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## Armenia Expects Further Strengthening Of Ties With US Under Trump

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia believes that its relations with the United States will be further strengthened under the presidency of Donald Trump, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a congratulatory message to the American president-elect on Wednesday, November 6.

“I am sure that during your presidency, Armenia-US relations will be further strengthened, and we will continue to record new achievements, realizing our vision of reaching the level of strategic partnership,” Pashinyan said in the message, as quoted by his press office.

He noted the “unprecedented progress” made in recent years in Armenia-US relations, which, he emphasized, are “anchored in the historical friendship, common values, and mutual interests of our countries.”

The prime minister also highlighted the role of the American-Armenian community in strengthening ties.

“I highly appreciate the effective cooperation between our countries in establishing peace and stability in the South Caucasus based on the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, strengthening democratic institutions in Armenia, protecting human rights and ensuring the rule of law, fighting corruption, and preventing security threats,” Pashinyan said.

“The development of cooperation in trade, economic and investment spheres, as well as the full use of the existing considerable potential have a special place in our multi-layered agenda. In this regard, I am happy to note the joint efforts aimed at promoting Armenia’s economic and energy resilience,” he added.

The Armenian premier also expressed hope for new opportunities in Armenia-US relations if “lasting and sustainable peace” is established in the South Caucasus and “regional economic and communication channels” are unblocked. He underlined that the Armenian government’s proposals in that regard are summarized in the “Crossroads of Peace” project.



Ethnic Armenian citizens of Artsakh forced to leave one year ago (Roman Ismayilov, EPA-EFE)

## Freedom House Report Says Azerbaijani Regime Ethnically Cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh

WASHINGTON — On Monday, November 11, Freedom House, a non-governmental watchdog agency, issued a report, in which it concluded that the Azerbaijani regime engaged in ethnic cleansing against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The report was based on an international fact-finding mission composed of Freedom House and a coalition of six other partners.

The report, which builds on initial findings released in June, examined the situation for ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh between the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 and the Azerbaijani regime’s September 2023 military offensive, along with the aftermath of that offensive. The report found

multiple cases of gross human rights violations, breaches of international humanitarian law, and violations of international criminal law by Azerbaijani authorities against ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, through

extrajudicial killings, a monthslong blockade, forced displacement, and postdisplacement policies of cultural erasure and property destruction.

The documented evidence aligns with the definition of ethnic cleansing put forward by a UN commission of

experts in the context of the former Yugoslavia. The fact-finding report also supports the conclusion that the acts documented in Nagorno-Karabakh constitute war crimes and



The unbroken line of cars leaving Stepanakert for Armenia one year ago (Maxar Technologies/Handout via Reuters)

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## Pashinyan, Macron Discuss Armenia-Azerbaijan Normalization

BUDAPEST (Azatutyun) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and French President Emmanuel Macron “exchanged ideas” on the process of normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations as they met on the sidelines of a European summit in Budapest on Thursday, November 8.

According to the Armenian prime minister’s press service, Pashinyan emphasized Armenia’s commitment to the peace agenda and steps to ensure regional security and stability.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan holds a brief conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the 5th European Political Community Summit in Budapest, Hungary, November 7, 2024.

Pashinyan and Macron were attending the fifth meeting of the European Political Community, which brought together dozens of European leaders in the Hungarian capital.

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## APRI Provides Insights into Armenia’s Foreign Policy Challenges

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

NEW YORK — The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) 93<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly included an unusually rich variety of events in addition to its formal sessions held at several sites in Manhattan. Hundreds of attendees from around the world were able to learn about AGBU activities in Armenia and throughout the Armenian diaspora, and enjoyed social and cultural experiences

during three days in October. In addition, they were able to ponder various aspects of the current critical challenges facing Armenia thanks to a full afternoon of panels and speakers presented on October 11 by the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia Foundation (APRI), founded by the AGBU in 2022. Many of the participants were involved in think tanks in the United States and some had held positions in government in the past.

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A discussion on Armenia’s foreign policy at the APRI Armenia New York Meeting.

FRANKFURT

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### AGBU Commemorates 93rd Anniversary

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### ‘Artsakh Uprooted’ Program at USC

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## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Turkey Says Ties with Armenia Will Improve After Peace with Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has once again said that the normalization of its relations with Armenia would depend on the latter's peace process with Azerbaijan.

Fidan's remarks on November 6 came despite Armenia and Turkey earlier agreeing to normalize relations without preconditions.

Fidan told *Turkiye* newspaper that Ankara's relations with Yerevan will be normalized after a peace treaty is signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan," Armenpress reports.

"The relations of Turkey and Armenia will be normalized after the signing of the peace [treaty] between Azerbaijan and Armenia," Fidan said.

### Opposition Urges Parliament Majority To Join Statement on Armenian Prisoners

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The opposition Hayastan and Pativ Unem factions in the Armenian parliament have initiated a special sitting on the issue of Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) and hostages illegally held in Azerbaijan.

They seek the adoption of a statement calling for the release of Armenian prisoners at the parliamentary hearing scheduled to be held later on Tuesday, November 12.

Hayastan MP Artsvik Minasyan called on the pro-government majority in the parliament to back the statement condemning Azerbaijan's inhumane action.

"This provides a good opportunity for Armenia's highest representative body to urge the international community to help release all Armenian prisoners on the sidelines of COP29 being held in Baku," he announced.

### Estonia Says It Will Continue Supporting Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Estonia is ready to continue supporting Armenia, Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal said at a meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the sidelines of the fifth summit of the European Political Community in Budapest.

During the meeting on November 8, the possibilities of development of Armenia-Estonia multi-sectoral cooperation were discussed.

Pashinyan thanked Estonia for the support shown to the strengthening of democracy in Armenia, as well as the advancement of institutional reforms.

Michal noted that Estonia is ready to continue supporting and sharing its accumulated experience and knowledge.

The parties also referred to issues of Armenia-European Union cooperation. The Prime Minister of Estonia reaffirmed his country's support for the development and expansion of Armenia's relations with the EU.

## Armine Afeyan Appointed CEO of The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

YEREVAN — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative announced this week the appointment of Armine Afeyan as the organization's chief executive officer.

Afeyan succeeds Arman Jilavian, who will take on the role of vice chair of the Aurora Board.

"We extend our deepest gratitude to Arman Jilavian for his visionary leadership and unwavering dedication to Aurora's mission," said Noubar Afeyan, Co-Founder and Chair of the Board of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. "Arman's commitment has helped galvanize Aurora's impact across the globe, and we look forward to his continued contributions as Vice Chair of Aurora's Board of Directors."

Armine Afeyan was most recently executive director of Aurora. She rejoined the organization in 2023, having previously held the position of director of communications in 2015–2016. In addition to Aurora, Afeyan has spent the balance of her career in consumer-oriented technology companies, most recently serving as a general manager at Wayfair.

"Armine's leadership experience in both the public and private sectors, coupled with a deep passion for humanitarian work, make her uniquely suited to lead the or-



ganization into a new era of impact," said Dr. Eric Esraïlian, Co-Founder and Board Member of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. "I'm confident that with Armine at the helm, Aurora will continue to inspire hope and action in the face of difficult circumstances, extending the movement to all corners of the world."

"I am honored to follow Arman's footsteps as CEO and continue building on the remarkable foundation laid over our first decade. As we prepare to celebrate Aurora's 10th anniversary in 2025, I look forward to working with our global partners and supporters to expand our reach, enhance our programs, and empower the next generation of humanitarians," said Armine Afeyan. "I am immensely proud to channel my Gratitude into Action by being part of Aurora during this pivotal time."

Recently, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative announced that Dr. Eric Esraïlian has accepted the role of Co-Founder of Aurora's next phase, joining the organization's original co-founding trio, Vartan Gregorian, Ruben Vardanyan and Noubar Afeyan. As an Aurora Board member and the Co-Chair of the 2024 Aurora Prize events in Los Angeles, Esraïlian brings his influence and leadership expertise across various domains including academia, industry, philanthropy, and human rights advocacy to this new role, helping guide the organization toward its 10th anniversary year and beyond.

## Armenian Ministry of Internal Affairs Suspends Controversial Surveillance Bill

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Ministry of Internal Affairs has suspended its bill seeking mandatory installation of video surveillance systems with 24-hour police access.

In a statement on November 12, the ministry said it won't submit the bill to second reading in parliament without broad public consensus.

The bill passed first reading in parliament on June 12, 2024. The ministry of internal affairs said the bill seeks to ensure a safer environment. According to the ministry, the purpose of the bill is exclusively "the full use of the opportunities of modern technological developments in withstanding the modern challenges to public safety, and ultimately the significant improvement of the public safety environment."

Authorities said they studied international experience and researched the matter in terms of constitutional guarantees protecting

fundamental human rights and freedoms. In this context, a study of the European Court of Human Rights practice concerning the inviolability of privacy and family life was also conducted. Authorities concluded that surveillance in public areas and access to relevant publicly accessible data does not constitute disproportionate interference into private and family life, if prescribed by law and pursuant to a lawful goal.

Nevertheless, the ministry said that not all concerns among various groups in the public have been dispelled.

"Taking this into consideration, attaching importance to the necessity to develop a common perception and unified action agenda in ensuring public safety, the Ministry of Internal Affairs finds it appropriate not to submit the bills for second reading without broad public consensus. This is a testament that our bill does not have any pretext, and it indeed stems from exclu-

## Pashinyan, Macron Discuss Armenia-Azerbaijan Normalization

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Earlier on Thursday, they also had a brief conversation. During that discussion, Macron touched on Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and expressed hope that Yerevan and Baku would be able to sign a peace treaty.

In addition, during their meeting, Pashinyan and Macron discussed issues related to joint projects in the economy, infrastructure, and other sectors.

"Issues related to Armenia-European Union cooperation were discussed, including the reforms implemented in Armenia with the support of the EU, the dialogue in the direction of visa liberalization," the Armenian prime minister's press service said.

Earlier on Thursday, a senior diplomat

in Yerevan stated that differences over the text of a peace treaty with Azerbaijan remained even after the parties exchanged their latest — 11<sup>th</sup> — drafts.

Previously, Baku had rejected Armenia's proposal to move forward with signing the peace agreement based on parts of the draft that both sides had already agreed upon, while working to resolve the remaining issues later.

Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Thursday that there were still disagreements on "one or two issues." He, however, did not specify which points remained unresolved.

"The parties do not yet share a common position on these issues, and naturally, discussions with official Baku will continue,"

## ICJ Rules Armenia's Discrimination Case Against Azerbaijan Can Proceed

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on November 12 threw out objections by Azerbaijan to an anti-discrimination case filed by Armenia and said on Tuesday the case could move forward.

Armenia filed the case against Azerbaijan in 2021. Azerbaijan then filed a counterclaim accusing Armenia of violating the same treaty.

Last year, the court issued emergency measures in Armenia's case, ordering Azerbaijan to let ethnic Armenians, who fled Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, return.

The court completely rejected all preliminary objections raised by Azerbaijan in the case concerning the Application of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Armenia v. Azerbaijan*).

The court confirmed that the preconditions under Article 22 of the Convention were met. Specifically, it found that Armenia had engaged in genuine negotiations on the interpretation and application of the Convention and that these negotiations had become futile by the date of Armenia's Application on 16 September 2021.

Furthermore, the court dismissed Azerbaijan's objections regarding jurisdiction *ratione materiae*. It held that Armenia's claims fully fall within the scope of the Convention, including the claims that Azerbaijan has committed acts of murder, torture and inhuman treatment against ethnic Armenians based on their national or ethnic origin, as well as claims of arbitrary detention of ethnic Armenians.

sively the public interest," the ministry said, adding that it is freezing the further course of the bill because there is no wide consensus among the public. The ministry expressed readiness to again hold discussions with stakeholders.

At the same time, the ministry said it is now discussing a separate initiative envisaging a phased solution to the issue. The first phase of the new initiative seeks to grant police access to surveillance cameras of state and local self-government bodies with the goal of strengthening security in public areas.

Kostanyan said.

Before the opening ceremony, Pashinyan, along with other high-ranking guests of the event, was welcomed by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

The Armenian prime minister's press office said that Pashinyan, in particular, participated in a round-table discussion titled "Economic Security" with the leaders of a number of countries, which was held in a closed format.

It said that Pashinyan's meetings with leaders from different countries were scheduled as part of the summit.

The agenda for discussions at the Budapest summit included European security challenges, including Russia's war on Ukraine, and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.



## ARMENIA

# AI Is the Future, and Armenia Is Placing a Big Bet on It

YEREVAN — In October 2024, during the 28th World Congress on Innovation and Technology (WCIT2024), one of 17 tech events held in Armenia that month, the global tech community gathered around a small nation in the Caucasus that is making ambitious steps to establish itself as a global technological center.

SpaceX and Tesla CEO Elon Musk sent a message to the attendees, expressing his intention to introduce Starlink in Armenia, while many international companies like Adobe, BostonGene, and NVIDIA have already joined Microsoft, IBM, Cisco and others in opening branches in Armenia. Adding to the discourse, David Yang, a Silicon Valley-based serial entrepreneur and founder of ABBYY envisioned the creation of an “AI City,” an ecosystem equipped with a multi-modal data bank that would attract scientists from around the world.

But why Armenia? How can it emerge as a destination for innovation?

## Generation AI: Armenia’s Unique Approach to AI Education

While many countries continue to debate the integration of AI into school curricula or limit their focus to AI literacy, Armenia is taking a bolder approach. The country is already piloting an educational program called Generation AI allowing high school students to study advanced mathematics and computer science, with a strong emphasis on Python programming and AI fundamentals, coupled with career guidance and mentoring to prepare students for specialized studies and careers in the field. This initiative represents the first phase of a multi-layer program aimed at establishing a comprehensive educational framework that spans from high school through doctoral levels.

Leading countries in AI like the UK, US, South Korea, and Japan have already introduced AI programs to nurture young talents, and China has gone even further introducing AI education in schools. Armenia’s example, however, underscores a different type of approach, whereby non-governmental organizations can conceive – and private-public partnerships can implement – systemic changes at the institutional level.

The cooperation agreement between the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST), a think tank established by prominent members of the Armenian diaspora to help strengthen Armenia’s innovation ecosystem, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia

officially heralded the start of Generation AI – Armenia’s first national-level educational and career pipeline for AI researchers and innovators in 2023. Currently, the program is being piloted in 15 schools across seven of Armenia’s ten regions, benefiting 540 students and positioning the country as a future leader in AI talent development. Here is where the country turns its small size into a strategic advantage which enables the country to experiment with innovative educational models on a national scale. This approach facilitates cost-efficient implementation while maintaining effectiveness, manageability, and scalability, thereby positioning Armenia as an ideal environment for testing innovative educational initiatives. In a complex educational landscape, where reforms often require significant time and resources to adopt and societal resistance can pose substantial risks, Armenia possesses the flexibility to adapt and refine its programs in response to the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

## Building on Strong Foundations

Armenia’s legacy as a tech hub and center of engineering talent dates back to the Soviet era, when the country ranked second among Soviet republics in the production of electric machines and had factories making early computers, automated control systems, radio electronics, space communication devices, and more. This legacy was anchored by institutions like the Mergelyan Institute in Yerevan, which became a hub where the USSR’s first general-purpose computers were developed in the early 1960s. Today FAST operates on this very site, continuing Armenia’s tradition of innovation with the Generation AI program and combining its rich history, culture for education and academic strengths to contribute to the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Studies, such as the World Bank report (2020), emphasize Armenia’s comparative advantages in mathematics and the natural sciences, underscoring its capacity for cultivating an AI-ready workforce. In 2017, the country outpaced global averages (0.32 in ICT and 0.36 in NSMS) in producing graduates (0.38 per 1,000 tertiary graduates from ICT-related courses and 0.6 per 1,000 graduates in NSMS) in natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics, outperforming many regional competitors. This demonstrates a persistent strength in scientific education that connects to its Soviet-era roots.

Since 2016, the role of women in STEM in Armenia has undergone significant change, with female participation not only catching up to but in some cases surpassing that of men. The considerable increases in participation were seen among women in higher education programs for mathematics and statistics at state institutions, where women make up 54 percent of students and 59 percent of graduates. In 2022, women also dominated the biological sciences, accounting for 81 percent of students and 71 percent of chemistry students. This development marks a sharp shift from 2016, when men still outnumbered women in mathematics programs, indicating how rapidly the landscape is changing.

When compared to UNESCO data (2020), where globally only 28 percent of women are enrolled in tertiary-level STEM programs, Armenia stands out, with 44 percent female representation in these fields. In addition, Forbes (2020) also reports on the growth of Armenia’s tech sector, noting that it has seen consistent double-digit growth, with 30 percent of whom are women, while the global average doesn’t exceed 20 percent. These trends highlight a critical opportunity for Armenia to capitalize on its growing female talent in STEM.

One more notable feature of Armenia is its ability to draw on a wide range of talent from both within its borders and across its extensive global diaspora. With a population of just 3 million within its borders and a diaspora of 7 to 10 million spread across the globe, Armenia is uniquely positioned to cultivate the best of global knowledge and expertise. Prominent figures like Dr. Nubar Afeyan, founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering, co-founder and chairman of Moderna, and David Yang, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur behind ABBYY, Newo.ai, and Morfeus.ai, exemplify the caliber of Armenian talent making difference worldwide. Furthermore, the achievements of Nobel laureates of Armenian descent — including Daron Acemoglu, who was recently awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, as well as Ardem Patapoutian, honored with the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine and Emmanuelle Charpentier, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2021 and 2020 — highlight the diaspora’s intellectual and scientific reach. While challenges remain in aligning the diaspora around a common vision for Armenia’s future, commitment to homeland is important characteristics defining Armenian diaspora, alongside a growing consensus on the necessity

of science and technology for the country’s progress. Transforming Armenia into an AI hub could be the crucial link that strengthens this relationship and fully capitalizes on its global potential.

This synergy — betting on local talent, a historical legacy of education and innovation, and a unified vision in diaspora-Armenia collaboration — opens space for the country’s transformation, where the size of a nation matters far less than the scale of its ambition.

## What’s Next

Over the next few years, FAST plans an expansion of its educational program, aiming to extend its reach to 45 high schools across Armenia and engage over 85 percent of the nation’s students. To drive this initiative forward, the foundation will host two Advance Armenia Galas, one in Paris at the Automobile Club de France on November 16 — home to the largest Armenian diaspora community in Europe — and another in Los Angeles on December 6, which boasts the largest Armenian community in the Americas. These events aim to bring together the vast expertise of diaspora and global visionaries uniting support to transform Armenia’s bold vision into lasting global influence in the AI-driven future.

