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## Former Karabakh Official Sentenced on Charges of Spying

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — An Armenian court on Friday, November 22, convicted a former Nagorno-Karabakh official, who did not flee the region right after his recapture by Azerbaijan, of spying for Baku and sentenced him to 18 years in prison.

The man, Sargis Galstyan, and his wife were among a few dozen Karabakh Armenians who did not flee to Armenia following Azerbaijan's September 2023 military offensive that triggered the mass exodus of Karabakh's population. The couple arrived in Armenia through the Lachin corridor in March.

Galstyan was arrested and charged with espionage the next day. Armenian law-enforcement authorities gave very few details of the accusation brought against him, saying only that he admitted working for Azerbaijani security services during and after the 2020 war in Karabakh.

Galstyan's lawyer Aleksandr Kochubayev said in June that he has renounced the espionage confession because it was made under duress. Kochubayev claimed that masked interrogators threatened to kill his client and arrest his wife and children if he refused to incriminate himself.

see SPY, page 3

## German Foreign Minister Visits Armenia, Azerbaijan

*Denounces Azerbaijan's  
Human Rights Record*

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on November 22 described the human rights situation in Azerbaijan as alarming.

During a press conference on the sidelines of the COP29 in Baku, asked on the issue of arrested environmental activists and oppositionists in Azerbaijan, Baerbock said Germany calls for the release of the government critics and that she will raise that issue during a meeting with her Azerbaijani counterpart, Turan news agency reported.

"Regardless of this climate conference, the human rights situation has always been part of the political discussions between Germany and the government of Azerbaijan. The human rights situation in Azerbaijan is alarming. The arrests of media representatives, activists and opposition representatives are very concerning. As the German foreign minister, I'd like to say that the ban on entry of 76 members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council see BAERBOCK, page 6

## PM Pashinyan Under Fire for Another 'Pro-Turkish' Statement

By Shoghik Galstyan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has drawn strong condemnation from historians, opposition leaders and other critics after saying that Armenians should stop describing as "Western Armenia" parts of modern-day eastern Turkey populated by their ancestors until the 1915 genocide.

Those areas had for centuries accounted for most of the territory of ancient Armenian kingdoms before being incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Their indigenous population was forcibly deported and/or massacred by the Ottoman Turks during the First World War.

In an interview with Armenian Public Television aired late on November 22, Pashinyan again criticized his country's 1990 declaration of independence which calls for international recognition of the genocide of Armenians "in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia." He drew parallels between that reference and the Azerbaijani government's regular description of much of Armenia as "Western Azerbaijan."

"We get so upset by ... the fact that some people in some places use the term 'Western Azerbaijan,'" said Pashinyan. "But when we say 'Western Armenia,' don't we think that it irritates some people? Just like they irritate us by saying 'Western Azerbaijan' we irritate others by saying 'Western Armenia.'"



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is interviewed by Armenian Public Television, Yerevan, November 22, 2024

The remarks sparked an uproar from Pashinyan's political opponents who portrayed it as further proof that he has been kowtowing to Ankara and Baku and trampling on Armenian national interests and dignity in the process.

"Comparing Western Armenia with Western Azerbaijan is scholarly bankruptcy, civilizational color blindness, national denial, political suicide," Lilit Galstyan, a parliament deputy from the main opposition Hayastan alliance, wrote in a weekend Facebook post.

Ashot Melkonyan, the director of the Institute of History of Armenia's National Academy of Sciences, expressed outrage

at Pashinyan's statement on Monday, accusing the premier of legitimizing Azerbaijan's "historical falsifications."

"In Azerbaijan, the phrase 'Western Azerbaijan' is used at the state level, it comes from the lips of their top leader [Ilham Aliyev,] and naturally his entourage also defends that idea, laying claim to Armenian territory," Melkonyan told RFE / RL's Armenian Service.

Aliyev stated in July that as part of a resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict Yerevan must ensure the safe return of ethnic Azerbaijanis who had fled "Western Azerbaijan" in the late 1980s.

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## Boyamian Honored for 35 Years of Dedication At St. Stephen's School Anniversary Celebration

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Hourly Boyamian's daughter, Taline Boyamian Kebabdjian, holds up her portrait, which will hang at the school (Candid Memories Studio photo)

## 'Monsieur Aznavour' Pays Tribute to the Most Armenian of French Singers

By Mélanie Tuysuzian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PARIS — October 2024 marked the centenary of Charles Aznavour, iconic French-Armenian singer-songwriter who passed away at 94 in 2018. To honor his legacy, a new biopic, "Monsieur Aznavour," was released in theaters in October, celebrating the extraordinary life of one of France's most beloved cultural figures.

