there, and a de-Sovietization of society, the glass wall that existed between the “spurkahays” (diaspora Armenians) and the “hayastantsis” (Armenians living in Armenia) seems to have finally been broken.

I was impressed by the political changes on the ground, as well as the country's openness to tourism beyond the diaspora and even to immigration, which is starting to be observed, especially in Yerevan and Gyumri.

In ten years, the country has modernized significantly, and mentalities have evolved a lot. Minds have opened up. It felt like a dream; I felt at home there and I am now seriously thinking on relocating there part time. The level of education of many young people is impressive, and in some fields, the programs are comparable to European education.

Of course, the security situation worries me greatly, and my trips to the borders did not ease my concerns. But Armenians have faced many trials in their history. We must remain mobilized, be realistic about the difficulties we face, and not expect external help to magically solve our problems. We are the masters of our own destiny.

On an individual level, each of us must ask ourselves how we can be useful to our people and consider the sacrifices we are willing to make to be Armenian.

We must remain confident about the future and remember that it has never been easy to be Armenian!

still last today. It helped me understand the meaning of being Armenian. For nearly 10 years, I spent time in this magical place, first as a camper and then as a counselor.

This experience confirmed what William Saroyan beautifully expressed in his prose: once two of us meet, anything becomes possible.

I remained friends with Hermine Duzian, who has been running the camp for 31 years and whom I greatly respect. When she offered me the opportunity to help, I knew it was fate answering my questions.

For three years now, I've been part of the leadership of this wonderful camp. It brings together around a hundred children and twenty counselors from around the world. This year, we welcomed children from France, Armenia, Lebanon, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, and Turkey.

The days are filled with games, sports, dancing, singing, and cultural activities. The participants form strong bonds and experience their Armenian identity in the enchanting setting of the French Alps.

I'm very proud to contribute, along with Hermine and thanks to AGBU, which has supported this project for 40 years, to planting the seeds of Armenian identity that will grow and shape our future generations of Armenians.

The interested people I would suggest to visit AGBU summer camp website: <https://ugabfrance.org/colonie-vacances?language=hye>

Are you optimistic about preserving the Armenian identity in future generations of European Armenians?

It's a difficult question. In Europe, we're



ARTS & CULTURE

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 20.

MASSACHUSETTS

SEPTEMBER 7 — "Let's Meet at the Park: For College Students." Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Saturday at 11:00 a.m. Welcome. Meet & Greet. Eat & Enjoy! RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

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

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

SEPTEMBER 12 — Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and the Shahbazian Foundation invite you to a lecture on "The Development and Future of Artificial Intelligence (and AI in Armenia)" featuring Prof. Joseph Shahbazian and Harry Glorikian, author of *The Future You: How Artificial Intelligence Can Help You Get Healthier, Stress Less, and Live Longer*. Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown (or via Zoom), RSVP at tcadirector@aol.com, Zoom link <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/86485218660?pwd=caBEqHO04LdBPMtBmZd972jJvfSDai.1>

SEPTEMBER 14 — Shish Kebob Picnic, Ararat Church, 2 Salem Street, Salem, NH. Open to All. Kids events start at 2:30 PM; meals served 3 PM to 7 PM. Kids Magic Show: 5:30 PM. Live Armenian Music, Luke's Goldies IG Influencer Meet & Greet, Face Painting, Bounce House, Magician and more! \$25 for two skewers of meat. Meals include a choice of lamb, beef or chicken plus sides of rice pilaf, salad, hummus, tabouleh, pita bread and dessert. Meal tickets sold online and at the door. <https://shish.ararat.church> or Call Mary Ann @ 603-770-3375 for more information.