The Parisian Advance Armenia Gala will gather figures from the Armenian diaspora and global visionaries committed to enhancing AI education like François-Xavier Bellamy a prominent member of the European Parliament. Dr. Afeyan will be among the distinguished speakers, along with health tech visionary Jean-Charles Samuelian, co-founder and CEO of Alan and co-founder and Board Member of Mistral AI, both internationally recognized leading firms in technology and innovation.

Arnak Dalalyan, a professor of Statistics at ENSAE Paris, the director of CREST, and Advisory Board member of the Generation AI program, highlighted the critical need for accessible AI education in Armenia: “Attending the upcoming gala is a great opportunity to share knowledge and expertise. By investing in our human capital and developing globally competitive AI innovators, we can collectively foster a new generation equipped with the competencies critical for Armenia’s success in an AI-driven world.”

The gala will include a dinner, a fundraising auction and musical performances, with proceeds directly benefiting the Generation AI High School Project.

## Pashinyan’s Party Blocks Resolution on Armenian Captives in Azerbaijan

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The pro-government majority in Armenia’s parliament on Tuesday, November 12, rejected an opposition-drafted resolution calling on the international community to pressure Azerbaijan to release at least 23 Armenian prisoners held by it.

The resolution debated at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly also urged the Armenian government to actively work with international bodies in trying to secure the release of the captives, among them eight former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Representatives of the opposition Hayastan and Pativ Unem blocs that initiated the debate said that the ongoing COP29 climate summit in Baku is a unique opportunity to heighten international pres-

sure on Azerbaijan and get the latter to bow to it.

“It is more effective to exert direct and indirect pressure on Azerbaijan within the framework of COP29, and if the state does not act vigorously now, including at the parliamentary level, it will be more difficult later,” said Pativ Unem’s Tigran Abrahamian.

Only 30 members of the 107-seat parliament voted for the draft resolution. None of the deputies from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party were among them.

Civil Contract’s parliamentary leader, Hayk Konjoryan, said that such an appeal makes no sense because the Armenian authorities are already trying hard to have the captives set free. Another senior ruling party figure, parliament vice-speaker Ruben Rubinyan, accused the opposition

of exploiting the issue for political purposes.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan has reportedly expressed readiness to attend COP29 if Baku agrees to release at least some of the prisoners. No Armenian official is taking part in the two-week global summit that began in the Azerbaijani capital on Monday.

“An Armenian delegation must not participate in the international show staged by [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev as long as we have prisoners of war and hostages in Baku,” Ishkhan Saghatelian, a Hayastan leader, said on October 31.

Armenian officials have admitted that a draft Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty discussed by the two sides would not require Baku to unconditionally release them. Also, Pashinyan has been widely criticized for his scathing comments about

one of the captives, Armenian billionaire and former Nagorno-Karabakh premier Ruben Vardanyan, made at an August 31 news conference. He wondered who had told Vardanyan to renounce Russian citizenship and move to Karabakh in 2022 and “for what purpose.”

Critics said that Pashinyan thus echoed Azerbaijani leaders’ earlier claims that Vardanyan was dispatched to Karabakh by Moscow to serve Russian interests there. They accused the Armenian premier of helping Baku to legitimize and prolong the prominent tycoon’s imprisonment.

Vardanyan and the seven other Karabakh leaders were captured following Azerbaijan’s September 2023 military offensive. They were charged with “terrorism” and other serious crimes and are due to go on trial.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Armenian GM Beats Azeri Rival at European Chess Championship

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The European Individual Chess Championship 2024 is being held in Petrovac, Montenegro November 7-20.

After 3 rounds, GM Robert Hovhannisyan has scored 3 points. In the last round, Robert defeated GM Misratdin Iskandarov of Azerbaijan, the Armenian Chess Federation reported.

GM Aram Hahobyan has collected 2.5 points.

## Michel, Aliyev Discuss Armenia-Azerbaijan Normalization

BAKU (Panorama.am) — European Council President Charles Michel discussed the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

The two met on the sidelines of the COP29 UN climate summit in Baku on November 11.

“We also touched upon all aspects of bilateral relations. And following my exchange with PM Nikol Pashinyan in Budapest last week, we discussed the state of play of Armenia-Azerbaijan normalisation process,” Michel wrote on [the platform formerly known as Twitter](#).

“The EU remains ready to support all efforts for a stable, peaceful and prosperous Caucasus,” he added.

## Karabakh Armenians’ Right to Return Part of Iran’s Official Position

TEHRAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Iran’s official position regarding Nagorno-Karabakh has already been presented by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, according to which the Armenian residents of the region have the right to return to their homes, and their rights, life and property must be respected and maintained, Ehsan Movahedian, an international relations specialist, lecturer and Caucasus expert at the Tehran ATU University said this week.

In an [interview](#) with Armenpress, Movahedian weighed in on the 2023 Azerbaijani attack in Nagorno-Karabakh and the subsequent forced displacement of the 120,000 local Armenian population. He recalled Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s statement that the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh have the right to return to their homes and their rights must be respected.

“This is what we believe in, however, nevertheless we don’t have the tools to implement it. And I think it is the obligation of the government of Armenia to protect these people, for example, apply to international courts, utilize international law and rules, file complaints, force the Azerbaijani government to respect the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh’s Armenian population. This is Iran’s position,” Movahedian said.

# Freedom House Report Says Azerbaijani Regime Ethnically Cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh

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crimes against humanity. The report’s release comes as Baku hosts the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29), the annual UN forum on climate change.

“Baku’s military offensive and the use of blockade, starvation, and threats were brutal tactics meant to forcibly displace ethnic Armenians out of Nagorno-Karabakh,” said Andranik Shirinyan, Armenia country representative at Freedom House. “The Azerbaijani regime’s unchecked actions in Nagorno-Karabakh set a dangerous precedent of undemocratic regimes using force to end conflicts. The global community must step up its efforts to address the human rights abuses faced by the ethnic Armenians displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.”

Key findings include:

- The Azerbaijani state’s actions constitute ethnic cleansing using forced displacement as a means. It acted upon a comprehensive, methodically implemented strategy to empty Nagorno-Karabakh of its ethnic Armenian population and historical and cultural presence. The documented evidence meets the criteria for ethnic cleansing as defined by a UN commission of experts’ report examining violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

- The September 2023 displacement of 100,000 ethnic Armenians was the culmination of an intensive, yearslong campaign. This campaign by the Azerbaijani state included widespread human rights violations in various forms against the ethnic Armenian population, using prolonged tactics of intimidation and a blockade. Such actions made it impossible for the ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh to live

safely and in a dignified manner.

- Ethnic Armenian residents suffered multiple violations to their rights and freedoms. Fact finders documented violations to residents’ rights to life, health, food, freedom of movement, adequate living standards, liberty and personal integrity, education, and property. Cultural rights were also violated. Ethnic Armenians additionally suffered violations to their right to live without torture and ill treatment. Perpetrators willfully killed civilians—even in the presence of peacekeepers—and enjoyed absolute impunity. This heightened the insecurity and terror among the population prior to the mass displacement in September 2023.

- Violations in Nagorno-Karabakh remain ongoing in the form of erasure of Armenian cultural and historical presence. This includes the planned or completed destruction of Armenian cultural monuments, churches, cemeteries, and residential neighborhoods.

The report identifies a number of steps that democratic governments can take to address impunity. These recommendations include:

- Urge accountability for acts of impunity. Support international efforts to prosecute crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, including by making a state referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Implement targeted sanctions, such as travel bans and asset freezes, against Azerbaijani officials, military leaders, and individuals implicated in gross human rights violations and war crimes.

- Uphold the rights of displaced ethnic Armenians. Urge the Azerbaijani state to establish conditions for the safe and voluntary return of displaced Armenians to

Nagorno-Karabakh, with robust safety guarantees and assurances of nondiscrimination. Support initiatives that safeguard the rights of forcibly displaced people and advocate for the implementation of strong legal protections and support services. Ensure that the voices of the affected population are heard and their rights upheld in all relevant international forums.

- Protect Armenian cultural heritage. Urge Azerbaijan to uphold international cultural-preservation standards and prevent further destruction or modification of Armenian cultural properties. Advocate for Azerbaijan’s cooperation with the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other relevant bodies to facilitate independent monitoring missions and promote international dialogue for the protection and restoration of these sites.

The fact-finding mission was composed of Freedom House, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), Democracy Development Foundation (DDF), Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly–Vanadzor, Protection of Rights Without Borders NGO, Law Development and Protection Foundation, and Truth Hounds. The mission’s full report collected evidence from 330 witness interviews representing 71 of 107 Nagorno-Karabakh communities. It expands on initial findings released in June 2024 with additional documented evidence and analysis on the September 2023 military offensive, the ensuing displacement of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, and the aftermath, including details on all of the routes used by residents to evacuate. It also expands on legal frameworks and provides a comprehensive set of recommendations.

## Azerbaijan Destroys Entire Village in Karabakh

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan has destroyed the Armenian village of Mokhreneh in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), according to a geo-located satellite image published by Geghard Foundation on November 6.

“Azerbaijan’s vandalism is not limited to the destruction of monuments, cemeteries, churches and monasteries.

Azerbaijan is deliberately destroying Armenian villages and neighborhoods. This time, the village of Mokhreneh in Hadrut Region, which came under Azerbaijani control during the 44-day war in 2020, has been completely destroyed,” the foundation [said](#) in a statement on its Facebook page on Tuesday, November 5.

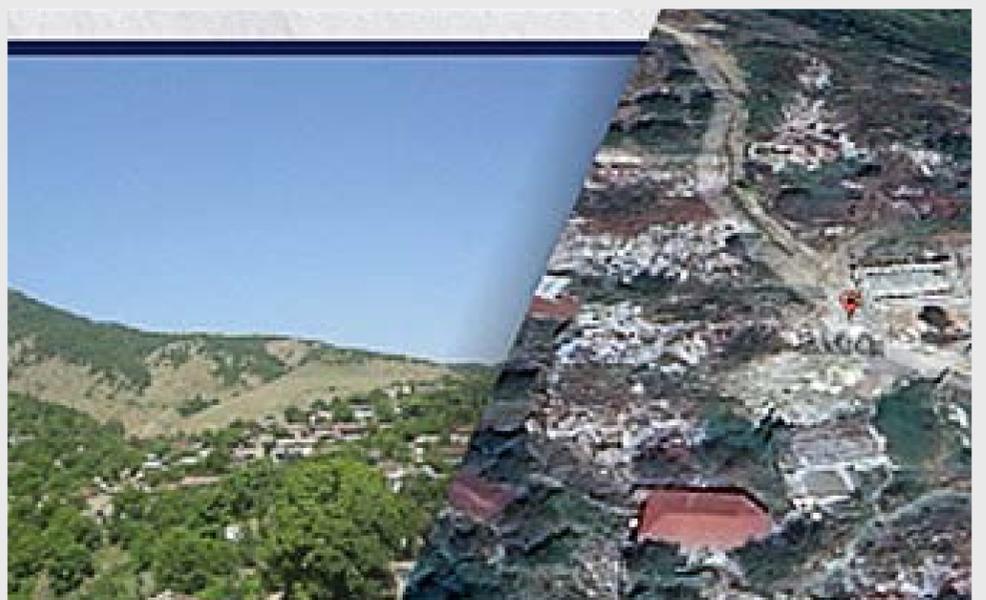
The foundation is noted that satellite images show that most of the houses, a school, a kindergarten and other buildings have been destroyed.

“In total, more than 40 houses and buildings were destroyed, while the Mokhreneh Surb Sarkis Church was completely razed by October 2022,” the report says.

The destruction of the Armenian Church of St. Sarkis (18th-19th centuries) in the village of Mokhreneh in the Hadrut region of Artsakh by Azerbaijanis was first reported by the Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW). The church in the village of Mokhreneh in Artsakh was operational until the Second Karabakh War in the fall of 2020. According to a

CHW report, study note that in the list of Azerbaijani monuments, the Church of St. Sarkis was identified as Albanian temple #232.

Concerns about the preservation of cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh are made all the more urgent by the Azerbaijani government’s history of systemically destroying



indigenous Armenian heritage — acts of both warfare and historical revisionism. The Azerbaijani government has secretly destroyed a striking number of cultural and religious artifacts in the late 20th century. Within Nakhichevan alone, a historically Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani forces destroyed at least 89 medieval churches, 5,840 khachkars (Armenian cross stones) and 22,000 historical tombstones between 1997 and 2006.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Poetry in Word And Image: Anahit Hayrapetyan in Frankfurt

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FRANKFURT — The annual Frankfurt Book Fair represents a cultural highpoint in Germany, as authors, publishers, booksellers, literary agents, and booklovers from around the world gather to honor one country's literary contributions, and explore the vast offering of new titles in every language culture. This year's guest country was Italy, which presented its new selections under the rubric "Roots in the Future."

As always, the Republic of Armenia is present with a stand to exhibit works by Armenian authors in the original, as well as numerous volumes as part of its ambitious "Armenian Literature in Translation" project. Armenian publishers and authors are eager to make their works known abroad. This year, the delegation from Yerevan organized an event dedicated to this pursuit: "Looking for a Place: Armenian Literature in Europe" was moderated by Jürgen Jacob Becker, deputy director of the Literary Colloquium in Berlin. Guests included writers Anush Kocharyan, Aram Pachyan and Sargis Hovsepian, as well as literary critic Tigran Amiryan.

It has become traditional for cultural associations even outside the book fair to organize readings and performances in and around the city, among them, the Armenian Cultural Society in Hessen (AKV). This year the co-chairs of the board, Shushan Tumanyan and Armin



Shadyans before a portrait of his son, killed defending his homeland in the 1991-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh war. 2006 (Anahit Hayrapetyan photo)

Preuss, invited renowned photographer and writer Anahit Hayrapetyan, and myself to share the podium. I presented my work on German General Otto Liman von Sanders, an exceptional figure who contravened Young Turk deportation orders during the Ottoman genocide and saved thousands of Armenians and Greeks.

Anahit Hayrapetyan dealt with the suffering of Armenians in the present day, specifically in Artsakh. The selection of her photographs, projected on a screen, included portraits of individuals whose lives have been radically altered by the repeated wars and recent expulsion. There is the young man shaving, not at home in front of a well-lit mirror, but outdoors, in a soldier's uniform, doing his best with a makeshift razor and small mirror balanced on a stone wall. There is the elderly couple, whose faces appear only in part, as if to symbolize that half of their own being has been taken away—that missing part we



After the ceremony at Gandzasar Cathedral, one of about 700 couples who married on the same day in Artsakh. 2008 (Anahit Hayrapetyan photo)

see between them, behind them, a photograph on the wall of the dead soldier. And in contrast, there is the joy of a young wedding pair, travelling in traditional means of transportation...

The photographer has printed the pictures on postcards and published them in a collection entitled, "Բացիկներ Արցախից" ("Postcards from Artsakh"). Anahit Hayrapetyan, whose photos are highly poetical, composes poetry in words as well, and she read several of her compositions in Armenian from the collections, Վաղուց նամակ չեմ գրել (*Haven't Written a Letter in a Long Time*) and Միբուն (Pretty), with German translation provided by Shushan Tumanyan. One poem from the latter volume, entitled, "new war" evokes again the tragedy of Artsakh. It reads, in part:

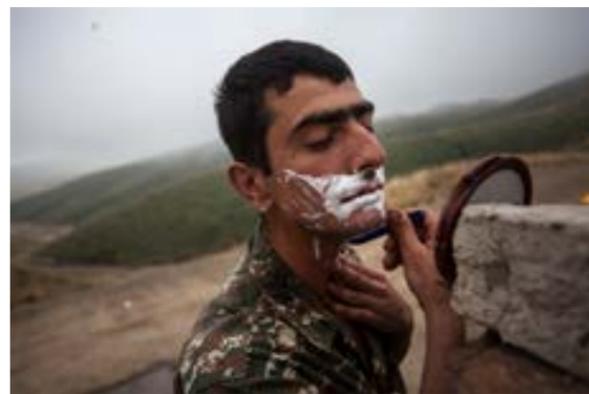
new war  
with all my power i hate wars  
i hate war bitterness  
hate the lament of mothers of lost sons  
inner cries to gods  
stretching to blue skies  
through the velvet of smoke and oak tree my grandpa  
has put in my village  
i hate gods with all my power  
in my ears lives lament  
of old women who lost their young sons in my eyes live  
images of social injustice and poverty  
my fingernails are bitten to end  
...  
rockets thrown inside tear my face ears are crooked  
with voice of dying old women rockets have torn the  
roads of wars my beautiful dreams stored  
all i have  
you  
i am left alone all alone  
totally alone  
...  
the rockets touch the starry sky  
take me  
carry me away  
my love  
(Translated by Tsovinar Chilingaryan)

### A Visual Storyteller

Anahit Hayrapetyan studied at the Caucasus Institute in Yerevan and the State Engineering University of Armenia in 2005-2006. Following participation in World Press Photo Seminars in 2006, she decided to dedicate her efforts to a career in photojournalism. From 2009 to 2010, she studied photojournalism in Denmark followed by master classes organized by Noor-Nikon in Russia and Objective Reality.

Her work has been exhibited internationally, from Photoquai in France to Europe and Asia – Dialogue of Cultures in Russia, with group exhibitions in Istanbul, Yerevan, Gyumri, Mozambique, and beyond.

The Armenian artist, who is based in Frankfurt and travels frequently to Armenia, works with poetry and photography to explore themes of resilience, identity, and human rights. Through what she calls "visual storytelling," she gives voice to the voiceless and provides a stage to the unrepresented. She is a co-founder of 4Plus, a col-



A soldier shaves near Talish, on the northern border of Nagorno-Karabakh. 2016 (Anahit Hayrapetyan photo)

lective for documentary photographers in Armenia.

Her photography has been published in prominent media outlets, including the *New York Times* Lens blog, EurasiaNet.org, Radio Free Europe, Hetq, Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Radio Free Europe, the *New York Times*, *Le Point* and IWPR.net, as well as *National Geographic Traveler* (Armenia), Armenianow.com, Gretert, and Enter (World Press Photo).

She has been honored with several awards, among them the President of Armenia Award (2006), Asian Women Photographers' Showcase (2013), and prizes at the Photovisa Festival (2008) and Karl Bulla International Photo Contest. Her poetry has appeared in four books thus far, *Poems* (2002), *Taboo* (2005), *Pretty* (2015) and *Haven't Written a Letter in a Long Time* (2019). Her photobook, *Princess to Slave*, published by FotoEvidence in 2015, sheds light on domestic violence against women in Armenia. She tells the stories of five women, ranging from a local resident of the artist's own village, to a woman who displayed the courage to take her case to court, thereby focusing public attention in Armenia on the plight of women victimized by domestic violence. The title of her work expresses the tragic irony of a culture that may idolize girls when children, treating them like princesses, but then allows them to be subjected to disrespect and abuse as adult women. The volume is introduced by Lara Aharonyan, director of the Women's Resource Center of Armenia, who discusses the reasons why women have been deprived of liberty and equal opportunities in modern Armenia, and how women's rights may be achieved.