The Pathé Opéra cinema was buzzing with excitement on October 23, the film's release date. Tickets sold out quickly, and just 20 minutes before the screening, only six seats remained — on the see AZNAVOUR, page 16

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### Polish President Visits Armenia



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CALIFORNIA

### 125th Anniversary of Diocese Celebrated



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## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Russia Hopes to Achieve Record Trade Turnover

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Russia expects to achieve a record trade turnover with Armenia in the amount of \$14-16 billion by the end of the year, Russian Ambassador Sergey Kopyrkin said in an interview with *Izvestia* on November 25.

“If we talk about specific figures, then already in the first half of 2024, trade turnover between Russia and Armenia exceeded the \$8.3 billion mark, surpassing the figures for the entire last year, \$7.4 billion. We expect to maintain the current momentum and reach a record \$14-16 billion,” he noted.

The Ambassador emphasized that work is currently underway to launch joint economic projects in Armenia.

### HIV Infections Rising in Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Health officials have reported an increase in HIV infection rates in Armenia in recent years. A total of 462 new HIV cases were confirmed in the country as of October 31 2024, Anna Mergelyan, head of the Monitoring and Evaluation Department at the National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCID), told a news conference on Monday, November 25.

The highest prevalence was recorded in Shirak Province.

Transmission of HIV through heterosexual contact accounted for 81 percent, while homosexual transmission increased to 12 percent, and transmission through injection of drugs accounted for 6 percent, Mergelyan said.

### Ministry Denies Water Cooperation with Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia’s Ministry of Environment on November 26 denied any cooperation with Azerbaijan on transboundary water management claimed by a US diplomat.

In a social media post earlier in November, US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Mark Libby said a group of hydrologists and engineers from Azerbaijan and Armenia “are working together — with our active support — on an integrated water management scheme for trans-boundary rivers.”

The Ministry of Environment said, “We would like to tell you that no work on transboundary cooperation is being carried out as part of the USAID-funded Armenia Improved Water Management Program. Within the framework of the program, a management plan for the Southern Basin District for 2025-2030 and a tool for estimating river loads are being worked out.

“Two hydrological observation points on Akhuryan River are in the process of refurbishment, and the Araks-Surmalu hydrological observation point is also planned to be modernized,” the ministry added.

It remains unclear why the U.S. ambassador would make such a statement.

# Azerbaijan Transfers Administration of Artsakh’s Dadivank Monastery to Udi Community

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The medieval Armenian monastery of Dadivank located in the Karvachar district of Azerbaijani-occupied Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), has been handed over to the administration of the Udi community, Artsakh Monument Watch reported on November 25.

According to Azerbaijani media reports, “During its occupation from 1993 to 2020, Armenians attempted to falsify the history of the temple, falsely claiming it to be theirs. But after the liberation, it was returned to the original owners.”

The Artsakh Monument Watch had documented how after the signing of a trilateral agreement on November 9, 2020, and the end of hostilities in Artsakh, Azerbaijan launched an anti-Armenia campaign in the case of the occupied territories. This kind of deliberate propaganda, first of all, endangers many monuments of the Armenian Christian spiritual culture located in the occupied territories.

The Azerbaijani mechanism of propaganda, continuing the policy of appropriation of the Armenian cultural heritage of Artsakh, formed back in the Soviet years, presents it as cultural monuments of the Albanians and links them with Caucasian Albania. After the end of the war in 2020, the Azerbaijani campaign, along with the propaganda of the appropriation of the Armenian cultural heritage, began to actively involve the Udi Christians living in Azerbaijan, the followers of the Armenian Gregorian Church. The main reason was that the Udis are the only Christians among the peoples of Caucasian Albania.

Dadivank appears in bibliographic sources for the first time in the 9th century,



Dadivank Monastery

ry, “...in Khoradzor, known as Dado monastery” (Kaghankatvatsi 1983, 340). It is also known as Dadi, Dadoi, Dadui, Dadei, Tadei, Khuta, and Arakelots in later lithographic and bibliographic sources (Ayvazyan 2015, 6). The monastery’s foundation is traditionally linked to the martyrdom of Dadi, a disciple of the apostle Thaddeus. According to legend, he was martyred for spreading Christianity, and a monastery was built on his grave.