SEPTEMBER 14 — The Mosesian Center For The Arts in Watertown will host a concert starting at 7:30pm with oud master John Berberian and the bands Armadi Tsayn and RazAvaz, for a night of Armenian folk music from the Armenian Highlands to the Diaspora. Armadi Tsayn, features young musicians who pay homage to the rich legacy of Western Armenia. Members include Alek Surenian and Sam Sjostedt, both of whom studied under Berberian. RazAvaz is a contemporary Persian ensemble based in Boston. Purchase tickets at : <https://www.mosesianarts.org/timedevents/1836?vrid=WmF-PNXZnPT06OmVjYmIzOTQ2NGMxMjg4NTM0YmFjZjI2M2JmYzE2N2Fk&showall=1> For additional ticketing inquires:617-923-0100, tickets@mosesianarts.org

SEPTEMBER 15 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, under the patronage of Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg Mikael Mouradian, will celebrate the Feast of Exaltation of the Cross. Sunday, 10.30 a.m. at the church, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Followed by a luncheon at the Oakley Country Club, 410 Belmont St., Watertown. Master of Ceremonies Maral Der Torossian, Keynote Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and entertainment from singer Miriam and musician Vasken Habib and DJ Ryno. Donation \$125 adult, \$95 youth and \$75 child. Reservations by calling parish office at 617-489-2280 or emailing holycrossbostonma@gmail.com

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

NEW YORK

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

SEPTEMBER 15 — Parish Council members and friends of St. Paul Armenian Church, Syracuse, will host its Annual Shish Kebob Picnic. Great food, games, prizes, etc., on scenic, sheltered, private grounds at Ryder Park. Serving starts at 1 p.m. The entire community is invited.

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

'Dispersion' Podcast Navigates Identity, Home and Belonging through Storytelling

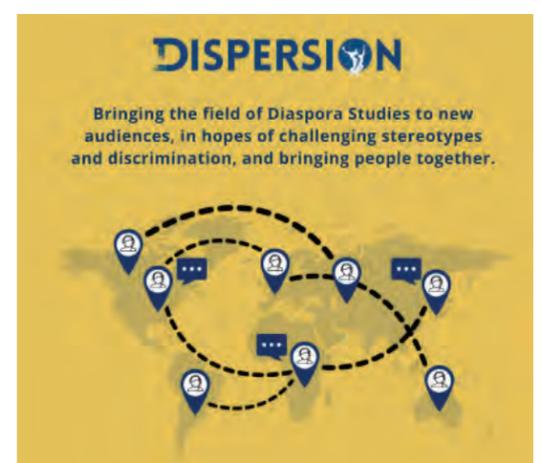
PODCAST, from page 13
generational diasporans and their understanding of the concept of "home." Greg Sarkissian explains in the episode: "I am an Armenian by choice. At the end of the day, if my father was 100 percent Armenian, and I am 50 percent Armenian, maybe Talar is 25% Armenian... All of us are some sort of cappuccino, but the coffee and milk levels change." The episode is emblematic of "Dispersion," addressing the differences and similarities that unite diaspora groups globally.

Each episode of the podcast is grounded in an article from the *Diaspora* jour-

nal, providing a foundation for conversations that bridge the gap between academic and non-academic audiences alike. The *Diaspora* journal captures a world where borders are transgressed and elastic, boundaries are fractured and permeable, and identities are increasingly fluid and adaptable. Including literature from the social sciences strengthens the podcast's ability to make meaningful contributions to ongoing conversations about mobility, mobilization, and transnationalism, reorienting traditional accounts of home, homeland, host state, and diaspora.

Despite the cultural, linguistic, reli-

gious, and geographical differences between various diasporic communities, "Dispersion" truly represents Canada's cultural mosaic. It makes a brave foray into the changing and often complicated dialogue of diasporan experiences, offering Canadians from all manners of diaspora the opportunity to find commonalities and better understand their differences. The podcast allows the wider public to engage in diaspora studies through storytelling and documenting lived experiences. *Dispersion* serves as a platform for the kinds of conversations needed in today's increasingly polarized world.



COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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Armenia's Diplomatic Engagement at 2024 US Parties' National Conventions and Its Impact on Bilateral Ties

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In the past two months the US national conventions for both the Republican and Democratic Parties took place. The Republican Party held its national convention between July 15 and 18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, nominating Donald Trump and David Vance respectively as its 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates. On the other hand, the Democratic National Convention was held a bit later, between August 19 and 22 in Chicago during which the Democratic party nominated Kamala Harris and Tim Walz as its own presidential and vice presidential candidates.

The US national conventions are pivotal events in the American political calendar, which define the programs and objectives of the two main parties and set the stage for the general elections. These conventions provide a vital opportunity for foreign diplomats to learn about the foreign and domestic agendas of the next US administration. Understanding these dynamics is essential for maintaining bilateral ties and making possible policy adjustments that may impact relations with the United States. The participation of ambassadors accredited in Washington at these conventions reflects their strategic interest in engaging with US political developments and ensuring robust dialogue with key American stakeholders. Hence, for the diplomats, these conventions are not just ceremonial events but crucial platforms for understanding each party's policy priorities and building relationships with influential figures from both parties. That is why it is important for diplomatic missions to have high level engagement in both conventions, thus showing their willingness to work equally productively with either potential administration, no matter whichever party will be elected into power. In this way, ambassadors can mitigate the risks related to possible political shifts in the United States and build rapport with both the Republican and Democratic parties.

Lilit Makunts, the Armenian ambassador to the US, took part in both the Republican National Convention and the Democratic National Convention as part of a State Department program for heads of diplomatic missions accredited in Washington, which gave diplomats a chance to gain insights into US political processes, specifically elections and to engage with key political figures from both major parties. In this regard it is important to take into account that effective diplomacy requires adapting to the dynamics of both major parties to ensure that Armenia's interests are well-represented and that relationships with U.S. policymakers remain strong and productive.

From the Embassy's official announcements, it becomes evident that discussions were held with the representatives of the diplomatic corps involving former US administration officials, congressmen, think tanks and foreign policy experts. These discussions highlighted the foreign and domestic policy priorities of both parties. However, from the embassy's statements, it ap-

pears that Ambassador Lilit Makunts was less deeply involved in the Republican discussions compared to her counterpart, the Georgian ambassador, who engaged with prominent US senators and representatives, including Senators Marco Rubio, Cory Gardner, Dan Sullivan, Bill Hagerty, House Speaker Mike Johnson, Congressman Joe Wilson, and prominent foreign policy leaders of the Republican Party. In contrast, we do not observe a similar level of engagement with Republican senators and representatives from Ambassador Makunts. Even if she had a chance to get involved with Republicans she did not publish any information about her engagement with GOP representatives. This is circumstantial evidence that the Armenian government is not willing to have deeper ties with Republicans, which would be highly unprofessional.

On the other hand, we observe a deeper level of engagement from the Armenian ambassador at the Democratic National Convention. The current Armenian government seems to have a more effective working relationship with Democrats rather than with Republicans, a pattern that was particularly evident during Donald Trump's presidency. Despite the vast opportunities for significant bilateral developments, the period of the Trump administration saw relatively small-scale progress in US-Armenia relations.

In addition to Ambassador Makunts's participation, a delegation of Armenian National Assembly deputies, including Sargis Khandanyan, Tsovinar Vardanyan and Sona Ghazaryan, attended the Democratic National Convention but did not engage with the Republican National Convention. It is prudent to avoid showing preferential treatment to one party, especially when the election outcome remains uncertain. By maintaining a balanced approach and engaging with all major political parties, the Armenian diplomatic efforts can better maneuver through US politics and promote more robust and bipartisan relations.

With regard to the future of US-Armenian relations, it is crucial for Armenia to better position itself in these political processes to better adjust to the possible political changes in the United States by proactively and equally engaging with both US major parties and its key members and representatives. Maintaining this bipartisan involvement will be critical for advancing Armenia's interests in the USA irrespective of the prevailing political party in the country. Of course, engaging with political parties does not equate to engaging with administrations. Thus, working with parties involves interacting with Congress, which may be led by Republicans — a scenario the Armenian government appears keen to avoid.

(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.)