Armenian stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair (Anahit Hayrapetyan photo)

# Community News

## Worldwide Day of Prayer for Armenian Hostages Observed

NEW BRITAIN, Conn. — On Sunday, November 10, the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection in New Britain joined Armenian churches worldwide for a special prayer service during the Devine Liturgy, for hostages being held in Artsakh.

This prayer service was held pursuant to a communication sent to all Armenian Dioceses throughout the world from the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, in Armenia, regarding the plight of the Artsakh Armenians who are still being held captive in Azerbaijan — one year after the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh an area precious to Armenians, and four years after the surprise attack and subsequent war against our people there.

Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians announced that the special service would be held during the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of Holy Echmiadzin to pray for the well-being of the Armenians held captive in Azerbaijan, and to draw international attention to the illegal and immoral imprisonment of the ethnic Armenians.

Catholicos Karekin II requested that all Armenian churches around the globe join in the prayer service on that date. The special request was communicated to Eastern Diocese Armenian churches by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church in America.

In lieu of a sermon on that day, Harry N. Mazadoorian spoke to the congregation concerning the situation in Karabagh, the importance of the prayer service, the issue of defending the rights of Artsakh Armenians, and the urgent need to gain liberty for the Armenians still being held prisoner. He stressed the need for increased humanitarian relief for the region, its refugees and the captive hostages from both governmental and non-governmental sources, as well as the critical need to shine awareness on the brutality inflicted on the long suffering expelled residents.

Artsakh, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh, is an enclave between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with centuries old Armenia influence and habitation. In 1988, Nagorno-Karabakh's legislature passed a resolution declaring independence and an intention of reunifying with Armenia. Following the declaration, numerous battles with Azerbaijan ensued resulting in a 1994 ceasefire. The local Armenians retained control but in a subsequent war in 2020, Azerbaijan acquired some of the territory. Another ceasefire was brokered but again was followed by hostilities in 2022 and total disruption of essential food, fuel, supplies and medicine in the blockade of Lachin corridor by Azerbaijani elements.

In September 2023 a brutal Azerbaijani attack and invasion, with sophisticated weapons of war provided by Turkey and other countries, resulted in the expulsion of the entire 120,000 ethnic Armenian population

see PRAYER, page 8



Children at the Orran center in Armenia

## Orran Gala Raises \$400,000 for Armenia's Most Vulnerable

LOS ANGELES — An outpouring of support by hundreds of energized guests catalyzed the annual “Evening with Orran” Gala on November 2, raising \$400,000 and ongoing commitment to Orran, which for nearly 25 years has cared for Armenia's most vulnerable children, elderly and families. During its nearly 25 years of continual service, Orran has helped more than 30,000 people in dire need from Armenia and Artsakh.

Gala Co-Chairs Hermine Oruncakci and Marina Kurian welcomed and thanked supporters and committee members whose wholehearted involvement locally enables Orran to improve the lives of so many in Armenia.

Following Father Zaven Markosyan's invocation, Mistress of Ceremonies Ani Hovannisian Kevorkian brought Orran's mission and activities to life in words and images, noting that Orran means “cradle” or “haven” in Armenian, a constant embrace, which is precisely what Orran provides for thousands of children in extreme need, sometimes literally taking them off the streets, leading them to safe, productive and fulfilling lives.

She said, “As many times as I've been to Orran in the past 25 years, during the most exhilarating and crushing times in our homeland, Orran is, without exception, the happiest, most uplifting, active and transformative place I know. All children are precious, but these children who come from families broken by war and economic hardship and other difficult circumstances beyond their control don't have a chance until Orran notices them, picks them up, and shows them that they matter. They can have goals and dreams and help themselves and others. Orran empowers them to do that. Watching these children blossom, it's clear how bright and capable they are, and that they can impact the course of our history, lead our nation forward. They are Armenia's guarantors, and we play a huge role in that guarantee.”

Orran provides daily food and clothing, educational and vocational support, compassion and camaraderie, while building their character and sense of purpose, empowering them to become leaders. The charitable non-governmental organization also serves thousands of uprooted families from Artsakh and reaches impoverished families in the outskirts who have no transportation, ensuring that assistance extends beyond its physical centers in Yerevan and Vanadzor.

Orran Co-Founder Armine Hovannisian captivated the audience by painting a compelling and honest picture of Armenia and of the impetus for Orran, which she and her husband, Armenia's first foreign minister, Raffi K. Hovannisian, started in 2000.

She reflected, “Armenia is a nation of paradoxes. If you were to visit this magical land and walk through the streets of Yerevan, you would be dazzled by the high-end boutiques and gourmet restaurants, luxurious cars and stylishly-dressed residents... Just a few blocks away, the picture changes, and you are confronted with a country struggling with a 25-percent poverty rate, thousands of refugees from Artsakh and a growing inflation rate. No doubt, there is a vast and growing gorge between the haves and have-nots... those who are destined to live in comfort and those who struggle every day. Orran was created to care for and love the children who are on the margins of society and live in despair. We take those children who are abandoned, hungry, begging on the streets, and walk with them on the path of light, goodness, compassion and promise for a better life.”

Hovannisian offered Sveta Hovhannisian's story as an example, a teenager whose father abandoned the family, leaving her and her brothers nearly orphaned. But with Orran's care, Sveta turned her life around, graduating from high school and then from military academies in Armenia and Italy. Penning her life story in *Stronger than Ever*, Sveta is currently earning a master's degree in Italy, soon to return to Armenia to become a military commander.

see ORRAN, page 8

## To Be Armenian Living in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diaspora

BURBANK, Calif. — Under the auspices of Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, the Zvartnots Cultural Committee of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church invited Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian, the newly-appointed director of the Institutional Innovation Project of the Western Diocese, to speak on October 24. His talk was based on the outcome of his extensive global research exploring Armenian identity in the diaspora, with the funding of the Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and carried out under the auspices of the Armenian Institute in London.

During welcoming and opening remarks, Dr. Simon Simonian, Zvartnots Committee chairman, gave a brief overview of the word “diaspora.” He introduced Tchilingirian as an academic leader, an experienced professor from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, as well as an Associate Professor of Armenian Studies at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) in Paris, France.



Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian

Simonian also introduced two talented cultural participants for the evening: Armine Ghazaryan, a renowned pianist, who performed two works by Armenian composers, and Ani Marselian, a teacher at the St. Gregory A&M Hovsepian School of the Diocese in Pasadena, who recited a heartwarming Armenian poem.

In Tchilingirian's quest to discover “What are the ingredients of the Armenian identity in the diaspora today,” a global survey was conducted. Specifically, 13,000 Armenians of all ages participated; and there were an additional 400 personal interviews conducted of Armenians from 10 different countries. According to Tchilingirian, the outcome of the study revealed that, “‘diaspora’ has a much more complicated connotation for Armenians in light of the devastating genocide” and “There is no commonality in understanding. Each Armenian defines his/her own identity.” As for his observations regarding the new generation, he stated, “It is inconceivable to mold our traditional ‘Armenianness’ to our new generation. Homeland is not the same for all Armenians.”

see DIASPORA, page 8



# Second Annual Kerr Family Lecture Takes Place at UCLA

LOS ANGELES — The UCLA Promise Armenian Institute hosted its second annual Kerr Family Endowed Lecture, titled “The Very Limit of Our Endurance”: Rev. Hovhannes Eskijian and his network of resisters during the Armenian Genocide.”

This lecture was delivered by Dr. Khatchig Mouradian of Columbia University and the US Library of Congress, with pre-recorded introductory remarks by Dr. Antranik Dakessian of Haigazian University, on the evening of Friday, October 18.

The Kerr Family Endowed Lectureship is designed to amplify the stories of heroes and heroines who dedicated themselves to saving and supporting victims and survivors of violence and mass atrocities in times of crisis.

Mouradian’s lecture explored the role of an Armenian evangelical pastor, Rev. Hovhannes Eskijian, and his associates in creating an underground network of humanitarians, missionaries, and diplomats who were able to coordinate in resisting the destruction of the Armenian people during the Armenian Genocide and World War I. Dakessian’s introductory comments provided the historical context for the efforts of these dedicated individuals.

Focusing on the history of Genocide and resistance in Ottoman Syria, Mouradian’s talk demonstrated that Armenians were not simply helpless victims of violence and

receivers of Western humanitarianism but were, in many cases, active agents of resistance to the efforts at the extermination of the Armenians by the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Over time, an impressive and well-coordinated effort evolved which was primarily conducted by Armenians to rescue fellow Armenians, despite the violent and systematic mechanisms of control and destruction.



From left, Derik Ghookasian, Father Yeremia Abgaryan, Martin Eskijian, Pastor Nancy Eskijian, Khatchig Mouradian, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Maggie Mangassarian-Goschin and Ann Karagozian

Following the lecture, the grandchildren of Rev. Hovhannes Eskijian, Martin Eskijian and Pastor Nancy Eskijian, offered comments on their grandparents’ dedication to serving God through their selfless efforts to save as many lives as possible. Both noted that numerous survivors of the Genocide who escaped to the U.S. would tell their family members of Rev. Eskijian’s heroic efforts and those of his wife, Gulenia, in

carrying out her late husband’s mission.

Maggie Mangassarian Goschin, the director of the Ararat Eskijian Museum, which was established by and named after the Eskijian family, offered remarks as well on the inspiring dedication of Rev. and Mrs. Eskijian. Mrs. Goschin, who has been a dedicated partner of the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute since its inception, was honored by the Institute for her tireless work and commitment to Armenian Studies and the preservation of Armenian heritage and artifacts.

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, also offered praise and gratitude to the Eskijians, to Mrs. Goschin, and to all those who, at the very limit of their endurance, “turn their lives into miracles.”

The event was attended by UCLA students, faculty and staff, members of the Eskijian family, and members of the larger Southern California Armenian-American community.

This event was co-sponsored by the Ararat-Eskijian Museum (AEM), the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), the Haigazian University, and the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies.

Recording of the lecture is now available for post-event viewing on the Promise Armenian Institute YouTube Channel.

## Martin Eskijian Honored with 2024 ASCE Harbor and Coastal Engineering Award

By Christine Vartanian Datian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — Martin Eskijian has been selected by the American Society of Civil Engineers’ Coasts, Oceans, Ports and Rivers Institute (COPRI) to receive the 2024 John G. Moffatt-Frank E. Nichol Harbor and Coastal Engineering Award for his advancement of seismic design, behavior, and performance of lifeline marine structures, and the co-development of ASCE-COPRI’s Port Certificate Program curriculum.

Eskijian was one of the instructors of the Port Certificate Program, and helped create the program. His 50-plus year career reflects a great passion for continuously improving standards and practices, mentoring young professionals, and giving back to the engineering and coastal community that has given him so many opportunities. The John G. Moffatt-Frank E. Nichol Harbor and Coastal Engineering Award recognizes new ideas and concepts that can be efficiently implemented to expand the engineering or construction techniques available for harbor and coastal projects. The award was presented to Eskijian in September at the International Conference on Coastal Engineering in Rome, Italy.

Eskijian worked as an engineer for 41 years, specializing in structural dynamics, reservoir engineering, and structural engineering/code development for marine oil and LNG terminals. He earned a B.S. in Civil Engineering, an M.S. in Applied Mechanics, an Engineer Degree in Civil Engineering, and an M.S. in Petroleum Engineering, from the University of Southern California.

He began his career in 1970 with Bechtel Power Corporation, and was involved in seismic analysis of nuclear power containment structures and conventional steel and concrete analysis/design for power plants. After 7 years, he moved to the Aerospace Corporation, as a member of the technical staff, and was involved in nonlinear dynamics for nuclear weapons effects, and

satellite dynamics. For next 28 years, Eskijian worked for the California State Lands Commission, as a petroleum reservoir engineer, and then as a civil/structural engineer for offshore platforms, and later on as the leader of a group focused on marine oil terminals. Eskijian is responsible for Chapter 31F of the California Building Code



Martin Eskijian

“Marine Oil Terminals,” commonly known as “MOTEMS.”

Eskijian retired from state service in December 2011 and has taught graduate classes at the University of Southern California, the University of California, San Diego and California Baptist University, on the subject of marine structures. He currently serves as the chairman of the Lifeline Subcommittee of California’s Strong Motion Instrumentation Program and as the US alternative to the PIANC WG 153, “Recommendations for the Design and Assessment of Marine Oil and Petrochemical Terminals,” which was published in 2016.

He also taught numerical analysis for a new graduate program in earthquake engineering at the American University of Armenia in 1992. Two of his students who are now in California have doctorates and are helping to raise the current structural standards in Armenia.

Eskijian is a registered civil engineer in California, a registered petroleum engineer in Texas and a retired Diplomat of ASCE/COPRI and works as a consultant.

Eskijian is the chairman of the Ararat-Eskijian Museum (AEM) and Research Center in Mission Hills. The Ararat-Eskijian Museum was founded in June 1985 by his father, Armenian Genocide survivor Luther Eskijian, and includes a unique collection of Armenian artifacts as well as books and materials about the Armenian Genocide. This historic landmark is part of the Ararat Home of Los Angeles. His vision was to create an Armenian museum telling the Armenian story through artifacts, art, maps, books, coins and other heirlooms. He began with his own private collection, opening the door for others to donate as well. He raised the funds for the construction of the church and the Museum, supervised the project even into his late 70s, and was involved in much of the growth of the Museum for many years.

Luther Eskijian was a World War II veteran, designing hospitals for the troops as cities were liberated. He is known for outstanding community service, including the design of many churches, without charge, Rotary, the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and his years of service to the Armenian and American communities.

The museum is a cultural and educational center where scholars, artists, writers, and community leaders can present current and historical subjects related to the Armenian people, as well as Armenian Genocide education. AEM prides itself on its vast collection of over 6,000 primary and secondary sources including books, journals, periodicals, magazines and films dealing with subjects related to Armenian studies within its three libraries. The Onnik Kouyoumjian Research Library, the Vahakn N. Dadrian Research Library and the Harold Mgrublian Library are available to visitors during regular hours.

AEM’s two archival rooms house digitized documents, photos, articles, newspapers and other sources from the collec-

tions of Dr. Vahakn N. Dadrian, Professor Robert Hewsen, Richard Demirjian (Armenian-American military collection) and Rev. Hovhannes Eskijian (Armenian humanitarian efforts 1915-1916). These archival rooms are available to academic researchers and other interested parties by appointment.

The Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) was established within The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA in early 2022. Led by Taner Akçam, Ph.D., the AGRP engages in research and scholarly activities pertaining to the study of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire during the early 20th century. In advancing its mission to collect, preserve and promote Armenian culture and history, Ararat-Eskijian Museum also serves as a center of living culture and education. Events such as exhibitions of art, photography and rugs, poetry readings, theatrical and musical performances, film screenings, international conferences, and illustrative talks by prominent scholars, authors, artists and speakers are regularly organized.

As a unique institution of Armenian culture and history, Ararat-Eskijian Museum collaborates with various scholars, organizations and other institutions on projects ranging from publications of scholarly and non-fiction works to theater and film productions. The museum also serves as a resource for individuals and scholars researching topics in Armenian history. Ms. Maggie Mangassarian-Goschin is the director of the museum which has sponsored over 400 events at the AEM.

For YouTube video of an interview with Luther Eskijian from the Armenian Film Foundation, go to: <https://www.ararat-eskijian-museum.com/about-the-eskijians>

For more information on the museum, email [eskijian@ararat-eskijian-museum.com](mailto:eskijian@ararat-eskijian-museum.com)

For information about the Eskijian Family, go to: <https://www.ararat-eskijian-museum.com/about-the-eskijians>

Also see: <https://www.ararat-eskijian-museum.com/>

# Orran Gala Raises \$400,000 for Armenia's Most Vulnerable

ORRAN, from page 6

Graciously acknowledging that none of this life-changing good would be possible without the participation of three generations of Orran supporters, Armine recognized longtime donors, and called the youngest volunteers, 8-10 years-old, to the stage.

Volunteerism is at the core of Orran, as is the bridge it creates between Arme-



Orran founder Armine Hovannisian

nia and Diaspora. Following an emotional video highlighting the experiences and reflections of students from AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School in Los Angeles who spent several weeks volunteering at

Orran last summer, the students and their teachers, along with Head of School David Ghoogasian stood proudly before the audience. Applauding the critical work of Orran, Ghoogasian then motioned to the students, exclaiming, "What we see here are not just the future leaders, but the leaders of today, and Orran has given them that vehicle to connect with their homeland and their brothers and sisters. And as much as they are thanked for doing what they do there, they get much more out of it. They come back transformed with lifelong commitments."

World-renowned Armenian folk vocalist Hasmik Harutyunyan and a master ensemble of Armenian instrumentalists transported the guests with their musical performance to the ancestral Armenian homeland. Sponsor-a-child opportunities allowed guests to learn the stories and dreams of the children they chose to help, many of them from Artsakh...again, creating a direct connection between Diaspora and Armenia.

Hearty food, drink and camaraderie filled the evening attended by professionals, public officials and people from all walks of life, including former California Assemblyman Adrin Nazarian. Longtime



Head of the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School David Ghoogasian speaks of Orran and student volunteers.

Orran supporter Haig Bagerdjian introduced Nazarian, applauding his civic and Armenian leadership and wishing him success in his bid for LA City Council.

Orran veterans Jack Barseghian and Henrik Sardarbegian roused the crowd as they introduced several one-of-a-kind pieces in the evening's exciting live auction finale, including an autographed weight used and cherished by the first ever World Champion Armenian weightlifter, Nazik Avdalyan, also the first Armenian woman to become a world champion in any sport. Nazik, likewise a champion of Orran, traveled from Armenia to participate in the evening. Her remarkable story of resilience and strength, recovering from a nearly fatal accident to not only survive, but become a world champion weightlifter is the subject of a new motion picture, "The Reverse Side of the Medal," now premiering

internationally. Visibly moved as she and the entire crowd watched an excerpt from the film and then the real-life moment of victory, Nazik rose to the stage with an impassioned message to the Orran family. She said nothing is more important than sharing her good fortune with those who help others, and in particular, Armine and Orran who have created a haven where children in despair can at last experience joy and thrive. For that reason, she decided to share the special pair of weights she used on her road to victory...one for the Orran family and one for her to keep at home... a symbol of strength, resilience, unity and triumph.

Orran will celebrate its 25th anniversary in Armenia in April 2025 with a grand performance by the children of Orran at the Opera House, followed by its Silver Anniversary Gala in Los Angeles next fall. For more information, visit orran.org.