There is no available information regarding the monastery’s history, construction process, or activities before the 12th century, but it was already a major spiritual and cultural center in the second half of the 12th century. It is mentioned indirectly in the historian’s report, which also describes the years 1145-1146, the actions of the Chol commander who came from Persia to punish the Shahap (city head) of Gandzak’s rebellion against

the Seljuk state: “(Chol) burned down the apostolic holy place known as Dadivank” (Kaghankatvatsi 1983, 353). It is crucial to note that the lords of Khachen also fought against the weakened Seljuk state, and as a consequence, Dadivank, along with many other monasteries and fortresses, was repeatedly damaged and destroyed. That being said, thanks to that struggle, the lords of Khachen gained some political independence in the second half of the 12th century. Dadivank was under the reign of Haterk lords, who were considered supreme rulers and served as their spiritual center at the time. Beginning in the second half of the 12th century, as evidenced by inscriptions carved on the monastery’s walls, the religious and secular buildings in the monastery were renovated and new ones were constructed, resulting in the current appearance of the monastery complex.

## Fund for Armenian Relief Hosts Third International Nutrition Conference to Address Armenia’s Child Health and Nutrition

YEREVAN — The third international conference “Today’s Nutrition Matters Tomorrow,” hosted by the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) on November 14-15 at the American University of Armenia (AUA), brought urgent attention to the state of nutrition in Armenia. International and local experts and participants discussed how digital food marketing, the prevalence of fast food advertising, inconsistent policy enforcement, limited public health campaigns, and gaps in legal oversight contribute to poor dietary habits and hinder effective nutrition programs.

To address issues like malnutrition, childhood obesity, and the rise of diet-related diseases, the conference highlighted the pressing need for preventive measures targeting these factors directly.

“If we don’t act now, we’ll face a future with more chronic diseases, including diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disorders, which come with significant health and socio-economic costs,” cautioned Diana Andreasyan from Armenia’s National Institute of Health, who presented findings on Armenia’s nutrition control efforts.

Co-organized with the Columbia Institute-Human Nutrition and the Texas Agricultural, Food and Nutrition Science Center, the conference emphasized the importance of focusing on child and adolescent nutrition. Evidence-based approaches, supported by research data, are critical to addressing the escalating rates of obesity and related health complications among youth.

Deputy Minister of Health Lena



Participants engage at Fund for Armenian Relief’s third international conference “Today’s Nutrition Matters Tomorrow”

Nanushyan underscored the challenge of implementing public health initiatives in Armenia: “Public health work is often overlooked and even criticized. Yet, without these interventions, we cannot safeguard the health of our population. Our programs on healthy nutrition must begin with breastfeeding at birth, but we must also prioritize adolescent health, as today’s adolescents will be tomorrow’s parents. Behavioral changes need to start with them.”

For two days, Armenian and international experts shared insights on nutrition programs and research, stressing the value of global perspectives. “Conferences like this, with international collaboration, bring new ideas and enrich our research efforts,” said Hambardzum Simonyan, FAR’s Health Programs Director. “Comparing data globally gives us a clearer understanding of trends and strengthens our vision for future actions.”

—Elizabeth Yekhtikyan

# Former Key Officials Reported Under Corruption Investigation

By Naria Bughadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prosecutors on November 26 neither confirmed nor denied a report that they are looking into the personal wealth of two former officials believed to have exerted strong influence on Armenian courts for the last two years.

Justice Minister Grigor Minasyan and Karen Andreyan, the chairman of Armenia's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), were forced to resign on October 1 and November 18, respectively, despite showing strong loyalty to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan throughout their tenure. The two men are close friends and business partners, having reportedly co-founded a law firm years before Pashinyan swept to power in 2018.

In their last acts in office, they engineered the dismissals of dozens of judges who fell afoul of the Armenian authorities. Critics condemned the sackings as a further blow to judicial independence. Minasyan and Andreyan claimed, however, they on the contrary strengthened the judiciary as part of "reforms" praised

by Western officials.

Pashinyan publicly lamented a continuing lack of "justice" in the country on November 15, two days before telling An-



Former Minister of Justice Grigor Minasyan (left) and former Supreme Judicial Council Chairman Karen Andreyan

dreasyan, the heads of two law-enforcement agencies and three senior govern-

ment officials to resign. They all tendered their resignations the following day.

Citing an unnamed "very reliable" resource, the Yerevan newspaper *168 Zham*



block prosecutors' efforts to confiscate his and Minasyan's assets deemed to have been acquired illegally.