Armenia to Russia: Thanks, But No Thanks on Mediation

By Ani Avetisyan

It seems Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov huffed and puffed and then ... stopped trying to strong arm Armenia into giving the Kremlin a say in the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process.

Lavrov spent a portion of the last week grousing about a decision by Armenia and Azerbaijan to set aside differences over a transit arrangement, dubbed the Zangezur corridor, amid discussions on a durable peace deal between the two states. The decision to address Zangezur separately from a peace pact stands to greatly diminish Russian influence in the region. Under a blueprint drafted in 2020, Russian forces would have had a major role in ensuring "security" in the Zangezur corridor.

The Kremlin didn't accept the development quietly. During an August 18-19 visit to Azerbaijan, Russian leader Vladimir Putin dropped not-so-subtle hints that he wants to remain a powerbroker in the Caucasus. And in a late August interview broadcast on Azerbaijani television, Lavrov lashed out at Armenia, claiming Yerevan is renegeing on an agreement signed in 2020 concerning the Zangezur corridor. "It

is the Armenian leadership that is sabotaging an agreement signed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. It is difficult to understand the meaning of such a position," Lavrov complained.

The heavy-handed approach did little to sway Pashinyan. During an August 31 news conference, the Armenian prime minister emphatically stated that Yerevan sought to finalize a peace pact with Baku without any third-party assistance. He went on to deride Russian leaders' efforts to cast themselves as disinterested peacemakers. "How do you imagine that, for example, a country that accuses Armenia of sabotaging that topic [transit arrangements] can act as a mediator in regional transit arrangements? The one who makes such a statement excludes himself from all possible mediations," Pashinyan stated.

"I can say that regional transit routes have not been opened up to this point, including due to the comments of a number of Russian partners that have nothing to do with the logic of the document [the 2020 blueprint] and contradict it," he added.

The verbal sparring over Zangezur ended with Lavrov seeming to give up on efforts to cajole Yerevan into acceding to

the Kremlin's wishes. If Armenia wants to make peace with Azerbaijan without Russian mediation, "so be it," the official Russian news agency TASS quoted Lavrov as saying during a meeting with students at MGIMO University in Moscow on September 2.

Moscow, Baku and Ankara had been pushing for the creation of the Zangezur corridor since late 2020. The route would connect Azerbaijan and Turkey, with Russia serving as the security guarantor. Yerevan strongly opposed the project and any foreign control over the transit route, instead suggesting a route under Armenian control and following Armenia's customs regulations. The issue had been a major sticking point in peace talks.

With the Zangezur deadlock now set aside for further negotiations at a later, undetermined date, Russia seems to have lost a lot of leverage in the Caucasus. The biggest remaining obstacle to a peace settlement now appears to be Azerbaijan's insistence that Yerevan alter the Armenian constitution to acknowledge Baku's sovereignty over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

see OFFER, page 20



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Pashinyan's Press Conference Proved Why He Isn't Qualified To Lead Armenia

During his latest press conference held on August 31, 2024, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan showed once again why he should resign as soon as possible.

Since neither Pashinyan nor his advisors and appointees know what they are doing, I am obliged to volunteer some advice and suggestions, something I have done for 30 years with all previous and current leaders of Armenia.

While it is commendable that Pashinyan wants to meet with the media and answer questions, his press conferences should not last longer than one hour, to lessen the number of his contradictory statements and to conceal his incompetence. During past press conferences, he had spoken for four or five hours, thus copying the practice of past Soviet and current Russian leaders whose meetings with the media lasted forever. Fortunately, this time, Pashinyan's press conference lasted only 2 hours and 17 minutes. By answering so many questions, Pashinyan provided more ammunition to his opponents to criticize his answers.

The first issue that I would like to cover is Pashinyan's reply to a question on whether Armenia should attend the International Environmental UN Conference to be held in Baku in November. In July, when asked if Armenia will participate in the UN Conference (COP29), the Government Information and Public Relations Department promised that Pashinyan will respond to Azerbaijan's invitation during his press conference in August. However, on August 31, when asked about his decision, he nonchalantly said he had not made a decision and that he will let everyone know at a later date. If he has a good reason for not deciding now, why did the government promise in July that he will announce the decision in August?