## To Be Armenian in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diaspora

DIASPORA, from page 6

He acknowledged concern, yet, he did not consider the results to be alarming, declaring "We cannot focus on what we are losing, but build on what we have."

A discussion followed the lecture during the question and answer session by some very accomplished local educators in the audience. The prevalent subject was "the mission/role of our devoted Armenian educators." There were recommendations to organize follow-up lectures in order to cover such a vast subject.

Derderian, in his final closing remarks, prior to his benediction, expressed his deep

appreciation to the Zvartnots Committee, the cultural performers and the new collaborator of the Western Diocese — the renowned Professor Tchilingirian. The archbishop noted the immense need to adapt and overcome the challenges of change and viewed stagnation as extremely detrimental at present. He emphasized the need for optimism and inclusion of our youth in every aspect of growth, stating: "This research can only be justified if we implement and benefit from Dr. Tchilingirian's tireless exploration."

The evening came to a close with an appropriate reception prepared by the Zvartnots Cultural Committee.



The Zvartnots Cultural Committee with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian at center, and Dr. Hrach Tchilingirian to his left

## Worldwide Day of Prayer for Hostages Observed

PRAYER, from page 6

from the region and the retention of hostages, including prisoners of war and political prisoners.

A period of widespread ethnic and cultural cleansing followed with centuries old Armenian churches, monuments, cultural sites and even cemeteries, destroyed and remnants of Armenian history and tradition eradicated.

Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian, pastor of the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection, said of the prayer service that "It was a privilege to participate in the special prayer service observed on this day by all Armenian churches throughout the world. We pray for the release of the hostages, the return of the evacuees to their homeland and the restoration of peace to this historic area."





**Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Boston Chapter**

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**Armenian Cooking  
Demonstration III:  
Holiday Desserts Anoushabour  
+ Halawet el Jibn**

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<p>Thurs., Dec. 5 Baikar Building 7 p.m. 755 Mt. Auburn St, Watertown via Norsaman Ave. door \$30 includes reception</p>	<p>Series Coordinator Rita Balyazian RSVP Required @ Sossy Yogurtian 617 281-1647 or syngurtiani@comcast.net</p>
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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Yerevan Man Donates Bone Marrow Stem Cells to Save His Sister's Life

LOS ANGELES — On November 6, Yerevan resident Garik Petrosyan donated bone marrow stem cells to help save the life of his sister, in Germany.

Garik said that from the very start, he was certain that he would end up being identified as a matched donor for his sibling, potentially being able to help save her life through a bone marrow transplant.

The harvesting of Garik's bone marrow stem cells took place at the Stem Cell Harvesting Center of the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR), in Yerevan. Thanks to the procedure, the donated stem cells were to be used for an urgent transplant that could help the patient survive her life-threatening blood-related illness.

"Garik had already donated stem cells for his sister in April of this year, but she once again needs her brother's help, in the form of another round of harvesting," said ABMDR Executive Director Dr. Sevak Avagyan.

The painless, non-invasive harvesting was the 44th such procedure to be facilitated by ABMDR. As soon as it was completed, the donated stem cells were entrusted to a special courier and flown to Germany.

"Every transplant is a challenge, involving the work of many specialists," said ABMDR President Dr. Frieda Jordan. "And once the process is set in motion, everyone involved focuses on a single goal, which is to get the donated stem cells to the patient as quickly as possible for helping them survive a potentially fatal illness."

To date, the registry has recruited over 33,500 donors in 32 countries across four continents, identified over 9,000 patients, and facilitated 44 bone marrow transplants. For more information, visit [abmdr.am](http://abmdr.am).



The stem cell donor during the harvesting procedure, at ABMDR's Stem Cell Harvesting Center, in Yerevan.

## OBITUARY

### Elizabeth (Schwering) Berberian Opera Singer Who Sang for President

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Elizabeth (Schwering) Berberian, 86, also known as "Betty Jane," passed away on Thursday, November 7, at home with her family by her side.

She had a successful and fulfilling professional career as a noted soprano. She lived in Providence for many years and performed with many ensembles and was also an active and committed member of the Chopin Club.

In 1963, she married Jon Berberian, a well-known tenor who has shared in her musical life with joint appearances at the New York City Opera and elsewhere. Jon Berberian had owned and operated the



historic Columbus Theatre in Providence since 1962.

She took great pride in her twin sons, Karl and John. She also leaves behind two sisters-in-law, Lillian Klanian and Stephanie Berberian, as well as her brother-in-law, Hapet Berberian, and many loving nieces and nephews.

She was recently interviewed in her large, historic home in Providence, brimming over with musical mementos, photographs and drawings (mostly by her son John).

Born at Fort Meade, Md., she was the daughter of the late Col. Karl W. and Re-

becca J (Shupp) Schwering. She described herself as an "Army brat," recalling a childhood as a travelogue. Her father was in the military, so the family moved regularly, even spending two years in Panama. She remembered her father lovingly as having been a great influence in her life, being a very fine singer as well as a professional military man. A graduate of West Point, he retired as a full colonel, after which he enrolled in the Harvard Business School.

Betty Jane began singing as a youngster, along with studies in piano and violin. Her strong interest in singing developed when she entered St. Margaret's School in Waterbury, Conn., at the age of 14. While there, she was invited to perform with the Waterbury Symphony. Upon graduation, she won a scholarship to the Juilliard School, where she spent five years and then furthered her studies with Eleanor McLellan in New York City. She spoke fondly of her teacher, known as "Miss Mac," recounting tales of running into Placido Domingo, Eileen Farrell, Roberta Peters and other famous singers at the Ansonia Hotel, where she had her music studio. This was the teacher who exercised a great influence on her development of a career in voice.

In March 1963, she was chosen to sing, with Julius Rudel conducting, at the White House before President John F. Kennedy and guest King Hassan II of Morocco, while she was a member of the New York City Opera. Her first professional opera performance was in the role of Rosalinda in "Fledermaus," following the world premiere of "The Crucible."

Many other performances followed, including roles in light opera and summer stock. It was at this time in her life, after marriage and a move to Boston, when she won two prominent awards: the Metropolitan Opera Regional Auditions and, later in Providence, the New England National Federation of Music Clubs.

After moving to Providence, Betty Jane appeared with the New England Opera Company in Boston as Marguerite in "Faust" and as Mimi in "La Boheme" with

the R.I. Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as soprano soloist in Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*, among others. She enjoyed all aspects of singing. In addition to opera, oratorios and recitals formed a large part of her wide repertoire, with appearances as soprano soloist with the Concord Community Chorus, at the Old South Church in Boston, and the Brahms Requiem at Brown University. A highlight was a recording of a live concert of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* with the Norfolk (VA) Symphony.

In 1983, she became one of the first fac-

ulty members in the voice department at Providence College until her retirement in 2003. She also took great pleasure in being a soloist and member of St. Stephen's Church in Providence.

Services will be private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, 70 Jefferson St., Providence, RI 02908 or Continuum Care of RI, 1350 Division Rd. – Suite 205, West Warwick, RI 02893. Visit [Nardolillo.FH.com](http://Nardolillo.FH.com) for online condolences.

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# AGBU Commemorates Anniversary with Assembly

NEW YORK — For more than 875 AGBU members, friends and guests from 22 countries, the 93rd General Assembly (GA) weekend in New York stood out as one of the most memorable and inspiring in the organization's recent history.

From Thursday, October 10 through Saturday October 12, the assembled honored the past, contemplated the future, celebrated success and delighted in Armenian and world culture in landmark spaces unique to New York City.

However, this year, the most anticipated event of the weekend was the history-making passing of the presidential torch from AGBU's seventh President Berge Setrakian to AGBU Council of Trustees member Sam Simonian.

The transfer took place during the official proceedings of the 93rd General Assembly on October 12, held at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, in the presence of 360 AGBU global delegates and members, in addition to guests, including Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

Setrakian's farewell general assembly address touched on many themes related to the state of affairs.

"The Armenian Nation is presently at a crossroad," Setrakian stated. "It is divided almost equally between the Homeland, the Russian and Western Diasporas. Each has its own expression of national identity. This makes us different while also the same. We need to reinforce the bridges to maintain our global nation. The State cannot do it alone, nor can the Diaspora. For as long as I have been active in the governance of AGBU, we have tried to bridge these gaps throughout our own global network. I think our organization is a shining example of how, despite cultural nuances and diverse national experiences, unity prevails."

He added that the Armenian Church plays a vital role in keeping Armenians of different backgrounds united, due to the universality and timelessness of the Armenian values, customs and traditions derived from Christian tenets, history and the cultural heritage of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

During the formal session, AGBU Central Board Vice President Joseph Oughourlian announced that the AGBU Central Board and Council of Trustees had unanimously elected Berge Setrakian as honorary president, considering his half-century of close involvement in the governance of AGBU and the deep imprint he has made on the organization.

AGBU Central Board Assistant Secretary Arda Haratunian, who moderated the GA proceedings, also announced

And this commitment to neutrality allows us to serve Armenians from all walks of life, uniting our community around shared values and common goals, free from the divisions that political affiliations can bring." He went on to underscore the importance of "not being wedded to and cling to outdated methods because in the age of the Internet and AI, our approach to educating and engaging youth must evolve to make the most of these transformational advances."

Simonian also observed that today we are confronted

AGBU Alex Manoogian award for leadership, while two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee Garo Paylan and U.S. Representative Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ) received the Boghos Nubar Award for service to the Armenian nation and community.

## Gala Honors Berge and Vera Setrakian

Later that evening, Gotham Hall was filled with more than 550 guests, featuring music by world renowned violinist Samvel Yervinyan, who performed with energy and



Catholicos Karekin II offers blessings in gratitude with a memento from Holy Eucharist.

with numerous challenges that demand a collective effort: "To rise above these difficulties, we must pursue ambitious dreams of a prosperous and united future," he said. "Achieving such dreams requires all our organizations to work together in harmony, pooling resources, and expertise, rather than engaging in competition. By fostering collaboration, we can strengthen our global community, amplify our impact, and ensure the long-term success and resilience of Armenians everywhere."

## Praises and Blessings

Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, had traveled from Holy Eucharist to congratulate Berge and Vera Setrakian in person, owing to the long friendship that he and the Setrakians forged in 1983, when Berge Setrakian was still the youngest member of the AGBU Central Board and then-Very Rev. Karekin was rising in the ranks of the Armenian clergy in then-Soviet Armenia. After Armenia's independence, many collaborations and cooperative efforts bore fruit in service to native Armenians suffering from the collapse of the Soviet system and economy. It was also a time that the need for spiritual connection became critical in those dark days of Armenian independence.

## General Assembly Honorees

As is tradition, the general assembly proceedings serve as a time of organizational reflection which includes an opportunity to honor individuals and groups for their service to AGBU and the Armenian people.

The AGBU Outstanding Service Award was presented jointly to the AGBU London Chapter and AGBU YP London committee for their constructive efforts and collaborative spirit. The AGBU President's Award for outstanding dedication and service was given to long-time members of the AGBU Central Office in New York, Randa Akda, Director of Endowments and Estates, and Hrant Kamalyan, Director of Information Technology, as well as Hosesep Torossian, former principal of the AGBU Alex & Marie Manoogian School in Michigan. Armenian chef and entrepreneur Aline Kamakian was also honored with this award despite her absence due to her work with World Central Kitchen in Lebanon.

Berge Papazian, former AGBU Central Board member and representative of AGBU in Toronto, received the

vibrato.

Emcee and co-chair of AGBU Young Professionals of Zurich, Elisabeth Istanbuli von Tscharner began the elegant evening thanking Berge and Vera Setrakian for their vision and their belief in Armenian youth — a commitment that has taken the global Young Professionals movement from 4 groups in 2002 to 46 groups in 2024. Themes of impact and inspiration echoed throughout the evening.

Each speaker and video presenter reflected their personal experiences and relationships with the Setrakians as well as the global reach of their decades of service and positive influence. Speakers that evening included AGBU Central Board member Yervant Demirjian, close family friend Nigol Koulaian, and Seta Nazarian, a cousin of Vera Setrakian.



AGBU Young Professionals from around the world kick off the weekend.

traktion. The evening included heartfelt tributes as well from AGBU President Sam Simonian, AGBU Council of Trustees Chairman Vatche Manoukian and Karekin II.

Video tributes included remarks from public figures and friends alike including a message from Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who praised Setrakian as a brilliant lawyer and a great friend to the Lebanese nation. United States Ambassador to Israel ('93-'94) and Syria ('88-'91) Edward Djerejian noted Setrakian's ability to understand complex geopolitical issues and observed that Setrakian would have made an excellent diplomat. Countless Central Board Members and prominent AGBU members reflected on the Setrakians' nation building journey, dedication to unifying the diaspora, investment in youth, and love of Armenian culture and arts.

*continued on next page*



AGBU Honorary President Berge Setrakian and Vera Setrakian with AGBU President Sam Simonian, Sylva Simonian, Tamar Manoukian, and AGBU Council of Trustees Chairman Vatche Manoukian.

that letters of congratulations to Berge Setrakian had been sent by government leaders, including Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo and governors of the French regions, along with pontifical blessings and accolades from Karekin II, Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, and Raphael Bedros XXI, Catholicos Patriarch of Cilicia of Armenian Catholics, as well as a number of institutions, like the American University of Armenia (AUA).

## Visions of Tomorrow

When newly inaugurated Sam Simonian made his acceptance speech, he also emphasized the theme of unity in the context of neutrality, saying: "We respect all our institutions — state, religious, cultural and educational.



## COMMUNITY NEWS



AGBU 93rd General Assembly Honorees

**Berge Setrakian Leadership Fund**

AGBU President Sam Simonian made a special announcement that was felt as a most fitting tribute to Setrakian's half century of outstanding leadership—the establishment of the Berge Setrakian Leadership Fund. “For the many years that I have known and worked closely with Berge, he has emphasized the importance of cultivating future leaders. Individuals who will stand out in their respective fields and possess the skills and knowledge to successfully navigate the complexities of an uncertain world — while remaining deeply connected to their Armenian identity and community,” Simonian said. “Berge is a shining example of these attributes.”

Simonian also noted that, thanks to early supporters from around the world, the Berge Setrakian Leadership Fund had already raised \$3.3 million with more contributions on the way.

Berge Setrakian was visibly moved by the overwhelming display of respect, admiration, gratitude and friendship extended to him by old familiar and new faces from across the generations. He began by saying: “You know, it's very difficult to express myself. I feel so humbled because, after all, what Vera and I did during this journey, we were the biggest beneficiaries because of the satisfaction and reward that we got — that we were able to do something for others, was much greater than anything else,” he said. “I personally do not believe in sacrifice. There is no reason to sacrifice because either you are convinced of what you are doing or you're not...And it is true, you know, when you are able to assist somebody, you get the joy of having had the opportunity...And this is an organization which is based on that philosophy, on that ideal...This morning we had over 360 delegates from all over the world... and there is a bonding among us because we all believe in the same values. And this is an organization where we are taught that you give without expecting anything else but the satisfaction of having done something for somebody else. And this is the greatness of this organization.”

**Conference, Culture and Cocktails**

During the three-day weekend, several daytime meetings and gatherings provided participants with ample opportunities to interact with thought leaders in diverse fields of expertise. Leadership of Young Professionals groups from 12 countries met first on Thursday for strategic discussions as well as a lively discussion with incoming AGBU President Sam Simonian.

Later in the evening, over 300 young professionals from around the world were welcomed at hidden speak easy Saint in the Big Apple's Lower East Side to toast the kickoff of the General Assembly weekend with a fun meet-up hosted by the AGBU Young Professionals of Greater New York.

The discussions carried through the next day during the Delegates' Workshop which remained focused on AG-

BU's unified impact throughout the past few years and finished with an intimate fireside chat with outgoing President Berge Setrakian who imparted words of wisdom on navigating volunteer leadership roles, career and personal life.

**APRI Armenia New York Meeting**

The APRI Armenia forum themed Armenia's New Balance: Russia, the West, and the Future of the South Caucasus brought together hundreds who remained intensely engaged in the three panels. Participants were even welcomed to an intermezzo by renowned artist Ara Dinkjian whose music honored the deep tradition of Armenian culture. (See story on Page 1.)

First came a one-on-one interview with Ambassador John Herbst, Senior Director, Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center, to talk about The U.S. Election and Strategic Interests in the South Caucasus. The next panel focused on

one-on-one dialogue with Ambassador Sam Brownback, Co-Chair, International Religious Freedom Summit, Former US Senator from the State of Kansas, and Former US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

**Arvest: A Night of Rhythms and Flavors**

On Friday evening, October 11, over 380 guests convened at the Harold Pratt House where the architectural and decorative splendor of Old New York met with new interpretations of Armenian musical themes and spirits. In a unique set up, guests enjoyed an immersive cultural experience moving from room to room to explore the diversity of Armenian artistry, starting with the Lucy Yeghiazaryan Jazz Quintet.

With each room in the townhouse, guests had the opportunity to explore different themes. In one space was the Intesa Duo, where vocalist Lucine Musaelian together



Presenters at the gala evening: Elisabeth Istanboulli von Tscharnher; Yervant Demirjian; Nigol Koulaian; Seta Nazarian

Armenia's Foreign Policy Pivot in a Multipolar World with discussants: Dhruva Jaishankar, Executive Director, Observer Research Foundation America; Anatol Lievin, Director, Eurasia Program, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft; Garo Paylan, Visiting Scholar, Europe Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Michael Rubin, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute.

The next two panels moderated by APRI founder Lara Setrakian delved into Armenia's Security in the Quest for Regional Peace with panelists Colonel (Retired) Robert Hamilton, Head of Eurasia Research, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Nerses Kopalyan, Associate Professor-in-Residence of Political Science, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Leonid Nersisyan, Senior Research Fellow, APRI Armenia; and Margarita Tadevosyan, Executive Director, Center for Peacemaking Practice, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University.

The final topic explored Armenia's Conservative Outreach: On Foreign Policy and Religious Freedom with a

with Nathan Giorgetti performed on the viola da gamba. Upstairs in another space, a trio of Armenians from Los Angeles played their intoxicating ancient tunes on authentic instruments. Mher Mnatsakanyan performed on the duduk, shvi, and clarinet while Antranig Kzirian played the oud accompanied by Albert Ordinyan on the dhol and dap. On the same floor, cellist and composer Artyom Manukyan rendered dynamic upbeat rhythms on electric cello, while Gregory Dolbashian, a movement director and choreographer, performed interpretive dance.