Armenian courts can allow such confiscations in accordance with a controversial law enacted in 2021. The paper highly critical of Pashinyan said a relevant division of the Office of the Prosecutor-General petitioned one of the courts for that purpose recently after scrutinizing the properties of the two effectively sacked officials and their families. The lawsuits were then "miraculously" withdrawn, it said.

The office denied the *168 Zham* report but it did not say whether the prosecutors had indeed opened an asset forfeiture case against Andreyan or Minasyan.

Andreyan could not be reached for comment on Tuesday. The former head of the state body tasked with protecting Armenian judges against outside influence defended his track record when he announced his resignation on November 18. He claimed to have "brought the judicial system out of a shameful crisis."

Arshak Vartanyan, a former member of the SJC, claimed the opposite. He insisted that most of the judges appointed by the SJC were widely respected for their independence and professionalism. By contrast, Vartanyan said, Andreyan proved that he himself is not independent by swiftly agreeing to step down.

Pashinyan claimed late last week that he only "asked," rather than pressured, Andreyan to quit. Some legal experts believe, however, that even such requests constitute illegal interference in the work of the judiciary.

## Campaign against Gender-Based Violence Kicks off in Yerevan

YEREVAN (Jam News) — On November 25, Yerevan marked the start of a 16-day campaign aimed at combating gender-based violence, with various events planned throughout Armenia.

The opening event featured a discussion titled "Achievements, Needs, and Effective Partnerships to Combat Gender-Based Violence in Armenia." Labor and Social Affairs Minister Narek Mkrtchyan participated, highlighting that gender-based violence not only infringes on fundamental human rights but also destabilizes families and society, leaving a damaging legacy for future generations.

The campaign, initiated in 1991 by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University in the United States, is known as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

Vassilis Maragos, Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, emphasized the global scale of the issue, noting that one in three people worldwide experiences violence. He stressed that violence is not a private

matter but a societal challenge:

"A society cannot prosper or progress when more than half its population faces violence, discrimination, or inequality."

In Armenia, around 10 women are killed each year by their husbands, former spouses, or partners. Alarming, only 12 percent of women who experience physical or sexual violence seek help, underscoring the persistent culture of silence surrounding the issue.

### Challenging Stereotypes

An extended session of the thematic group on gender issues was held as part of the Promoting Human Rights Protection and Strengthening National Institutions program. The initiative is led by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and UNICEF, with co-financing from the European Union.

Mkrtchyan emphasized that combating gender-based violence requires a multifaceted approach, addressing not only legal and social dimensions but also cultural

norms. He pointed out that the issue touches on societal mindsets and collective stereotypes, making it impossible to tackle in isolation.

The minister underscored the vital role of various organizations and individuals involved in violence prevention, highlighting the importance of raising public awareness:

"Ongoing education will enable citizens to recognize the grave consequences of violence, ensuring that society neither accepts nor tolerates them."

Vassilis Maragos, Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, agreed with this view:

"A sustained and united effort is essential to create an environment where domestic violence is entirely rejected, and gender inequality becomes a thing of the past. Achieving this requires both collaborative action and a strong legal framework."

Since 2020, the government has been providing assistance to victims of domestic violence, including financial support, said Mkrtchyan. He noted that there are plans to invest additional resources and enhance the quality of services offered:

"In 2022, 1,516 people accessed these services. In 2023, the figure rose to around 1,800, and so far this year, 1,600 individuals have sought help."

The minister highlighted that these figures point to a change in societal attitudes toward the issue. Gradually, addressing domestic violence is becoming a norm, with more people coming forward to report cases. He also believes this reflects increased public trust in both the government and NGOs.

### Rising Violence Cases Spark Concern

A study by Armenia's Statistical Committee revealed that nearly one-third of surveyed women had experienced psychological violence, with an equal number reporting economic violence:

"One in seven women reported physical violence, while one in fifteen disclosed experiences of sexual violence."

In 2023, police registered 1,338 cases of domestic violence, issuing emergency intervention orders in 619 instances.

The Women's Support Centre hotline received 3,851 calls over the past year. The center provided assistance to 1,085 women and children affected by domestic violence, offering safe shelter to 265 women

## Pashinyan Under Fire for Another 'Pro-Turkish' Statement

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Western Azerbaijan is also the name of a province in Iran bordering Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave and Turkey. France's ambassador to Armenia, Olivier Decottignies, emphasized this fact in a weekend post on X (formerly Twitter).

"The one and only," Decottignies wrote over a map of the Iranian province.