In reply to a question about whether the Armenian government is making any efforts to gain the release of the Armenian prisoners of war and political hostages, Pashinyan as usual blamed everyone else except himself. He forgot that immediately after the 2020 War, he is the one who foolishly released all Azeri prisoners of war in return for some of the Armenian prisoners. He should have freed ALL Azeri prisoners only in exchange for the release of ALL Armenian prisoners. Pashinyan made another major blunder when he agreed to lift Armenia's veto, allowing Baku to host the highly prestigious international conference in November. President Ilham Aliyev was so desperate to host this conference that he would have agreed to release, not just some, but all of the Armenian prisoners and even vacate the regions of the Republic of Armenia occupied since 2021 and 2022.

Pashinyan next disclosed that Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed on 13 out of the 17 articles in the draft of the peace agreement. Therefore, Pashinyan suggested that the two countries sign the document on the basis of the agreed 13 points, leaving the remaining four points for the future. However, Pashinyan does not seem to understand that Aliyev has zero interest in seeking peace with Armenia. What he wants is a piece of Armenia, in fact all of Armenia, as he has repeatedly threatened.

First of all, Pashinyan constantly asking for peace will not lead to peace for the simple reason that Azerbaijan is not interested in peace. It takes two to tango. There is no such thing as a one-sided peace.

Secondly, by desperately begging for peace, Pashinyan is simply encouraging Aliyev to demand more and more concessions from Armenia.

Thirdly, the signing of a "peace treaty" will not prevent Aliyev from waging war on Armenia. The "peace treaty" will not guarantee peace. For Aliyev, the "peace treaty" is just a piece of paper.

Pashinyan boasted that the agreement signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan last Friday to demarcate the borders was the first legal document signed between the two countries, even though it has yet to be ratified. He must have forgotten that back in 1994, the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh signed a ceasefire agreement. He also forgot that he himself signed a similar agreement at the end of the 2020 War with Putin and Aliyev.

Perhaps the ugliest part of Pashinyan's press conference was when he decided to raise unnecessary suspicions about Ruben Vardanyan, the former State Minister of Artsakh, who has been held in a Baku jail as a hostage since Sept. 2023. Instead of focusing on his non-existent efforts to gain the release of the Armenian prisoners of war and hostages, Pashinyan disparaged Vardanyan by saying: "What happened? How come Ruben Vardanyan gave up his Russian citizenship? Who advised him or recommended to him to take that step? Who sent him in that sense to the Republic of Armenia? Who sent him to Nagorno Karabakh? For what purpose, what guarantees, what assurances, what promises? And who at the end said, 'you know we do not really know who he is, since he is a citizen of another country?'" Pashinyan then told the reporter who asked the question: "Do you want that we have answers to these questions or not? You yourself mentioned it and I am reacting to it. And I would like to say and confess that it is a real problem, it is a serious problem with which we need to occupy ourselves and we are occupying ourselves with. I don't want now to talk about other additional complexities and reveal details. But, I also want to say that the successful realization of the peace agenda is for that issue as well for which it is not mandatory to have a successful endpoint..." Rather than helping to free Vardanyan, Pashinyan made his release even more complicated.

Pashinyan made many other errors during his press conference, but one needs to write an entire book to cover them all.

Protecting Armenian Churches in Nagorno-Karabakh Should Be a Condition for Peace

By Stephan Pechdimaldji

In recent weeks, there have been reports claiming that Armenia and Azerbaijan are on the cusp of inking a peace deal that would finally bring an end to their decades-old conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). While peace in the South Caucasus should be welcomed, Armenia must demand Azerbaijan end its ongoing campaign of cultural erasure of Armenian churches, monasteries, khachkars (cross-stone monuments), and other religious sites that have stood in the region for thousands of years as a condition for any peace agreement. In the wake of Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing of more than 120,000 Armenians from their ancestral homeland of Artsakh, the threat of wiping out their entire existence from this area remains today. According to a recent report from Reuters and The Museum of the Bible, an estimated 400 Armenian churches and other religious sites have been under attack and are in danger of being defaced or outright destroyed.