With a mix of mingling and exploration, all who attended found the avant-garde approach to a traditional concert refreshing and entertaining.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# APRI Provides Insights into Armenia's Foreign Policy Challenges

APRI, from page 1

Lara Setrakian, president of APRI Armenia, started the afternoon by providing some general information about this thinktank, which she said emerged out of the defeat of the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war. APRI, she said, is “dedicated to regional peace and sustainable development in the South Caucasus. She explained how it attempted to make its voice heard by Armenian government stakeholders, other thinktanks, and media outlets, and suggested a new narrative for Armenia in order to continue building for the future. Later in the day, AGBU Central Board member and president of AGBU Europe Camilio Azzouz took the stage to encourage participation in the APRI membership program to be launched in 2025.

Ara Dinkjian on the oud, accompanied by a keyboard player, performed between sessions.

## US Presidential Election and the South Caucasus

Nvard Chalikyan, an APRI Armenia research fellow, introduced John E. Herbst, former US ambassador to Ukraine (during what became called the Orange Revolution) and Uzbekistan, and currently senior director of the Eurasia Center of the Atlantic Council, an influential establishment thinktank in Washington.

Chalikyan noted the recent increased engagement by the US with South Caucasus, while Russia was no longer seen as security guarantor for Armenia, and Armenia was seeking alternative partners like India and France. She asked Herbst about US interests in the South Caucasus and US policy if Trump wins the November elections. (As stated above, this event took place prior to the US elections.) Herbst forthrightly declared: “I think it is fair to say that it is not considered a region of vital interest, although there really is no region in the world where the United States does not see important American objectives and that includes the South Caucasus.”

He appeared fixated on Russia as the greatest immediate threat to the US, though in the long term he added that China would become the greater danger, declaring, “I believe the single greatest danger to American national security today comes from a revanchist Russia, which on multiple occasions labeled the United States as its number one adversary.”

He stated that there were two camps in “Trump land,” one associated with now Vice President-Elect Sen. J. D. Vance and Donald Trump Jr., who are ready to cut off American aid to Ukraine, which might guarantee a Kremlin victory. Herbst said that on the other hand, the second camp, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien, understood the threat posed by Russia to the US.

Consequently, he said US policy will depend on which faction takes control with a Trump win. The Vance group, he said, would have a real and negative impact on the South Caucasus, while if the second group prevails, an active interest in the South Caucasus may be evinced. If Kamala Harris won, Herbst foresaw a continuation of current policy, which includes what he termed a serious interest in the region.

Herbst pointed out that US influence on Ankara could be a lever to use. At present, Azerbaijan’s interest in gaining more things from Armenia was a case of the tail wagging the dog, as Turkey otherwise already had what it needed to improve relations with Armenia. Herbst said that for the first 20 years of the Karabakh conflict the interests of Turkey and the US were aligned nicely but that changed 180 degrees over the last 10 years or so, especially starting in 2016 with the dress rehearsal for the 2020 war. Herbst noted that Azerbaijan now has been “made whole,” and said that though this phrase might not be so pleasant for some of the audience, it still should be a situation allowing Turkey (or Türkiye) to step aside.

Herbst seemed to show a sneaking admiration for what he termed Turkish pride, though this made it difficult for the US to “persuade” Turkey in certain things. He pointed out admiringly that Turkey shot down a Russian jet in Turkish airspace in 2015 while Western countries allowed Russian missiles to fly over all sorts of NATO allies without doing anything. While Herbst said that this was a strength that the US should be able to utilize, he confessed that the use of carrots and sticks to this end so

far had not been successful.

When Chalikyan asked how the US and the West could help strengthen Armenia’s deterrence capabilities and curb Azerbaijan’s penchant for using force, Herbst prefaced his answer by declaring there was a great warming in US-Armenian relations since Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan came to power and realized that basically Russia ditched Armenia as an ally for Azerbaijan. However, continuing in a less reassuring but candid tone, he said, “We had been developing what had been a very limited security relationship with Yerevan. I think that will continue, but let’s be frank, that is not enough because we are still a long way away...”

At this time, he stressed, the US was focused elsewhere, on the Ukraine conflict and in supporting Taiwan against China.

At best, he said, perhaps there could be a greater US presence, with more American trainers in Armenia and a “tough approach,” telling Turkey that the US has serious interests in the region and, though making concessions where Turkey wants them, insisting that the US also wants to see results.

He responded similarly to an audience question about why the US does not pressure Israel more to stop giving Azerbaijan weapons. Herbst said that with the current Middle East situation, this would be considered a tertiary priority, but he did feel that the US should give Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a freer hand in the politics of the current wars, and if it did, it could be easier to ask Israel to shut off the weapons spigot to Azerbaijan, and maybe even to Turkey as well.

In response to a second audience question about what Armenia could do to get more US support, Herbst replied that he would give the Pashinyan government and its “excellent ambassador in Washington” (Lilit Makunts) high marks for reaching out to the US but concluded, “I am not sure that Armenia can do much more.” It was up to the US and the West to do more, if it had the will to become more assertive, he admitted. If the US could get the Israelis on board, the US could then go to the Turks to have a conversation, he said, and the US could also do a bit more with Azerbaijan.

As to why the US does not do more to stop Russian oil and gas being sold through Azerbaijan, Herbst replied that Azerbaijan was not the worst scofflaw here. He noted that both Armenia and Georgia, as well as Kirgizstan has done a lot of this (though *Mirror-Spectator* readers may note that the scale of Azerbaijan’s actions are much greater than those of Armenia).

Finally, Herbst noted that if the ruling Georgian Dream won the (then upcoming) October 26 parliamentary elections in a free and fair way, the US would have no qualms to continue its relationship but if it stole the election, relations with the US would grow frostier. He observed that the Georgian Dream has been cozying up to the Russians and if relations worsen between Georgia and the US, Russia will take advantage of this and this will make Armenia and Pashinyan’s position more difficult.

(As it happens, the Georgian Dream did win the elections but the opposition, including the Georgian president, claimed that they were illegitimate and falsified, while officials in Washington and Brussels called for an investigation.)

## Armenian Foreign Policy Pivots

The second APRI presentation was that of a four-person panel moderated by APRI’s Vice President of Strategy and Development Anahide Pilibossian. Pilibossian introduced the focus of the panel, on whether Armenia is pivoting away from Russia towards the West, or to Asia, or even more broadly, “to the world.” The panelists were Dhruva Jaishankar of the Observer Research Foundation America, Anatol Lieven of the Quincy Institute, Garo Paylan of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute (and a frequent opinion writer for the *Mirror-Spectator*).

Jaishankar started off the discussion offering three observations. First, there is a new type of Cold War, with conflicts connected in complicated ways. Some examples he gave are the French accusing Azerbaijan of fomenting separatism in New Caledonia, Ukrainian intelligence

helping Malian rebels fighting Russian mercenaries in the Sahara, and North Korean soldiers fighting in the Ukraine.

Secondly, he pointed out that the distribution of power globally is changing rapidly. Whereas 25 or 30 years ago the US and its allies constituted 85 percent of the global economy, today they are only 50 percent, and this is declining yearly. Not only China but other countries are growing stronger. Consequently the idea that the US could solve the world’s problems is increasingly questioned.

Third, these changes play out in many realms besides conventional defense or nuclear power. Technologically, Jaishankar said, we see hacking into the infrastructure systems of other countries. In terms of connectivity, the maps of the supply chains and trade of certain nations are being redrawn. He concluded that today almost anything that can be weaponized may very well be.

Lieven felt it was a time of great uncertainty, with the US and Georgian elections, the undecided Ukraine war, and a probable second Israeli attack on Iran, which could have very serious consequences for Armenia. It would therefore make sense for Armenia to pursue a very cautious and prudent policy and attempt diversification or multivector foreign policy.

Paylan chimed in that small nations are vulnerable. No big power intervened during the nine-month blockade of 120,000 Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh), which ended badly, indicating that this is a dark era where only might and leverage, neither of which Armenia possesses, will prevail. Of three regional powers, Russia, Iran and Turkey, only Iran is “friends” with Armenia and opposed the Russian agenda. Paylan suggested, “we need to pivot to strategic thinking, which requires getting as many [regional] powers in the region on board — which can be Turkey.”

Paylan later in the panel elaborated that Armenia did not want to engage with Turkey from 1995 to 2015, when the latter was closer to the West, because it did not recognize the Armenian Genocide. Paylan at the time suggested that engagement could change Turkish perceptions of Armenians. Turkey instead pivoted to Moscow and Baku, coming under the influence of Ilham Aliyev. Paylan said he warned the Armenian government about this, but it feared being called traitorous if it tried to get closer to Turkey. “We needed to choose the best of the worst scenarios,” Paylan said, but “We didn’t have the necessary flexibility.”

Paylan said that after the 2020 war, when the Turkish economic was in a terrible situation, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan saw relations with Armenia as a bargaining chip with the West, and at least four times sent messages to the West that he was ready to open the border. However, the West did not respond because it saw Erdogan as a supporter of Hamas, and in addition, Paylan said, Armenian organizations tried to push the West to sanction Turkey.

Paylan concluded that engagement with Turkey could be beneficial for Armenia and strategic thinking was necessary. He said Turkey could paradoxically become a lifeline for Armenia, especially as Armenia will be vulnerable when an Israel-Iran war breaks out.

Rubin said he did not disagree with the prior speakers, but reframed their approach, stating: “We can talk about shifting power dynamics but it’s important to recognize that there’s another issue at stake. This is what I see behind the erosion, perhaps, of Russian influence, at some point of American influence as well, and the influence of others, and that is trust. We are in a situation right now where there’s ... a lack of shamelessness attached to the violation of trust.” He gave many examples of the US making statements which turned out to be outright lies and violations of trust. For the Armenians, the declaration of Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Yuri Kim that the US would not allow any effort at ethnic cleansing in Karabakh is one.

Consequently, Armenia should be less trusting in international relations he said, adding in an elliptical allusion to the Pashinyan government: “Now, not everything is done to Armenians. Armenians have agency. And one of the problems in Armenia itself is one can be very, very

*continued on next page*



## COMMUNITY NEWS

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adept at domestic politics and be woefully naïve when it comes to international relations. And the danger is, when one assumes that they are brilliant in every aspect of governance.”

As far as the border goes with Turkey, Rubin said that similarly, agreements that had been made in the past must be accepted and enforced. The Treaties of Moscow and Kars call for open borders between Turkey and Armenia, so it is not for Turkey to add new demands and its blockade is illegal.

Pilibossian asked Lieven about Russia, and he replied that with the Ukraine war, Russia's agenda in the Caucasus is obviously limited, though Russia still has troops in Armenia. He said Russia is trying to hang on to as much influence as it can but also looking to prevent new crises. Russia he said seems not to oppose an East-West route from Turkey to Azerbaijan as long as it controls it, and Turkey has become a very important trade partner for Russia, meaning it will have to consider everything in the future in terms of its relationship with Ankara. Lieven said this certainly qualifies any commitments Russia has to Armenia.

Lieven, in response to an audience question as to whether it would be wise for Armenia to demand all Russian troops leave its territory to allow full Western military support, responded: “That would indeed make excellent sense if you thought you were going to get Western military support, but I know of no plans or even possibilities of either European countries or the United States deploying troops in Armenia, and if of course the United States did deploy troops in Armenia, there would be a very good chance that they would be used against Iran. I can imagine few scenarios more disastrous for Armenia than that, especially because even if they did come, they might go home again. Armenia can't go home. Armenia lives there.”

Moderator Pilibossian added that Europeans observe that if they do not send troops to Ukraine, why should Armenians expect more than this from the West.

Rubin agreed with Lieven's assessment of the West, declaring: “...if the United States isn't fully committed and if we can't keep our word beyond four years, it would be a grievous mistake which would risk essentially Armenia sticking out its head only to get chopped off.” On the other hand, he thought Armenia could possibly have both Russian and US military presence, as in Syria, and play one power against the other to a point.

Paylan said Armenia shouldn't be the subject of great power rivalry and it also should not depend on any outside power. He said, “We should only depend on our minds... We need to build leverage. We need to mitigate the risks and maximize the opportunities.”

When asked by Pilibossian about how India's multivector relations with Iran, the US and Russia could promote stability in the Caucasus region, Jaishankar pointed out that it is already helping diversify Armenia's relationships in four dimensions, in part out of concern for the convergence between Pakistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Two of these dimensions are already concretely expanding: India is providing weapon systems to Armenia and educational and training programs connect the citizens of both countries. Two aspects are aspirational, with much work to be done: trade is meager and India or Indian companies are not yet actively involved in infrastructure initiatives including Armenia, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Western sanctions against Iran and the current Middle East fighting complicate the latter.

The panelists were each asked to give final words of advice for Armenia. Paylan again proposed strategic thinking, Rubin bluntly said to trust no one, Lieven suggested a policy of prudence, caution and diversification, and Jaishankar, agreeing with the others, advised diversification in foreign relations.

#### Armenia's Security in Quest for Regional Peace

A second panel, moderated again by Lara Setrakian, included as participants Colonel (Retired) Robert E. Hamilton of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, Nerses Kopalyan of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Leonid Nersisyan of APRI Armenia, and Margarita Tadevosyan of George Mason University, and examined issues of Armenian security.

Kopalyan said that Armenia is diversifying at the hard power level, obtaining weapons from various nations while conducting military reforms. It is building a new security structure, emphasizing resiliency at the level of national security strategy, and enhancing its diplomatic capabilities now that it is no longer viewed as a Russian satellite. It has the political will now to do this as well

as the necessity, along with outside investment from the West.

When asked how a vulnerable Armenia could antagonize Russia, Kopalyan replied that there was a misconception here: any challenge to what he termed a “master-slave” relationship was seen by Russia as anti-Russian. Armenia does not want to sever all ties with Russia but wants to exercise its sovereignty and autonomy.

Nersisyan, a Russian Armenian, said that dependency on Russia in the security domain was difficult to overcome. Even language skills align Armenia with Russia. However, after 2021, new defense procurement elsewhere is filling in the gap created by the lack of Russian support.

Nersisyan optimistically said that based on some international economic forecasts, in five years Armenia will have the same defense spending as Azerbaijan does today, since the Armenian budget grew 20 percent this year and the Azerbaijani budget decreased 6 percent. Armenia is two times lower than Azerbaijan in military acquisitions or expenditures, which last was true in 2003 or 2004. He said this means that the gap between the two countries is much smaller now and it is possible to prepare various types of deterrence, not only diplomatic, without matching an attacker's resources.

Nersisyan added Armenia was not ready for an all-in war without major support from outside, but could handle low-intensity warfare in 2025. While he said there is not going to be any country which is going to fight for Armenia, Armenia could prepare stockpiles of everything needed for months of war, and develop a domestic defense industry (which he encouraged diasporans to invest in as very profitable). It needed also to communicate better developments in the armed forces to the Armenian public. He gave the example of the Ministry of Defense trying to keep secret the construction of border defenses though Azerbaijani sources have images of this.

Tadevosyan agreed with the prior speakers that defense capabilities and diplomacy had to be pursued but pointed out that domestic politics is also interconnected with security issues. Deep divisions within society, including low trust towards government and problems of social cohesion needed to be addressed by the Armenian government and other actors, she said. Armenia does not have a vision for the future and what peace means for it, so internal conversations and dialogues are necessary. It needs an updated national security strategy or doctrine for the longer term. She also declared that NGOs in Armenia should not all be considered Soros-funded organizations, but rather partners in building the security of Armenia.

Setrakian then asked Hamilton how could Armenia keep itself secure until it could be more defense-capable. Hamilton declared that relying on external security guarantors was not the way. Russia proved itself an unreliable partner, while NATO is not possible for a variety of reasons. Instead, Hamilton reiterated the words of prior panelists that Armenia must build territorial defense capability and be ready to adopt a total defense approach such as the porcupine or poisoned shrimp models. This means the enemy might swallow you but it can't digest you. A large reserve force dispersed throughout the country, with stockpiles of all types of supplies, would leverage all aspects of the government and economy for military use in case of invasion.

Hamilton advised watching the Ukraine conflict closely to learn lessons because the changes in warfare are occurring at light speed on both sides. At present, he thought the defensive form of warfare appears dominant, which would be to Armenia's advantage. Also, he pointed to Ukrainian civil society donations to the military as partners with the public sector in defense funding as an example that Armenia could follow.

Hamilton cited the Georgian state's example of losing political will to transform its military along a Western model, and in order to avoid this, suggested Armenians encourage Western powers to not only provide training at the tactical level, but also work at the executive level and create a generating force to sustain capabilities and political will.

#### Brownback and America's Conservative Outreach

The final portion of the APRI was a discussion with former Sen. Sam Brownback (R), who was senator from Kansas from 1996 to 2011, Kansas governor from 2011-18, and US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom from 2018 to 2021. Brownback currently serves as co-chair of the International Religious Freedom Summit and is a senior fellow at Global Christian Relief. He is also chairman of the National Committee for Religious Freedom.

Setrakian introduced Brownback and then asked how he saw the current situation in the South Caucasus.

Brownback said he found it to be a powder keg region with Iran, Turkey and Russia active players. He termed Russia, Iran, China and North Korea the axis of evil, and going further than Jaishankar's Cold War diagnosis earlier in the day, declared, “I actually think World War III has begun, if we don't play right through the next 6-18 months...wisely.”

How to do that? He exclaimed: “I think we got to project the toughness that you're not going to mess with us. We're going to stand up and we're going to do what we need to do. Texans have a saying, and it's not polite, but you got a good sheriff in town and you got a lot of bad things going on. He goes and he shoots one of the bad guys and he drives around town with the body in the back of the pickup. It says I mean business.” Ultimately, he said China is the puppet master behind many conflicts, including in the Middle East and involving Russia.

Setrakian asked about what could happen when Armenia reaches out to Christian communities in the US with a voice in foreign policy. Brownback said, “I wouldn't be coy about it. I would say I think you have got a lot of friends. I don't think you've talked to them that much... You're the oldest Christian nation on the planet. Nobody else has that distinction...I've referred to you as the Israel of Christendom. You don't market that.” He added, “I thought, man, you guys ought to just be reaching out and saying, this is part of the body of Christ and you need to be helping us and we need your help, and you used to do it. You did it back in 1915 with the genocide that took place.”

He cited the Save Armenia coalition meeting with Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians in Washington in September as a positive example, remarking that he had never before seen a grouping of the three denominations reaching out to support one country. Brownback is on the board of directors of Save Armenia, and he later mentioned a trip it hosted for a group of Christian and Jewish leaders to Armenia a year and a half ago in which he participated, declaring, “I think you need to invite people to your house.”

Setrakian asked whether the aforementioned outreach to Christians was enough to move the US to do more for the defense of Armenia, given Armenia's lack of strategic value compared to other countries or parts of the world. Though not fully answering the question, Brownback responded by questioning the lack of strategic value, because, he said Armenia was actually in the middle of a key region, with Islamist Turkey, Russia and Iran (which he termed “the antagonist in the Middle East”). He implied that it was important for the US to have a stable partner, so, he said, “I think really a key piece for you guys long term is just political stability of Armenia, and staying with it.” He also pointed out Georgia as a counterexample of a country that lost the political will.