The French envoy's comment was interpreted by Armenian opposition figures and media commentators as a veiled rebuke to Pashinyan.

"France is strongly responding to Pashinyan's nonsense," said Eduard Sharmazanov, the spokesman for the opposition Republican Party of Armenia. "It is doing so through its ambassador."

The Armenian opposition has also accused Pashinyan of being willing to give ground on the Armenian genocide issue.

Pashinyan's statement on the 109<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide commemorated in April was markedly different from his previous messages issued on the occasion. The premier no longer called for wider international recognition of the genocide and said instead that Armenians should "overcome the trauma" generated by the slaughter of some 1.5 million Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. He also put the emphasis on the Armenian phrase "Meds Yeghern" (Great Crime), rather than the word "genocide."

Up until recently, Armenia welcomed and encouraged growing international recognition of the genocide resented by Ankara. Pashinyan's foreign minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, declared on October 31 that that is not a top foreign policy priority for Yerevan anymore.

## Former Karabakh Official Sentenced for Spying for Azerbaijan

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Armenia's Investigative Committee flatly denied the claim. According to the lawyer, the law-enforcement agency did not come up with any other evidence of the crime attributed to Galstyan.

Galstyan's trial took place behind closed doors. Kochubayev said that he will appeal against the verdict.

Galstyan is a veteran of the 1991-1994 war with Azerbaijan who held various



Sargis Galstyan speaks during an event in Karabakh (File photo)

Karabakh leadership positions in the following decades. His decision to stay in Stepanakert fueled speculation that he is collaborating with Azerbaijani authorities.

Galstyan did not publicly explain the decision. It is also not clear why he ultimately decided to leave Karabakh.

Galstyan and his wife were escorted to the Armenian border by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). An ICRC spokeswoman in Yerevan said in April that it has also helped more than 50 other Karabakh Armenians to "voluntarily move to Armenia" since October 2023.

## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## Luxembourg Parliament Demands Azerbaijan Release POWs

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg adopted a resolution condemning the Azerbaijani government's sanctions against the freedom of speech of lawmakers and representatives of the civil society on November 21.

The resolution demands Azerbaijan to urgently and unconditionally release all unlawfully imprisoned persons.

The resolution condemned the sanctions imposed by the Azerbaijani authorities against the freedom of speech of deputies and representatives of civil society, as well as the arbitrary arrests targeting civil society, journalists and other critics.

## Greece Could Reportedly Transfer Russian Weapons to Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Hellenic National Defense General Staff will be transferring Russian weapons systems to Armenia, according to a report from Enicos.gr. in a story on November 26.

The Russian weapons were reportedly initially set to be sent to Ukraine but the transfer never took place, allegedly due to uproar raised by the opposition.

Greek sources report that the decision to send the armaments to Armenia was reached in cooperation with France, which will also contribute weapons to the country's defense.

The weapons that are reportedly up for transfer include S-300, TOR M-1 and OSA-AK surface-to-air missile systems.

Greece is expected to replace the Russian systems with Israeli ones, sources add.

## Canadian Journalist Barred from Entering Turkey after Criticizing Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (News.am) — Canadian journalist Neil Hauer on November 25 wrote in various social media platforms that he had been blocked from entering Turkey after criticizing the actions of Azerbaijan during the Karabakh war.

"I flew to Istanbul airport from Yerevan with a tourist purpose. At passport control I was taken aside, informing me: 'You are blacklisted.' I was detained for 16 hours and deported back," he wrote.

This took place after his post about the ethnic cleansing committed by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh.

He had written: "COP29 is dedicated to achieving harmony and international cooperation. It is hard to imagine how this could have taken place in this year's host country, Azerbaijan, which committed ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh last year."

# Polish President Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — Prime Minister Pashinyan briefed Polish President Andrzej Duda on the latest developments in the discussions on the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty and the principled positions of the Armenian side. The Prime Minister emphasized Armenia's commitment to peace.

to promote trade and economic ties.

Duda expressed his country's support for expansion of relations with the EU and implementation of democratic reforms in Armenia, and welcomed the launch of a dialogue with Armenia on visa liberalization.

During a press conference, he Poland is ready to support the peaceful resolu-

both for Armenia and the European region.

Duda added he has discussed the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict resolution with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

"I've spoken about that topic with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev within the framework of COP29. And I'd like to remind that we want the Armenians to live in peace on their land within clear and stable borders. Peace is important, certainly also for the European region, and we are ready to help if needed," Duda said.