As the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301 AD, Armenia's identity and culture has been closely defined by its Christian faith, which makes these historical symbols so important to their survival as a people. Christianity has sustained Armenians throughout their painful history, which has been marked by widespread persecution and mass suffering over hundreds of years. That history includes the first genocide of the 20th century, when more than 1.5 million Armenians were systematically exterminated by the Ottoman Turks, an event that both Turkey and Azerbaijan deny to this day.

That is why preserving these religious sites should be a precondition for any lasting peace between the

two countries. By respecting and honoring that history, Azerbaijan would send a message that they truly want peace with Armenia. However, all signs show Azerbaijan heading in the opposite direction.

Taking a page out of the authoritarian playbook, Azerbaijan's petro-dictator Ilham Aliyev used the pretext of historical revisionism to launch his unprovoked war against Armenians living in Artsakh in 2020. Claiming that large parts of Armenia's territory were Azerbaijan's "historical lands," he embarked on a controversial campaign to restore Armenian churches and religious sites to their "original" form. What that form means was not initially clear, but we now know that the complete destruction and evisceration of these sites was Azerbaijan's original intent.

Under the guise of restoration, Azerbaijan dismantled the iconic Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi soon after taking over the city. The cathedral was a symbol of Armenian existence in the region. Later, more images from the city surfaced—occupying Azeri forced razed

IT IS HARD TO TAKE AZERBAIJAN AT FACE VALUE WHEN IT SAYS IT WANTS PEACE WITH ARMENIA, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY TRYING TO ERASE ARMENIA'S RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY.

an Armenian genocide memorial. And recent satellite imagery shows Azerbaijan's destruction of Armenian religious and cultural sites continues unabated, including the destruction of the 177-year-old St. John the Baptist church in Shushi, and the demolition of the St. Ascension Church in Berdzor and the entire village of Karintak, where a mosque is currently under construction where the town once stood.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of a cultural genocide taking place, Azerbaijan continues to deny any culpability in the desecration of these religious sites. They have even ignored the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) November order calling Azerbaijan

to "take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts."

In the summer of 2019, Armenians had the foresight to think ahead a year before the war in Artsakh broke out. Students from the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies produced a 3D scanning project of the Dadivank Armenian monastery, which was built between the 9th and 13th centuries. The students wanted to leverage the power of technology to bring one of the most important sites in Armenian history to life for people around the world to see, while educating them about Armenia's rich culture and presence in the region. Little did they realize that their efforts would soon turn into a preservation campaign. With the region and monastery now in the hands of Azerbaijan, the students' scan of Dadivank might be the only sign keeping Armenia's legacy alive as Azerbaijan continues to rewrite history.

Still, there is a significant difference between a digital record and a physical place of worship. That is why it is so important that these Armenian religious and cultural institutions that have weathered earthquakes and wars stay intact. In many ways, Azerbaijan's belligerence and aggression goes beyond a piece of land or sovereignty. It is a form of religious persecution that spreads across borders and needs to stop immediately.

It is hard to take Azerbaijan at face value when it says it wants peace with Armenia, while simultaneously trying to erase Armenia's religious and cultural identity. For a country that claims to tolerate various religious backgrounds and coexistence, Azerbaijan has a long way to go. They can start by making the preservation of Armenian religious and cultural sites in Artsakh a priority. Anything short of that should be a dealbreaker for any lasting peace.

(Stephan Pechdimaldji is a communications strategist living in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is a first-generation Armenian American and grandson of survivors of the Armenian genocide. You can follow him on X at @spechdimaldji. This commentary originally appeared on the website www.newsweek.com on August 26.)