Setrakian asked in a tactful way for Brownback to explain his evolution of his views on the South Caucasus. Without spelling it out, she was alluding to the change from his prior ardent support for Azerbaijani (and oil) interests while in the Senate, including efforts to circumvent Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act passed in 1992 to prohibit direct US assistance to Azerbaijan as long as the latter continued the blockade of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

Brownback first quoted Ronald Reagan on his change from Democrat to Republican, when he said “I didn't leave the Democratic Party — it left me.” Brownback specified that he meant that Armenia used to be closely aligned with Russia but then it changed. He recalled as an example that when he proposed the Silk Road Strategy Act in Congress at the end of the 1990s, this was an effort to avoid countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus from falling back into the Russian sphere or being pulled into an Islamic one. He said, “one of the barriers was the blockage towards Azerbaijan in the 907 sanctions, and Armenia wasn't interested in playing ball on this because they [sic] were closely tied with Russia.”

Now, referring to what he perceived as a Westward shift in Armenia's political alignments, he said, “You left a big ship ... [or] they left you and you're swimming in an ocean full of sharks trying to get to another ship. But I mean you want to build your own boat too.”

Setrakian concluded by expressing appreciation for the work of the Save Armenia coalition and Brownback's participation in this. Brownback in turn replied, “Thank you, and thank you for being Armenian. When I traveled to your country I read a small book on the brief history of Armenia. You've got too much history.” Noting that it was a tough spot, he finished by thanking Armenians “for hanging in there.”

For more information on APRI Armenia, see its website, <https://apri.institute>

# Arts & Culture

## Jordan Drops 'My Sweet Land' As Its Oscar Entry For Best International Feature, 'Due To Diplomatic Pressures'

By **Melanie Goodfellow, Matthew Carey**

LOS ANGELES (Deadline) — Jordan has withdrawn Sareen Hairabedian's documentary *My Sweet Land* as its official entry for Best International Feature Film at the 97th Academy Awards, reportedly after coming under pressure from Azerbaijan, Deadline has learned.

In a statement, the Royal Film Commission – Jordan (RFC) said, "Jordan withdrew its submission of 'My Sweet Land' documentary film due to diplomatic pressures. The Royal Film Commission – Jordan (RFC) remains committed to showcasing and promoting all Jordanian films, including their participation in film festivals."

The award-winning documentary follows 11-year-old Vrej, who dreams of becoming a dentist in his village in Artsakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave within Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been at the heart of



Vrej in 'My Sweet Land' HAI Creative LLC/Sister Productions/Soilsiu Films

a violent dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia since the 1980s. Artsakh fought for decades to become a breakaway state, an independence movement that ended with the Azerbaijani offensive of 2023.

The choice of the film by Jordan sparked controversy in Azerbaijan where its sympathetic account of the Armenians displaced by the conflict was viewed as taking an overtly anti-Azerbaijani stance.

Deadline understands the Azerbaijan government wrote to Jordan's Foreign Ministry requesting it reconsider the film's selection as its Oscar entry, which in turn put pressure on the Jordan's Royal Film Commission to withdraw the film.

Sources at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences confirm Jordan withdrew *My Sweet Land* for consideration as Best International Feature Film. This leaves Jordan without an entry in that category for the 97th Academy Awards.

Director Sareen Hairabedian and producer Azza Hourani tell Deadline exclusively, "This is very devastating news for our team that an emotional intimate story of a child's love for his home and family was banned and silenced. As documentary filmmakers, this censorship compels us more than ever to share *My Sweet Land* protagonist Vrej's story, which reflects the experiences of countless children

see PRESSURE, page 15



Dr. Marina Margarian playing the piano at Rockport

## Marina Margarian's Musical Journey Captivates at Rockport

By **Aram Arkun**

*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

ROCKPORT, Mass. — Over 250 guests assembled in the beautiful setting of the Shalin Liu Performance Center of Rockport, which enjoys an expansive view of the ocean, for a philanthropic concert entitled "A Musical Journey," featuring original compositions by pianist Marina Margarian. The event, under the patronage of Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the USA and Canada Mikael Mouradian, took place on November 3, and all proceeds will benefit wounded soldiers in Armenia and the Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church of Belmont.

Fifteen original compositions by Margarian were performed by Margarian on piano with a varied group of musicians from Boston and Armenia.

### The Philanthropy

Margarian said that around ten years ago she went to Armenia and was asked by her cousin, a military officer, to visit the special hospital for wounded soldiers. She said to the *Mirror-Spectator*, "I went, saw them and I said, that's it. I have to do a concert and help them... I started because my heart ached when I saw those young men without hands, or feet." So for ten years now she has organized a concert, usually of her students and/or herself, as an opportunity to raise money for them.

Then, last year, for the first time she also visited a physical therapy center for soldiers called Soldier's Home (*Zinvori Toun*). She distributed money there and at the hospital directly to the wounded soldiers or their families. She said, "It is not a very large sum of money, but it still helps. When we go, they [the administrators] tell us, this person has no money at all, this one is okay. Usually we divide the total money we have equally, but it depends on how much we have raised.... Each time we help different families, since every year there are new people in the hospital and Soldier's Home."

The last two years Margarian was accompanied on these visits by Maral Der Torossian of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, who is one of the main organizers assisting Marina to put together these concerts over the years. Receipts are signed by recipients, and for five consecutive years, Margarian has received the Wounded Soldiers' Social Assistance Award from the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia for this philanthropic work.

### The Musicians and the Music

After master of ceremonies Joselin Malkhasian welcomed guests, Der Torossian spoke about the difficulties faced by the wounded Armenian soldiers who deserved all the assistance possible considering the sacrifices that they had made. She then provided some biographical information about the performers, beginning with Margarian.

Born in Yerevan, Dr. Margarian received her master's degree in piano and music from the Khachatur Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University and a doctorate in music theory and music education from the Komitas State Conservatory and the Pedagogical University. After six years as a lecturer at the Pedagogical University, in 1991, she moved to the United States and founded Do-Re-Mi Music Studios in Waltham, where currently she has over 45 students of various ages learning piano, solfège and music theory. She also has been teaching music at the Kendall School in Belmont for over 30 years and also is the organist and music director of the Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church choir. In 2015 she founded and served as director of the Meghedi Children's Vocal Group.

see CONCERT, page 15

## 'Artsakh Uprooted' At USC: What Now?

By **Arpi Sarafian**

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

LOS ANGELES — If the current upsurge in the number of conferences dealing with the contemporary Armenian reality, award-winning documentaries, fine art exhibits, book events at Abril Books, concerts, fundraisers, festivals showcasing Armenian food, arts and crafts, high-tech schools and IT manufacturing facilities both in the homeland and the diaspora is any indication, it would seem Armenian culture is undergoing a renaissance.

The LARK Musical Society has resumed its Dilijan Chamber Music Concert series after an almost five-year hiatus. Recently, the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia offered a concert at the Monastery of the Mkhitarist Congregation on the island of San Lazzaro in Venice to an enthusiastic audience that had packed the church. The British literary magazine *Wasafiri* is publishing its winter 2024 special issue, to be released in December, to display "a rich tapestry of modern Armenian voices."

In 2024, Armenia hosted the second leg of the prestigious Black Sea Lit Projects Conference that aims to open dialogue between nations in the Black Sea area and beyond.

The Moonq High-Tech School of Artsakh that had had to leave everything behind in the September 2023 exodus has reopened in Yerevan to educate local students in software programming. These are just a few examples. It is perhaps true that the darker the skies, the more visible the stars.

And these are indeed times of darkness for the Armenian people (and for the rest of the world, alas!) As iterated at the November 2, University of Southern California (USC) Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies Symposium, titled "Artsakh Uprooted: Aftermaths of Displacement," the thousands killed in the recent Artsakh Wars, the ongoing threats to Armenia's security and the exodus of the entire population of Artsakh following a nine-month blockade have set a new standard for trauma: "We've never seen something like this."

Yet, rather than wallow in doom and gloom, the symposium showcased a narrative that goes beyond victimhood. Trauma was resignified as a force that contributes to resilience. Trauma empowers us by creating connection and solidarity with the species, the participants affirmed. The diversity of the diaspora was celebrated as a gift that makes it possible to cross boundaries and to connect.

Particularly appealing was a performance lecture, "Roots Across Diasporan Time," by Dr. Aroussiak Gabrielian of the USC School of Architecture and Hrag Vartanian,

see UPROOTED, page 17

# Margarian's Musical Journey Captivates at Rockport

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She received the Massachusetts House of Representatives Recognition of Honor in 2017 and the Award for Significant Contribution and Dedication to Armenian Music Culture, and in 2022, the Gomidas Award from the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America.

All of the performers were from Boston except soprano Hasmik Harutyunyan, who is based in Armenia but visiting relatives in Los Angeles. Harutyunyan came specially to Boston for this event, Margarian later told the *Mirror-Spectator*. Harutyunyan graduated with a bachelor's and a master's degree in vocal theory and academic solo singing from the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan. She has performed widely in Europe, including France, Spain, Austria, Germany and Belgium, and regularly takes part in charity concerts. She is a soloist with the Opera Viva Quartet and the Arshak Burjalyan Musical Drama Troupe, both in Yerevan. She has earned the Golden Medal of Gratitude from the president of Artsakh, the title Best Classical Singer of the Year from the World Association of Performing Arts, and multiple awards in competitions such as the Renaissance International Festival in Gyumri.

Violinist Armenuhi Hovakimian began to play the violin and piano in Armenia at



The performers with organizer Maral Der Torossian after the event

coached chamber groups and taught at summer festivals in the East Coast and beyond. She's the co-founder of the Arlina Ensemble and in addition to teaching she currently enjoys performing with her quartet.

Baritone Asatur Baljyan graduated the

and performed as a soloist with the National Opera Theater of Armenia. He has performed in Berlin, Moscow, Munich and Istanbul, and has performed leading roles such as Graf Tatul in the opera "Almast" and the title role in "Aleko."

He is music director and conductor at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, MA, and creative projects manager at the Armenian State Philharmonic Society. He won the Armenian Presidential Prize for Opera Singing in 2008 and the title of Best Artist of the Year in Chelyabinsk, Russia.

Pianist Gegam Margarian, born in Yerevan, is an example of how talent tends to cluster in families. The brother of Marina, he graduated from the Armenian Concert Music College, influenced by composers Martin Vardazaryan and Arthur Grigoryan. He has performed at the Armenian Philharmonic Theater and appeared at composer Emma Mharyan's "New Names" television show. He moved to the US in 1991 and has taught music classes at the AGBU Armenian School in Watertown, the Armenian Sisters' Academy in Lexington, and Belmont Kindergarten School. He is concertmaster at the Meghedi Vocal group and performs at various concerts throughout the US. He composes in many genres, including jazz, classical and pop.

He arranged the music compositions for the children's CD "Tsapik Tsapik" and is the composer and director of the children's musical "The Bird," based on a story by Hovhannes Tumanyan. He recently re-

leased a series of music videos.

Cellist Sophie Paul is working towards her Master's of Music in Cello Performance at the Boston Conservatory, where she serves as the cellist of the Honors String Quartet, and studies under Rhonda Rider. She has held fellowships at the Bach Institute at Emmanuel Music, the Music from Salem Chamber Music Festival, and the Harvard Chamber Music Festival. Originally from Salem, Oregon, she graduated in May 2022 with her Bachelor's of Music in Cello Performance and a minor in English from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.

The musicians performed in various combinations throughout the concert. At one point, a very young girl, Karina Karian, who is a student of Margarian, came onto the stage to perform the song *Mayrik* [Mommy] in a charming duet with Harutyunyan, afterwards bringing a flower to her own mother sitting in the audience nearby.

## Closing

Rev. Ghazar Bedrossian of Holy Cross Armenian Church gave some closing remarks, thanking the participants, audience and supporters. He quoted various important cultural figures, Armenian and musical, about the importance of music, which connects mind and soul, spirit and body, and also shows the importance of love and compassion. Rev. Bedrossian exclaimed that the musicians through the world of music transported the audience to a different place, and paraphrasing William Saroyan, exclaimed, "We have a new Armenia in this hall, full of music, prayer, culture, emotion and spirit."

The first encore was of Margarian's own *My Yerevan*, bringing together all the performers. Rev. Bedrossian surprised the performers and the audience with a rendition of *Pari Arakil* [Kind Stork] by Aleksey Hekimyan. He said that it symbolizes the Armenian nation, which loves to build, starting from zero, and creating a homeland wherever its members go.

After the event was over, Der Torossian said to the *Mirror-Spectator*, "I am very proud of all the performers and of Marina's accomplishments. I really hope we can keep it going, both for the sake of this community and Armenia. Culturally it is a unique type of program for the community, and if we can provide assistance in Armenia too, it is all the more worth it."

She noted that this year was the most successful yet in terms of philanthropy, thanks to generous donors and the general audience.



All performers together (photo Ken Martin)

the age of 7 in Armenia. She received her Bachelor of Music Performance from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a Master's in violin performance from Western Michigan University. She has participated in orchestral tours throughout Armenia, Canada, Germany, France and England,

Komitas State Conservatory with a bachelor's degree and studied at the Buchman-Mehta School of Music in Tel Aviv (2010-11) and the Lotte Lehmann Academy in Perleberg, Germany (2012-13). He took masterclasses with Alessandra Althoff-Pugliese and Peter Konwistchny

# Jordan Drops 'My Sweet Land' As Its Oscar Entry 'Due to Diplomatic Pressures'

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around the world today, who deserve to dream freely without the threat of war and conflict."

After Jordan withdrew the film as a contender for Best International Feature Film, the Academy told filmmakers they could submit *My Sweet Land* for consideration as Best Documentary Feature, if they followed standard qualification procedures. The filmmaking team has scrambled to arrange a qualifying run in the U.S.

"'My Sweet Land' will have its North American premiere at DOC NYC on November 16th and 17th, and our qualifying theatrical release will take place at Laemmle Theatres [in Los Angeles] starting November 29th," Hairabedian and Hourani tell us. "We remain committed to sharing our truthful story, undeterred by the obsta-

cles we face."

The move to withdraw the film from the International Feature Film category comes amid growing diplomatic and economic ties between Jordan and Azerbaijan, with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov receiving Jordanian officials in Baku in 2024 to discuss further ongoing cooperation.

"Our understanding was that Jordan withdrew the film in order to preserve diplomatic ties between Jordan and Azerbaijan after a complaint from the latter," the filmmakers say. "We also learned that after *My Sweet Land*'s premiere in Jordan at the Amman International Film Festival, Azerbaijan's embassy had also filed a complaint against screening the film publicly. So, *My Sweet Land*, a film that was celebrated weeks prior at the festival, was suddenly

banned in one of its home countries."

Jordan's Royal Film Commission is the governing body of the Amman International Film Festival. At that event in July 2024, *My Sweet Land* won three prizes: Jury Award for Best Arab Documentary, the Audience Award and the International Film Critics Award (FIPRESCI). The documentary premiered in June at Sheffield DocFest, the most prestigious nonfiction festival in the U.K., where it was nominated for the International First Feature Award.

In an email to Deadline on Saturday, the Royal Film Commission highlighted the awards earned by *My Sweet Land* at the Amman International Film Festival and noted the film "received development funding from the RFC's Jordan Film Fund in 2021."

Sheffield DocFest programmers wrote of the film, "Vrej, the subject of Sareen Hairabedian's impressive feature debut — a striking coming-of-age tale — has grown up in Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan. Since the end of the Soviet era it has witnessed much conflict. The 11-year-old watches birds, plays with friends and dreams of being a dentist. But echoes of the three wars his family have lived through since 1992 are ever-present. His grandmother laments the cycle of ethnic violence: 'Living in Artsakh means that one day there will be a war and my grandson will participate in that war'. As his school lessons become increasingly militarized and Vrej struggles to hold on to his childhood dreams, his grandmother watches her prophecy unfold."

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Sonia Uvezian's Missov Dziran (Armenian Lamb and Apricot Stew)

From: 'Moon Of The Faith: A History Of The Apricot And Its Many Pleasures  
by Joel S. Denker:

"Apricots flourished throughout the Islamic dominions. The Moors, who conquered Spain, planted apricots in [Granada]. Syria was another bastion of the fruit. In the garden oasis outside Damascus, the 19th century English naturalist Canon Henry Baker Tristram wrote, 'The great apricot-trees were laden and bent down under strings of ripe, golden fruit. The lanes were strewn with apricots. Asses, mules, and camels in long strings carried heaped panniers of these 'golden apples.'"

"To conserve the splendid produce throughout the year, the Syrians convert it to amardine. According to Middle Eastern food expert Sonia Uvezian, peasant women traditionally crushed apricots with their feet in stone troughs. They then extracted the pits and spread out the paste in the sun to dry..."

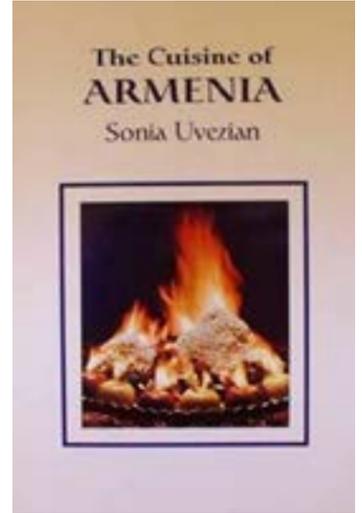
Uvezian was born and brought up in Beirut, Lebanon. A leading authority on Middle Eastern and Caucasian cooking and the winner of a James Beard Award, she is the author of six other highly acclaimed cookbooks, including *The Cuisine of Armenia*, *Recipes and Remembrances from an Eastern Mediterranean Kitchen*, *Cooking from the Caucasus* and *The Book of Yogurt*. Several of her books have been selections of Book-of-the-Month Club and published internationally. Uvezian has contributed articles and recipes to *Gourmet*, *Bon Appetit*, *Vogue* and numerous other publications.

"The recipes and variations in *The Cuisine of Armenia* include highly original specialties from the Caucasus, which were previously unknown in the West. As a bonus, the book contains a number of Ms. Uvezian's own superb creations, derived from the Armenian tradition, which are important contributions to a vigorous culinary style. Long recognized as the standard in its field, *The Cuisine of Armenia* is the first book in any language to offer a comprehensive view of Armenian cookery. Written by one of America's most gifted cookbook authors, it is a 'must have' volume, whether you already own one or a dozen books on Armenian, Middle Eastern, or Eastern Mediterranean cooking. Her celebrated Armenian lamb and apricot stew is simple to make, and is tender and delicious."