On November 26, National Assembly President Alen Simonyan received Duda. Simonyan thanked the President of Poland for his visit to Armenia and noted that he is glad to host the latter in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia. The President of Poland in his turn thanked Alen Simonyan for warm reception and underscored that he is impressed by his visit to Armenia and the reached agreements. "I assure you that the Armenian-Polish cooperation will become increasingly closer, bringing Armenia even closer to the European Union," the President of Poland said.

The two also touched upon the issues on the inter-parliamentary cooperation, the economic topics of bilateral interest, the regional developments, the problem of Armenian captives being held in Azerbaijan and the Armenia-EU relations.

On November 26, Duda also visited the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial in Yerevan to pay tribute to the memory of the Armenian Genocide victims.

On November 27, a delegation led by Duda visited Yeraskh to participate in a joint patrol with the EU monitoring mission.



Polish President Andrzej Duda, left, with Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan

Pashinyan said he believes there is a great untapped potential for the development of relations.

The two attached importance to the continuous development and expansion of cooperation between Armenia and Poland in the political, economic, tourism, cultural and humanitarian spheres. The parties emphasized the need to take consistent steps

of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, President Duda said at a joint press conference with Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan in Yerevan.

Duda touched upon the current unstable situation in the region, stating that the Russian aggression against Ukraine is impacting Caucasus as well. He said that the peaceful resolution of conflicts is a priority

## Armenian Assembly Delegation Pays Tribute to French Resistance Hero Missak Manouchian in Paris Gathering

PARIS — As Azerbaijan hosted COP29, with its dictator president railing against France for its support of Armenia, an Armenian Assembly of America delegation with Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian, President Carolyn Mugar, Life Trustee Noubar Afeyan and Executive Director Bryan Ardouny traveled to Paris and thanked France for its support and discussed the importance of continued engagement for the betterment of the Armenian people, and Armenia's sovereignty and security with numerous officials. Following Aliyev's inflammatory remarks against France and Europe, the country pulled its high-ranking delegation from attending COP29.

During the visit, and along with members and supporters of the Foundation For Armenian Science And Technology (FAST), the delegation also paid its respects to the legacy of Missak and Melanie Manouchian, Armenian resistance fighters during World War II in France, who were inducted into Paris's Panthéon mausoleum earlier this year.

"The Assembly was humbled to have paid its respects to the Manouchian family. Missak's legacy within the French Resistance is a testament to the strong and enduring bonds between the Armenian and French people," said Assembly Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian. "We greatly appreciate the continued support of the French as Armenia faces existential threats from Azerbaijan," Barsamian continued.

While in France, Assembly leaders also attended a gala for FAST, an ecosystem of innovation to lead scientists, technologists, and innovators in Armenia and beyond to success on the global stage.

"We applaud FAST for its important work and were honored to be part of a special evening in support of its mission," Barsamian added.



Assembly delegation at the Pantheon to pay respects to Missak and Meline Manouchian



Assembly delegation at the FAST gala in Paris, alongside Minister of Labour Astrid Panosyan-Bouvet and Member of the European Parliament François-Xavier Bellamy

# Sacred Grounds, Shared Vision: A Landmark Conference On the Preservation of Holy Sites in Artsakh

ROME — On November 18 and 19, the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) hosted a conference titled “Sacred Grounds, Shared Vision: Preserving Holy Sites for a Joint Christian Ministry of the Religious and Cultural Sites in Artsakh.”

Organized by the Representation of the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Holy See and the Institute of Ecumenical Studies at Angelicum, the event received patronage from the Catholicosate of All Armenians and the Dicastries for Promoting Christian Unity and the Culture and Education. It was financially supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal.

The conference commenced with welcoming remarks from Father Hyacinthe Destivelle, director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies, and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the representative of the Armenian Church to the Holy See. Their addresses set the tone for an impactful dialogue on the cultural heritage of Artsakh and its significance in the broader Christian narrative and universal cultural rights.

Messages of support underscored the importance of the conference, with notable contributions from Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, Cardinals Kurt Koch, Claudio Gugerotti and Jose Tolentino de Mendonça. These messages of unity and commitment to preserving religious sites resonated throughout the proceedings.

The first section of the conference focused on the “Introduction of Cultural Heritage, Religious Sites, and Human Rights.” Experts, including Prof. Mark Vlasic from Georgetown University, Prof. Pierre D’Argent of Louvain University, and Armine Aleksanyan, a member of the Diocesan Council of Artsakh, made significant presentations. They addressed the intersection of cultural heritage and human rights, highlighting the urgent need to protect religious sites in conflict zones as a fundamental human right.