Former University of Chicago Student Charged with Setting Off Explosion in Dorm, Lying to Federal Investigators

By Todd Feurer

CHICAGO (CBS) — A former University of Chicago student from Massachusetts is facing federal charges after allegedly setting off an explosion in his dorm room last year, and lying to federal agents months later when his bags set off explosive alarms at Logan International Airport in Boston.

Aram Brunson, 21, of Newton, Mass., is charged with one count each of falsifying, concealing and covering up a material fact by trick, scheme or device; and making false statements to federal officials.

Federal prosecutors in Massachusetts said, in January 2023, Brunson triggered an explosion in his dorm room at the

Woodlawn Commons at the University of Chicago while trying to build a large black powder device.

The explosion caused a fire which prompted officials to evacuate the dorm. At the time, he claimed he was just trying to recreate a prank he'd seen on the internet, according to prosecutors.

An investigation later revealed Brunson, who is of Armenian descent, was seeking to engage in revolutionary action and terrorism in support of Armenian causes, and made videos of himself teaching others how to make explosives and rig doors and desks with grenades, prosecutors said.

Investigators discovered a video of him "plainly seeking to assist Armenian speakers in the formation and operation of an armed militant terrorist organization," according to the charges.

Months after the explosion in his dorm, in August 2023, Brunson went to Logan International Airport in Boston to fly to Armenia, when his bags set off explosive alarms. Prosecutors said he told Customs and Border Protection officials that he had no idea how traces of explosive materials ended up on and in his bags.

A search of his home later revealed a notebook in which he had written up a recipe for making HMTD explosive compound. A bomb dog used to sweep the home alerted on three locations in his bedroom, according to the charges.

Court records show an arrest warrant for Brunson was issued on August 27. A spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's office in Massachusetts said Brunson is believed to be living in Armenia and attending the American University of Armenia

in Yerevan.

If convicted, Brunson faces up to 5 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 for each of the charges.

Former University of Chicago student Aram Brunson is wanted for federal charges for concealing bomb making in a dorm room in January 2023.



Aram Brunson

The University of Chicago issued the following statement Thursday:

"We take the safety of our students extremely seriously. The individual has not been enrolled at the University or permitted in a residence hall since the incident. The University worked closely with law enforcement to ensure a thorough investigation."

According to the charging documents Brunson's bomb-making activities were linked to his desire to take militant action against Azerbaijanis and others who pose a threat to ethnic Armenians living in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A subsequent investigation allegedly revealed that Brunson sought to engage in what he described as revolutionary direct

action and terrorism in support of Armenian causes. It is further alleged that Brunson made videos of himself teaching others how to make explosive devices and rig doors and desks with grenades. His internet searches also allegedly suggested that he planned to take action against foreign diplomatic facilities in the United States.

"It is alleged that Mr. Brunson crossed the line between political expression and mobilization, by taking affirmative steps to carry out unlawful acts. While radical political views may be offensive, they are constitutionally protected. However, experimenting with extremely dangerous explosives in support of those views and then engaging in false statements about your conduct is crossing the line. We will investigate and prosecute anyone

who crosses that line in order to keep our communities safe," said Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy.

"What Aram Brunson is accused of is alarming. We believe he engaged in a calculated scheme to conceal his efforts to develop bomb making skills and construct an explosive device in support of his violent extremist activity," said Jodi Cohen, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Field Division. "This case highlights how FBI Boston's Joint Terrorism Task Force takes its mission to thwart political violence, wherever it may occur, seriously."

(Material from the US Attorney's Office was added to the CBS story.)

Armenia to Russia: Thanks, But No Thanks On Mediation Offer

OFFER, from page 18

Since Armenia's loss of Karabakh to Azerbaijan in September 2023, Yerevan has sought to distance itself from Russia, its erstwhile strategic partner, and seek closer relations with the United States and European Union. Armenia remains economically reliant on Russia, but Moscow has given no indication to date that it will use its economic leverage over Yerevan to get what it wants on the Zangezur question.

(This column originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on Sept. 3.)



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