Author and Middle Eastern food expert  
Sonia Uvezian

In the cookbook, she features dolma, sarma, keufteh, shish kebab, boereg, lah-majoon, lavash, pideh, choereg, gatah, baklava, bourma, tel kadayif, kurabia, and many others. The 375 recipes range from traditional favorites to exciting innovations, include Red Pepper and Walnut Dip with Pomegranate (Muhammara); Grapevine Leaves Stuffed with Lentils, Bulgur, Dried Fruit, and Fresh Herbs; Mussels Stuffed with Rice, Pine Nuts, and Currants; Phyllo Pastry Boeregs with Cheese, Spinach-Cheese, or Meat Filling; Dumpling Soup in Yogurt or Tomato Broth (Mantabour); Lamb Soup with Potatoes, Apples, Quinces, and Fresh Herbs (Shoushin Bozbash); Tabbouleh; Basterma or Soudjuk with Eggs; Fish Kebabs Served with Grilled Peppers, Tomatoes, Onions, and Lemon Sauce; Fried Fish with Oranges, Black Olives, and Mint; Oysters in Tomato-Wine Sauce; Pomegranate-Glazed Roast Chicken with Apricot and Chestnut Stuffing; Chicken in White Sauce with Mushrooms, Tarragon, and Walnuts; Roast Turkey with Cinnamon-Glazed Apples; Partridges on a Spit with Grilled Tomatoes and Green Peppers, and much more.



"Situated at the crossroads of east and west between the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian seas, the richly historic region of Armenia has provided the world with one of its most varied and exciting culinary traditions. Fragrant with the aroma of spices and herbs and ranging from earthy peasant fare to noble creations, Armenian cuisine abounds in succulent kebabs, stuffed vegetables and fruits, opulent pilafs, delectable breads, and irresistible pastries and confections that have been perfected by generations of ingenious cooks over a period of many centuries."

### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tablespoons butter, more to taste
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 pound lean boneless meat\*
- 2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3/4 cup dried apricots
- 2 tablespoons walnuts, chopped
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- \*Meat should be lamb or mutton, weighed boneless and defatted, and cut into 1/2 inch cubes.
- Yield: 4-5 servings

### PREPARATION:

In a heavy saucepan or casserole, melt the butter over moderate heat. Add the onion and garlic and sauté until soft but not browned, stirring frequently. Add the meat and sauté until browned on all sides. Add the water, lemon juice, ginger, salt and pepper. Cover and simmer until the meat is nearly tender (about 1 hour for lamb, 3 hours for mutton).

Add the apricots, nuts and sugar (to taste), stirring well to dissolve the latter. Cover and simmer 15 minutes or until the meat and fruit are tender. Serve with rice or bulgur pilaf and fresh Greek yogurt on the side.

Recipe by Sonia Uvezian from *The Cuisine of Armenia*. For this recipe, go to: <https://souvigne.com/recipes/main590.htm>

"This book may well contain much of the best of Armenian cooking. Anyone familiar with the heavenly elegance of this cuisine shouldn't be without it," said Jane Wingate at *Ararat Magazine*. To order, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Cuisine-Armenia-Sonia-Uvezian/dp/0970971672>

See: 'Moon Of The Faith: A History Of The Apricot And Its Many Pleasures, Excerpt adapted from *The Carrot Purple and Other Curious Stories of the Food We Eat* (2015) by Joel S. Denker, with permission of the publisher, Rowman & Littlefield. All rights reserved. Go to: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/06/14/481932829/moon-of-the-faith-a-history-of-the-apricot-and-its-many-pleasures>

### References:

- <https://www.armgeo.am/en/armenian-apricot/>
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/06/14/481932829/moon-of-the-faith-a-history-of-the-apricot-and-its-many-pleasures>

### See:

- <https://mirrorspectator.com/2022/08/18/recipe-corner-sonia-uvezians-coffee-frozen-yogurt/>
- <https://www.foodpassages.com/>
- [https://aadl.org/files/cooks/repast/2018\\_Winter.pdf](https://aadl.org/files/cooks/repast/2018_Winter.pdf)
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1977/01/27/russia-gives-you-her-best/7a4525ef-c206-43cd-a47f-bd28b4253087/>
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- <https://foodtourist.com/the-cuisine-of-armenia-a-great-book-by-sonia-uvezian/>
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# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**NOVEMBER 16** — St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School will celebrate with a 40th Anniversary Gala. Saturday, 6.30 p.m., Hyatt Regency Cambridge. Tribute will be paid to retired longtime Principal Houry Boyamian. Program to feature Dr. Mary Papazian as keynote speaker. Vocalist Angelina Nazarian will perform. MC will be Kristina Ayanian. Cocktail reception to start at 6.30 p.m., followed by dinner and program at 7.30 p.m. Tickets for the event are \$250 (\$150 for alumni and students) available at <https://ssaes.square.site/product/tickets/2?cs=true&cst=custom>

**NOVEMBER 16** — Armenian Church at Hye Pointe will host its Annual Church Bazaar, 12 to 5 p.m., Delicious Armenian Food, Lamb, Chicken, Shish, Losh kebab, and Kheyma Dinners and Vegetarian Options. Armenian Cuisine and Pastries. Booths and Tables with Products from Armenia. Gift Baskets and Cash Raffles. Armenian Cookbooks for Sale. Sponsorship Opportunities Available. 1280 Boston Road (Rte 125), Haverhill MA (Exit 106 off Rte 495). For more information visit [www.hyepointearmenianchurch.org](http://www.hyepointearmenianchurch.org) or call (978) 372-9227

**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](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**NOVEMBER 23** — Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church 75th Annual Food Festival. 11 a.m. – 7 p.m., 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Eat-in or Take-out. The Food Festival menu includes lamb, chicken, losh kebab, and kheyma dinners, and a vegetarian platter; a country store with a variety of Armenian specialties and deserts. The festival also features a jewelry table, gift items from Armenia as well as tours of the church's sanctuary and

a Backgammon (Nardi) Tournament. For further information, call the church office at 978-256-7234.

**DECEMBER 5** — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents Armenian Cooking Demonstration III: Holiday Desserts Anoushabour and Halawet el Jibn. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown (Entrance on Norseman Avenue). \$30. RSVP required @Sossy Yogurtian, 617-281-1647 or [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net)

**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](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**DECEMBER 15** — Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church of Greater Boston and Erevan Chorale Society and Orchestra present their Christmas Holiday Concert, Sunday, 7:00 p.m. at Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church of Greater Boston, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge. The Christmas Concert is dedicated to the 155th anniversary of the birth of Gomidas Vartabed. Composer Konstantin Petrossian, Music Director & Conductor; Tatev Baroyan, soprano; Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian, tenor. For more information contact Konstantin Petrossian at [Petroskon@aol.com](mailto:Petroskon@aol.com), or Aida Diloyan, Chorale corresponding secretary at [adiloyan@verizon.net](mailto:adiloyan@verizon.net).

### RHODE ISLAND

**NOVEMBER 16-17** — Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church will host its food fair and bazaar. Saturday 12 noon to 7 p.m., Sunday 12 noon to 5 p.m. Delicious Armenian foods and pastries. Losh and lamb kebab, chicken, kheyma, Kufta, lahmajoon, hummus, falafel, boreg, yalanchi, choreg, cream khadaif, paklava, katah, kouarbia and more. Raffles and prizes, kids activities. Nazeli Dance Group and booths. 70 Jefferson St., Providence.

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

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

## USC's Artsakh Uprooted: Aftermaths of Displacement

UPROOTED, from page 14

editor-in-chief of *Hyperallergic*, who depicted the tree as a sacred spirit. Indeed, a tree is not held by its roots but by something deeper, something that goes beyond rationality, noted Gabrielian. Its roots are in the landscapes of our bodies and can thus migrate (metaphorically) through boundaries, across geographies and identities. It was interesting for me to learn that, as "silent witnesses," trees have been designated as part of our cultural legacy. The musical accompaniment on the oud and the duduk — both instruments made from the wood of trees — evoked the power of music to give voice and was a touching reminder of the idea of continuity and of survival. We can also claim through language by naming that which we can no longer touch, noted the panelists: Tchinar ess (You are as tall as a plane tree—Komitas), Garin etc.

Equally fascinating was a conversation between the Pulitzer Prize-winning

of the narrative resistance. Storytelling is an act of power, he said. It helps abolish the conditions of "voicelessness." Empowering the survivors by contributing to platforms that amplify Armenian voices is crucial, affirmed Nguyen. Rebuilding our identity is a community effort.

The new perspectives and the insights were truly empowering and they were not all abstract and romantic notions of resilience, as is often alleged. There was indeed a healthy awareness of the challenges facing us and tips were offered to realistically pursue our cause.

Renowned legal scholar Hannah Garry, for example, formerly at USC Law, and currently at the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA ("We have even crossed USC-UCLA boundaries," joked Dr. Shushan Karapetian, director of the Institute of Armenian Studies), noted that bringing demands for justice to the International Courts of Human Rights is not

useless, as some reckon. Human rights institutions are being used more than ever, she stressed. On the other hand, raising awareness for Azeri crimes against humanity by calling out the names of the Armenian prisoners of war still held captive in Azerbaijan at the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Summit to be held in Baku, demanding sanctions against Azerbaijan, and lobbying Congress to end military aid that contributes to Azeri war crimes could also help.

The fight of the Armenian people to



Margarita Baghdasaryan, Shoushan Keshishian, Ashot Gabrielyan, and Nina Shahverdyan at Artsakh Uprooted, Photo by Brandon Balayan



Shoushan Karapetian, Lika Zakaryan, and Hrach Martirosyan at Artsakh Uprooted, Photo by Levon Arshakyan

Vietnamese-American author Viet Thanh Nguyen and filmmaker Eric Nazarian. Dr. Nguyen forcefully iterated the importance

of the narrative resistance. Storytelling is an act of power, he said. It helps abolish the conditions of "voicelessness." Empowering the survivors by contributing to platforms that amplify Armenian voices is crucial, affirmed Nguyen. Rebuilding our identity is a community effort.

The fight of the Armenian people to

rightfully claim what is theirs cannot fail. Destroying the ancient religious and cultural heritage of Artsakh to erase all trace of a millennia-old Armenian presence on their ancestral lands, and forging history by calling Armenia the Caucasian Albania cannot win. The truth emerges ultimately. "We have a deep yearning for the truth," said Danell Jones, author of the recently published *The Girl Prince: Virginia Woolf, Race and The Dreadnought Hoax*, at the Annual International Virginia Woolf Society Lecture.

Yet, the truth is not all black and white. As noted by Nguyen, complicity in genocide needs to be foregrounded. Indeed, the only nugget of truth one left the symposium with was faith in the incredible power of family attachments and solidarity with

the rest of the species. A day's respite from the oppression gave one a wonderful sense of belonging and the courage to confront the darkness. To heal and to transform was possible. The steadily mounting investments in Armenia as "a future worth belonging to" are evidence of faith in that possibility.

Armenians are still reeling from loss. The documentary, "My Dearest Artsakh," and the film trailers featured at the symposium were touching reminders of the thousands killed and the tens of thousands displaced in the conflict. Yet, in the words of Lyoka, the Artsakh-born rapper who performed at the symposium, "I'm still alive and will be for a long-long time... even if injured, I will keep fighting. ... I've gone to be reborn."

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# Trump Is Back: What To Expect?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Trump's first presidency was marked by a passive approach to American policy in the South Caucasus. The United States was not particularly interested in what was happening in the South Caucasus, so the Trump administration mainly focused on regions that were of particular interest and vital importance, such as the Middle East, Asia and Central Asia. Consequently, the administration was not significantly involved in the war unleashed by Azerbaijan in 2020, which took place at the peak of the US presidential election season.

Preoccupied with the election, Trump made a few statements addressing Armenians and sent his national security advisor to meet with the Armenian community, but he was unable or unwilling to take real steps to stop the war. Even after inviting the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan to Washington, a ceasefire was not achieved. As a matter of fact, under the Trump administration, Artsakh was attacked, and under Biden, it underwent depopulation and the ethnic cleansing of Armenians. This was despite the Trump administration's limited involvement and the Biden administration's active engagement in the South Caucasus region.

Today, it is difficult to predict what foreign policy Trump will pursue and how it might differ from his first term. On one hand, times have changed, especially given the ongoing war in Ukraine; on the other, US policy itself has shifted under the Biden administration. Biden had a clear policy in the South Caucasus and aimed to see a peace agreement in Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations by the end of his presidency. Addition-

ally, America was able to increase its involvement in the South Caucasus due to Russia's diminished role following the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war and involvement in the Ukrainian war. This allowed the US to fill that gap and quickly establish a presence in the South Caucasus.

It is important to consider that if Trump manages to end the war in Ukraine, Russia will inevitably seek to return to the South Caucasus and attend to its vital interests there. It had neither the resources nor the time to pursue due them to its involvement in Ukraine, where it faces global opposition. If all this occurs, Russia will certainly return to the South Caucasus, and the role and significance of the United States there will diminish.

Regarding Iran, on one hand, Trump mentions that he wants to establish peace in the Middle East, while on the other, he says that Israel must be given unconditional support. How these two statements will be reconciled is hard to imagine, as achieving peace requires either negotiating for it or imposing it — two fundamentally different approaches. In any case, further escalation with Iran does not align with Armenia's interests, as Iran is one of Armenia's two gateways to the outside world and has been a historic ally.

However, Trump opened a new front of engagement with the Armenian community through his two recent actions. First, he directly addressed the Armenian-American community, using the terms "Artsakh" and "ethnic cleansing" — two phrases that the Armenian authorities generally avoid. The second was his phone call to Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia, who was visiting the US at the time. Although these steps were taken during an election campaign, they hold significant importance.

Firstly, Trump delivered his message to the Armenian community through the Church rather than by contacting Armenia's leadership, whose relationship with the Church is highly strained. By using the term "ethnic cleansing," Trump also provided a clear legal assessment of what has happened to the people of Artsakh. This implies that while Armenia's authorities might not pursue this, the Armenian-American community, lobbyists, other organizations, and the Church now have a foundation to work toward the US recognition of the ethnic cleansing in Artsakh, directly referencing the president's words. This is undoubtedly a complex and time-consuming task, but with a unified effort, it may be achievable — without relying on Armenia's government.

## A 'COP of Peace'? How Can Authoritarian, Human Rights-Trashing Azerbaijan Possibly Host

By Greta Thunberg

During rapidly escalating climate and humanitarian crises, another authoritarian petrostate with no respect for human rights is hosting COP29 — the UN's latest annual climate summit that starts on November 11 and is being held after the re-election of a climate-denier US president.

COP meetings have proven to be greenwashing conferences that legitimize countries' failures to ensure a livable world and future and have also allowed authoritarian regimes like Azerbaijan and the two previous hosts — the United Arab Emirates and Egypt — to continue violating human rights.

Genocides, ecocides, famines, wars, colonialism, rising inequalities and an escalating climate collapse are all interconnected crises that reinforce each other and lead to unimaginable suffering. While humanitarian crises are unfolding in Palestine, Yemen, Afghanistan, Sudan, Congo, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Baluchistan, Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, and many, many other places, humanity is also breaching the 1.5C greenhouse gas emissions limit, with no signs of real reductions in sight. Instead, the opposite is taking place — last year, global emissions reached an all-time high. Heat records have been shattered, and this year is "virtually certain" to be the hottest year ever recorded, with unprecedented extreme weather events pushing the planet further into uncharted territory. The destabilization of the biosphere and the natural ecosystems we depend on to survive is leading to untold human suffering and further

accelerating the mass extinction of flora and fauna.

Azerbaijan's entire economy is built on fossil fuels, with the state-owned oil company Socar's oil and gas exports accounting for close to 90% of the country's exports. Despite what it might claim, Azerbaijan has no ambition to take climate action. It is planning to expand fossil fuel production, which is completely incompatible with the 1.5C limit and the goals of the Paris agreement on climate change.

Many attendees of this year's COP are scared to criticize the Azerbaijan government. Human Rights Watch recently published a statement explaining how it couldn't be certain that attendees' rights to peacefully protest would be guaranteed. In addition, Azerbaijan land and sea borders will remain closed during COP29, making it only possible to travel in and out of the country by air, which causes pollution and which many Azerbaijan citizens can't afford. The reason given for closing borders at all COPs since the start of the Covid pandemic is to maintain "national security", but I've heard many Azerbaijanis describe the situation as being "kept in a prison."

The Azerbaijan regime is guilty of ethnic cleansing, humanitarian blockades and war crimes, as well as repressing its own population and cracking down on the country's civil society. The independent watchdog Freedom House ranks the country as the least democratic state in Europe, with the regime actively targeting journalists, independent media outlets, political and civic activists, and human rights defenders. Azerbaijan also accounts for about 40% of

Israel's annual oil imports, thus fueling the Israeli war machine and being complicit in the genocide in Palestine and Israel's war crimes in Lebanon. The Azerbaijan-Israel ties are mutually beneficial as the majority of weapons used by Azerbaijan during the second Nagorno-Karabakh war and likely those used in the September 2023 military operation into the Karabakh region were imported from Israel.

The "COP of peace" is one theme chosen for this year's climate conference by the host, which wants to encourage states to observe a "COP truce." It is gut-wrenching, to say the least, to talk of global peace after the terrible human rights violations committed by Azerbaijan's Aliyev regime against ethnic Armenians living in the Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh region. Furthermore, Azerbaijan is planning to greenwash its crimes against Armenians by building a "Green Energy Zone" on territories where the population has been ethnically cleansed.

How did this country get to host the climate summit? It was eastern Europe's turn. But Russia vetoed EU member states, so the options were either Armenia or Azerbaijan. Armenia lifted its veto against Azerbaijan and supported its bid in exchange for a release of prisoners, although a large number of Armenian political prisoners are still being held. Last year, the regime critic Gubad Ibadoghlu was imprisoned after criticizing Azerbaijan's fossil fuel industry. Other political prisoners include peace activist Bahruz Samadov, ethnic minority researcher Iqbal Abilov, political activists Akif Gurbanov and Ruslan Izzatli and journalists.

continued on next page

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenians Now Have a New Target: Jordan, for Buckling Under Azerbaijan's Pressure

As if Armenians did not have enough problems to deal with, they must now insist that Jordan reverse the dropping of its Artsakh-themed Oscar entry under pressure from Azerbaijan.

Jordan's Royal Film Commission had selected New York-based Jordanian American director Sareen Hairabedian's documentary "My Sweet Land," as its entry for the Oscars. The film is produced by Azza Hourani and coproduced by Julie Paratian and David Rane. The executive producers are Beth Levison, Carrie Lozano, Hallee Adelman, Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh. Robina Riccitiello is co-executive producer.