As discussions unfolded, participants emphasized that the preservation of these sacred places is not only vital to Armenian heritage but also crucial for the shared vision of a peaceful and unified Christian and more generally human community.

The second section of the conference provided an insightful examination of the intricate relationships between conflict, cultural heritage, and media representation, emphasizing how media narratives shape perceptions of cultural destruction and resilience. Prof. Vasco La Salvia from the University of Chieti opened the discussions with a compelling presentation on the destruction of cultural heritage as a byproduct of conflict. He highlighted how targeted attacks on cultural sites often serve as a means of erasure, reflecting deeper discriminatory practices that aim to diminish the identity of affected communities. This destruction not only leads to the loss of artifacts but also creates a rift in the collective memory and history of societies.

Complementing this presentation, Prof. Arsen Saparov from the Rabdan Academy addressed the role of the media in perpetuating silences and biases in reporting on cultural heritage destruction. He explored the notion of presumed neutrality in media and experts’ coverage, challenging the idea that media or experts can remain impartial in the face of ongoing conflicts. Instead, he argued that media narratives and expert opinions often reinforce existing power structures while silencing marginalized voices, thereby contributing to further dis-



The speakers at the event

crimination and societal fragmentation.

In the third session, Archbishop Michael Moussa Najeeb emphasized the ecumenical dimension of preserving cultural heritage, asserting that efforts to protect cultural sites must transcend religious divisions. He stressed the importance of collective stewardship in safeguarding heritage as a shared human responsibility. Following him, Prof. Peter Petkoff from Oxford University addressed the politically charged factors that lead to the weaponizing of religious and cultural heritage, revealing how geopolitical agendas can manipulate cultural symbols for consolidation of power.

Finally, Dr. Tasoula Hadjitofi presented a reflective strategy for Artsakh, drawing on 50 years of lessons learned from the conflict in Cyprus and her continuous activism in this domain. Her insights underscored the need for proactive cultural preservation strategies that engage local communities, promoting resilience in the face of adversity.

Overall, the sessions highlighted the complex interplay between conflict, cultural heritage, and media representation, advocating for a deeper understanding and commitment to preserving cultural identities amidst vulnerability.

The fourth session of the conference on Endangered Armenian Monuments, brought together a distinguished group of scholars to discuss the unique value as expressions of human creativity and the critical state of Armenia’s cultural heritage. Prof. Heghnar Watenpaugh from the University of California, Davis, initiated the discussions by addressing “The Fate of the Armenian Cultural Heritage of Nakhichevan: A Grim Potent for Artsakh?” Her presentation highlighted the dire implications of cultural erasure in Nakhichevan, setting a worrying precedent for the preservation of Armenian monuments in Artsakh. Following Prof. Watenpaugh, Prof. Jasmine Dum-Tragut from the University of Salzburg presented on the topic of “Cultural

Heritage in Border Zones,” drawing upon examples from the Tavush region. Her insights emphasized the precarious situation faced by cultural sites in volatile geopo-



Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

litical landscapes, suggesting that border zones often become battlegrounds for identity and cultural memory. Prof. Alain Navarra de Borgia of the Hystart NGO further contributed to the discussion with his presentation on “Religious Sites and Shared Cultural Memory in Artsakh.” He underscored the importance of religious monuments as repositories of cultural identity, particularly in a region marked by conflict and changing power dynamics.

The fifth and final session of the conference shifted the focus to the endangered cultural and religious heritage of Artsakh itself. Insights were offered by several experts, beginning with Prof. Marco Bais from the University of Rome La Sapienza

and Pontifical Oriental Institute, who discussed the “Use and Abuse of Classical and Medieval Sources about Caucasian Albania.” His examination revealed how historical narratives can be manipulated to undermine Armenian claims and rights to heritage.

Prof. Jost Gippert of the University of Hamburg addressed “Albanian Inscriptions in Artsakh,” enhancing the discourse on historical legitimacy and laying the groundwork for reassessing inscriptions within the larger context of Armenian heritage.

Prof. Annegret Plontke-Lüning from the University of Jena rounded up the presentations by providing a historical overview of the “Architectural Heritage of Artsakh” — highlighting its richness and the urgent need for its protection.

Finally, Prof. Hamlet Petrosyan of Yerevan State University presented on the “Monuments in the Armenian Azerbaijani Conflict Zone,” discussing identity, protection, and the importance of professional experience in safeguarding these historical treasures.