The film features 11-year-old Vrej who lived in Artsakh. After Azerbaijan attacked his village, Vrej and his family escaped and then returned to face devastation.

"My Sweet Land" had received the Amman International Film Festival's Jury Award in July for Best Feature Documentary and the FIPRESCI Award for Best Feature-Length Arab Documentary.

However, the Royal Film Commission just announced that "Jordan withdrew its submission of 'My Sweet Land' documentary film due to diplomatic pressures" from Azerbaijan, Deadline reported.

"The Azerbaijan government wrote to Jordan's Foreign Ministry requesting it reconsider the film's selection as its Oscar entry, which in turn put pressure on the Jordan's Royal Film Commission to withdraw the film," according to Deadline.

The Azeri media confirmed that Azerbaijan complained to Jordan about its Oscar entry. "We welcome the decision of Jordan to withdraw the film and stop its screening in Jordan," Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry spokesman Aykhan Hajizada said.

Director Sareen Hairabedian and producer Azza Hourani told Deadline: "This is very devastating news for our team that an emotional intimate story of a child's love for his home and family was banned and silenced. As documentary filmmakers, this censorship compels us more than ever to share 'My Sweet Land' protagonist Vrej's story, which reflects the experiences of countless children around the world today, who deserve to dream freely without the threat of war and conflict."

However, it appears that not all is lost. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences "told filmmakers they could submit 'My Sweet Land' for consideration as Best Documentary Feature, if they followed standard qualification procedures. The filmmaking team has scrambled to arrange a qualifying run in the U.S.," according to Deadline.

"My Sweet Land will have its North American premiere at DOC NYC on November 16th and 17th, and our qualifying theatrical release will take place at Laemmle Theatres [in Los Angeles] starting November 29," Hairabedian and Hourani told Deadline. "We remain committed to sharing our truthful story, undeterred by the obstacles we face."

It is sickening that a work of art would fall victim to political pressure. Re-

grettably, but not surprisingly, "the move to withdraw the film from the International Feature Film category comes amid growing diplomatic and economic ties between Jordan and Azerbaijan, with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov receiving Jordanian officials in Baku in 2024 to discuss further ongoing cooperation," Deadline reported.

"Our understanding was that Jordan withdrew the film in order to preserve diplomatic ties between Jordan and Azerbaijan after a complaint from the latter," the filmmakers told Deadline. "We also learned that after the premier of 'My Sweet Land' in Jordan at the Amman International Film Festival, Azerbaijan's embassy had also filed a complaint against screening the film publicly. So, 'My Sweet Land,' a film that was celebrated weeks prior at the festival, was suddenly banned in one of its home countries."

"Jordan's Royal Film Commission is the governing body of the Amman International Film Festival. At that event in July 2024, 'My Sweet Land' won three prizes: Jury Award for Best Arab Documentary, the Audience Award and the International Film Critics Award (FIPRESCI). The documentary premiered in June at Sheffield DocFest, the most prestigious nonfiction festival in the U.K., where it was nominated for the International First Feature Award," according to Deadline.

Sheffield DocFest programmers wrote of the film, "Vrej, the subject of Sareen Hairabedian's impressive feature debut — a striking coming-of-age tale — has grown up in Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan. Since the end of the Soviet era it has witnessed much conflict. The 11-year-old watches birds, plays with friends and dreams of being a dentist. But echoes of the three wars his family have lived through since 1992 are ever-present. His grandmother laments the cycle of ethnic violence: 'Living in Artsakh means that one day there will be a war and my grandson will participate in that war'. As his school lessons become increasingly militarized and Vrej struggles to hold on to his childhood dreams, his grandmother watches her prophecy unfold."

In an email to Deadline, Jordan's Royal Film Commission (RFC) highlighted the awards earned by "My Sweet Land" at the Amman International Film Festival and noted that the film "received development funding from the RFC's Jordan Film Fund in 2021."

Armenians worldwide, led by the Armenian Foreign Ministry, should complain to the Jordanian government. They should not let this Azeri pressure on Jordan go unchallenged. Losing Artsakh should not mean that Armenians would also lose the public relations battle where connections and planning replace drones and military might.

First of all, the Armenian community in Jordan should immediately use all of their contacts with the Jordanian government to demand that the Jordanian Foreign Ministry reverse its decision and not buckle under Azerbaijan's ugly pressure.

Secondly, the Armenian Foreign Ministry should send a diplomatic note to the Jordanian government objecting to allowing Azerbaijan to interference in Jordan's internal decisions.

Thirdly, Armenians worldwide should contact Jordanian Embassies and Consulates to express their utter displeasure at Jordan succumbing to Azeri threats and intimidation.

from previous page

Meanwhile, the EU continues to buy fossil fuels from Azerbaijan and plans to double its import of fossil gas from the country by 2027.

The climate crisis is just as much about protecting human rights as it is about protecting the climate and biodiversity. You cannot claim to care about climate justice if you ignore the sufferings of oppressed and colonized people today. We cannot pick and choose whose human rights to care for, and who to leave behind. Climate justice means justice, safety and freedom for everyone.

During COP29, the picture of Azerbaijan reported by the media will be a whitewashed and green-washed version that the regime is desperate to portray. But make no mistake — it is a repressive state accused of ethnic cleansing.

We need immediate sanctions targeted against the regime and a halt to the import of Azerbaijani fossil fuels. Diplomatic pressure must also be put on the regime to release its Armenian hostages and all political prisoners — and ensure the right to a safe return for Armenians.

(Greta Thunberg is a Swedish activist and international climate crisis campaigner. This commentary originally appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper on November 11.)

## Escaping Russia's Backyard: Armenia's Strategic Defense Shift

By Leonid Nersisyan and Sergei Melkonian

Today, Armenia is no longer considered a "backyard of Russia," as it has been for the last three decades. As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, Armenia's defense and security policies are now shifting. This strategic realignment presents a historic opportunity for Armenia to redefine its geopolitical role, moving away from Moscow's sphere of influence and toward Western allies.

In light of this shift, the United States and the European Union should provide Armenia with enhanced military support, thereby contributing to regional stability in the South Caucasus. By doing so, Western powers can prevent Russia from regaining control and further challenge Azerbaijan's unilateral military pressure. Such support would also facilitate Armenia's military reforms and ensure it becomes a self-sufficient actor in regional security.

### Past Purchases

Armenia's active arms procurement began in 2016, following its Four-Day War with Azerbaijan. This conflict, during which Baku demonstrated military superiority by introducing Israeli-made loitering munitions and surveillance drones, prompted Yerevan to sign a contract with its then-strategic ally, Moscow. As a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Armenia could purchase arms at domestic prices, and the military's alignment with Russian standards simplified equipment integration. Moscow, in a show of support, extended a \$200 million loan, enabling Armenia to acquire BM-30 Smerch and TOS-1A Solntsepek multiple-launch rocket systems, Igla-S man-portable air defense systems, the Avtobaza-M electronic intelligence system, and other equipment.

Armenia's strategic efforts to strengthen its defense capabilities are evident in its procurement of Iskander-E missile systems from Russia outside the aforementioned credit line. Before the 2020 war, Armenia also procured four Su-30SM fighters, though they lacked modern airborne munitions. Another key acquisition before the war was the Tor-M2KM air defense systems. The logic behind these procurements was to establish deterrence against large-scale escalation.

Between 2010 and 2020, in addition to arms from Russia, Armenia received 35 Osa air defense systems from Jordan and signed a \$40 million contract with India for four modern Swathi counter-artillery radars, delivered in 2021. Between 2011 and 2020, Russia accounted for 94 percent of Armenia's imports of major arms.

### Consequences of War

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 significantly altered the regional balance of power. Armenia suffered major losses that, according to the open-source Oryx blog, included 255 tanks, 71 infantry fighting vehicles, 250 towed artillery pieces, 29 self-propelled artillery units, 84 multiple-launch rocket systems, and 39 air defense systems (including one S-300 battalion and two Tor-M2KM units), as well as hundreds of other pieces of equipment. Despite serious evidence that these numbers were overstated, Armenia's armed forces clearly suffered a loss of capacity.

As a result of the war, the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which is considered a disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, lost 70 percent of the territory it had controlled since 1994, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed in the remaining area. Yerevan requested that Moscow establish

see RUSSIA, page 20



# Escaping Russia's Backyard: Armenia's Strategic Defense Shift

RUSSIA, from page 19

military outposts on the newly created Armenia-Azerbaijan border, leaving Yerevan vulnerable and no longer the security guarantor of Nagorno-Karabakh. Based on the Nov. 10, 2020 statement, the new status quo foresees Armenia providing communications through its territory for Azerbaijan. This is Baku's next strategic goal, supported by Turkey: to get the so-called "Zangezur corridor," a direct land connection to its exclave through Armenian territory, controlled by Russian FSB border troops.

Azerbaijan formalized a strategic alliance with Turkey, whose command-level involvement played a decisive role in the outcome of the 2020 war. In June 2021, Baku and Ankara signed the Shusha Declaration, a defense pact that includes provisions for mutual assistance in the event of an attack on either party. One of their goals is to open a land route through Armenian territory, the so-called Zangezur corridor. Azerbaijan, leveraging its military, economic, and political superiority, continued to pressure Armenia into making unilateral concessions, seizing Armenian territories during escalations in 2021, gaining strategic heights along the border during intense two-day fighting in September 2022, and later in 2024 conducting "delimitation and demarcation" of a portion of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in Tavush under military pressure and in Azerbaijan's favor.

The recent escalations exposed the ineffectiveness of Russia's security mechanisms within the Collective Security Treaty Organization. While the 2020 war fell outside the organization's responsibility, later attacks did not, as they directly targeted Armenia. Armenia gradually distanced itself from the Collective Security Treaty Organization, freezing its membership, and instead opted for an E.U. monitoring mission, which currently consists of 209 personnel with a mandate until February 2025.

## The Search for New Markets

The revision of the military-political agreements between Armenia and Russia stems not only from the diminishing deterrent effect of their alliance but also from the failure to deliver arms and military equipment under existing contracts. In August 2021, Armenia and Russia signed a new arms supply deal in Moscow, though its worth and the detail of its terms were undisclosed. In 2023, the head of the Armenian parliamentary commission on defense, Andranik Kocharyan, revealed that the contract was worth \$400 million. Discussions about Russian arms deliveries intensified after the autumn 2022 attack on Armenia. A year later, in November 2023, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that Armenia had paid Russia for weapons but never received them.

Various solutions were proposed, including using the funds already paid to write off part of Armenia's debt. However, these proposals did not address the core issue: Armenia remained under military pressure from Azerbaijan without receiving the arms it had paid for. The situation worsened with the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War, prompting Armenia to explore other arms markets. This turn of events highlights the urgent need for Armenia to secure alternative military supplies to withstand Azerbaijani pressure.

## India, France and US

Beginning in 2022, India became the largest exporter of military equipment to Armenia. According to our estimates, based on media leaks, the current package of contracts could exceed \$1.5 billion. The order includes such systems as the Pinaka multiple-launch rocket system for \$245 million, 72 155-millimeter MARG-155 self-propelled guns, 90 155-millimeter advanced towed artillery gun systems for \$155 million, Akash surface-to-air missiles for \$720 million, Zen anti-drone systems for \$41 million, license-produced Konkurs-M anti-tank missiles, and various other munitions and equipment.

In April 2024, it was reported that India would send its first military attaché to Armenia. This decision is linked to the growing military-technical cooperation between the two countries and is intended to address potential technical issues more efficiently. In addition, in 2024 Armenian and Indian delegations from their defense ministries signed a defense cooperation agreement, which is focused on training activities and institutional cooperation.

It is noteworthy that Armenia has focused on mass procurement of 155-millimeter artillery, signaling a shift from Soviet 152-millimeter and 122-millimeter caliber to NATO standards. This strategic change will make future procurement of artillery guns and munitions from Russia nearly impossible, especially given that few Soviet guns remain in Armenia's inventory after the heavy losses in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

This growing relationship between Yerevan and New Delhi represents a strategic pivot that could reshape the balance of power in the region, further reducing Armenia's dependence on Moscow and solidifying its alignment with democratic powers. Given the increasing military engagement between the two countries, it is in the interest of the United States and the European Union to actively support these developments to counterbalance Russian and Azerbaijani influence.

While Armenia's main arms contracts are with India, French arms deliveries are getting more coverage. These include 50 Bastion armored vehicles manufactured by Arquus, 24 of which have arrived in Armenia. After the 2020 war, Armenia also acquired three GM-200 radar stations from Thales and a memorandum of understanding for future deliveries of the short-range Mistral air defense system. In addition, Armenia procured 36 155-millimeter Caesar self-propelled guns, further demonstrating the country's intention of strengthening its artillery capacities and transitioning to NATO standards.

France's increased involvement, particularly in training Armenian forces and reforming its military institutions, demonstrates Armenia's strategic importance to European security. By continuing to deepen this relationship, the European Union can contribute to regional stability and bolster Armenia's independence from Moscow.

In parallel with existing contacts, Armenia is actively seeking new security partners. For example, in March 2024, Armenia and Italy signed an annual military cooperation program consisting of several agreements. Dialogue in the military domain with Greece and Cyprus is also progressing, and there is interest in developing ties with Bulgaria and Belgium. Separately, in July 2024, the European Union for the first time approved military non-lethal aid under the framework of the European Peace Facility worth €10 million. The United States has also shown increasing support to Armenia, conducting two Eagle Partner peacekeeping drills on Armenian soil in 2023 and 2024 and agreeing to send an advisor to the Armenian Ministry of Defense to support ongoing reforms. However, cooperation with the United States remains primarily focused on peacekeeping and civilian operations, with potential supplies of non-lethal equipment.

## Conclusion

The United States and European Union should expand their military assistance programs to capitalize on Armenia's strategic alignment shift. By providing more advanced training, military hardware, and access to dual-use technologies, Western powers can play a critical role in Armenia's defense and contribute to lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

The volume of arms and military equipment procured by Armenia after 2020 marks a dramatic shift in its secu-

rity cooperation with Moscow. Since 2022, Armenia has nearly doubled its defense spending. In 2022, the budget was approximately \$700–800 million. By 2024, it had reached \$1.4–1.5 billion. Previously, more than 90 percent of the Armenian armed forces' procurement came from the Russian military-industrial complex. Today, its suppliers are mainly India and France, while Russian supplies from older contracts now account for barely 5–10 percent.

Ultimately, the United States and the European Union should recognize that a more independent and militarily capable Armenia is a cornerstone of regional security in the South Caucasus. The West can counterbalance Russian influence and mitigate Azerbaijani threats by increasing military support and granting Armenia access to critical technologies. This will not only support Armenia's sovereignty but also contribute to a stable and prosperous region.

In the current geopolitical landscape, Russia and Azerbaijan strongly oppose Armenia's defense choices. Azerbaijan has actively opposed France and India, including supporting separatist movements in French Overseas Territories and strengthening ties with Pakistan. Baku has also threatened Armenia, accusing it of militarization. It is pushing for the creation of the so-called Zangezur corridor. As Article 9 of the November 2020 statement is the last option for Russia to have a presence in communication, Yerevan is facing double pressure from Moscow and Baku.

Increased Western involvement in Armenia's military reforms and procurement is essential to stabilizing the South Caucasus region and preventing Moscow from regaining control. Armenia's active rearmament could eventually lead to at least a partial balance of power with Baku, limiting Azerbaijan's ability to apply unilateral military pressure. This shift lays the groundwork for long-term peace.

After restoring its military capacity, Armenia can independently control the communications running through its territory. The United States and its Western allies should support Yerevan more, particularly in granting access to dual-use and military technology and providing training opportunities beyond peacekeeping operations.

(Leonid Nersisyan is a defense analyst and a senior research fellow at the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia. He co-authored the books *The Storm in the Caucasus* and *The Air War in Ukraine: The First Year of Conflict*. Dr. Sergei Melkonian is a research fellow at the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia, focusing on Russia and Iran. He is the author of dozens of academic and analytical articles.)

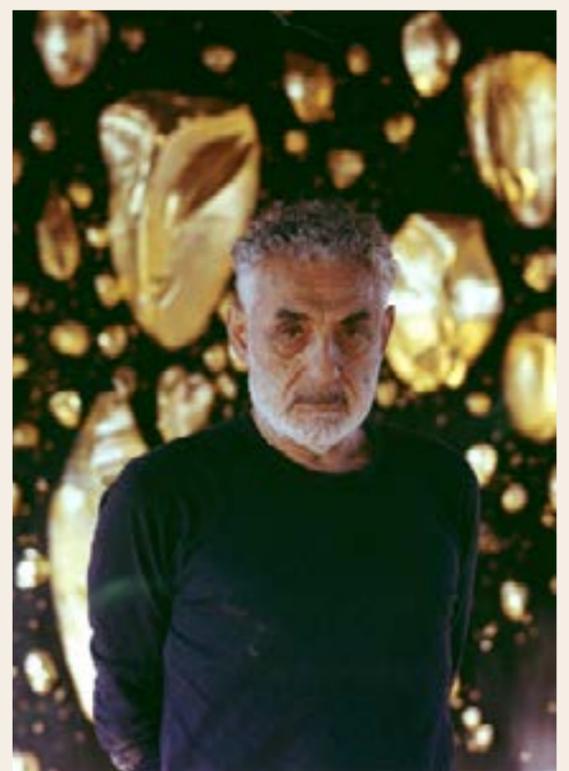
(Warontherocks.com on November 5.)

## Zadik Zadikian's 'Path to Nine' Appears at the Brooklyn Museum's 200th Anniversary 'Solid Gold' Exhibition

BROOKLYN, N.Y. — The Brooklyn Museum will unveil its highly anticipated "Solid Gold" exhibition, celebrating its 200th anniversary, featuring the groundbreaking installation "Path to Nine" by artist Zadik Zadikian. This immersive piece, debuting on November 16, explores the themes of structure, repetition, and transformation through the medium of gold. "Path to Nine" is composed of 18 towering stacks of gold-leaf gilded ingots arranged in a checkered pattern. These 999 plaster ingots, accented with stainless steel rods, symbolize the artist's meditative investigation into the mathematical and mystical properties of numbers, especially the number nine. The exhibition draws attention to Zadikian's lifelong fascination with gold, not just as a precious metal but as a symbol of endurance, purity, and cosmic witnessing.

Zadik Zadikian, known for his bold use of materials, began working with gold in the 1970s after a studio fire reset the trajectory of his artistic journey. With "Path to Nine," he continues this exploration, fusing material beauty with deep philosophical inquiry. The exhibition runs through July 6, 2025, and is set to be a highlight of the museum's anniversary celebrations.

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Zadik Zadikian