At the end, a round table discussion was facilitated by Prof. Zara Pogossian (University of Florence) and Prof. Marco Bais.

These discussions led by distinguished scholars regarding the cultural and architectural heritage of Artsakh illuminate the complexities surrounding identity, heritage preservation, and the ongoing Armenian Azerbaijani conflict.

Together, these scholars provide a compelling narrative that illustrates the rich cultural tapestry of Artsakh, while also highlighting the inherent risks faced by this heritage due to the unresolved conflict.

As the conference concluded, participants expressed renewed hope and commitment to the collective efforts needed to protect the sacred sites of Artsakh. The discussions ignited a collaborative spirit among attendees, serving as a solemn reminder of the fragility of cultural heritage in the face of conflict.

# German Foreign Minister Visits Armenia, Azerbaijan

BAERBOCK, from page 1

of Europe is totally unacceptable. It also covers members of the Bundestag and it is incompatible with the obligations assumed by Azerbaijan in the Council of Europe," the minister said.

Baerbock met with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov while in Baku.

The foreign ministers discussed the post-war situation in the region, the Armenian-Azerbaijani normalization process and the issues existing in the peace process, the Azerbaijani foreign ministry said in a readout.

The ministers also discussed development of bilateral ties, expansion of economic cooperation and joint projects in the



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock with Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in Baku



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in Yerevan, meeting with her Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan

energy sector. Baerbock stressed the importance of stability and security in South Caucasus, stressing Germany's readiness to support the peace efforts.

On November 19, Baerbock had arrived in Yerevan, where she met with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan.

The two discussed possibilities for further expanding the partnership between the two countries and the ongoing steps in that direction, based on democratic values and mutual

interest in deepening bilateral cooperation, the foreign ministry said in a readout.

Said Mirzoyan, "Madam Minister, esteemed colleagues, I welcome you to Yerevan. I am always happy to see you and discuss issues on global agenda issues and our region, as well as our relations with Germany, the Armenia-EU partnership, and the

deepening of our relations. There are many tools, mechanisms, and documents that we are discussing regarding Armenia-EU relations, and here your contribution is very important."

Mirzoyan presented the latest developments in the process, including the work done towards finalizing the draft peace

treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, emphasizing the importance of signing the treaty. The Foreign Minister of Armenia highlighted the constructive approach of Armenia on unblocking regional communications, as an important component of the peace agenda and enhanced economic interconnectivity within wider geography.

## Tensions between Israel And Turkey Spill over to Azerbaijan again

BAKU — Turkey's President confirmed that he denied Israel's president access to Turkish airspace for a flight to Baku to attend COP29. An Azerbaijani analyst interprets Ankara's move as a response to Baku's stance on Israel, which diverges significantly from Turkey's position. "That said, Turkey could have handled this differently, especially on a matter as sensitive for Azerbaijan as the level of representation at COP29," political commentator Ahmed Alili stated.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog was scheduled to visit Baku on November 19 to attend the UN Climate Conference COP29.

However, on November 17, Herzog's visit was cancelled "for security reasons," according to the president's office, which did not provide further details.

"In light of the situation assessment and for security reasons, the President of the State of Israel decided to cancel his trip to the climate conference in Azerbaijan," the official statement read.

As the host country, Azerbaijan stated that the real reason for the cancellation of the Israeli president's visit was Turkey's refusal to allow the Wing of Zion aircraft to pass through its airspace.

"Unfortunately, several days of intensive negotiations through diplomatic channels yielded no results. Azerbaijan has created all the necessary conditions for the participation of all parties in the climate conference. However, the situation surrounding the Israeli president's visit arose due to reasons beyond our

control," a representative of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told journalists.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan confirmed that he denied the Israeli president's plane access to Turkish airspace for a flight to Baku.

"We have cut trade ties with Israel and did not allow it to use our airspace," Erdoğan said during a press conference at the G-20 summit in Brazil.

"As you know, we have completely severed trade ties with Israel. Regarding the Israeli president's visit to Azerbaijan for the COP-29 summit, we did not allow him to use our airspace," Erdoğan clarified.

He added that President Herzog had other routes available to reach Baku.

"Turkey is obligated to demonstrate its position on a number of issues, and we will do so," he said.

It is worth noting that Israeli ministers who traveled to Baku used commercial flights via Georgia.

On November 19, Ronen Bar, the head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, visited Turkey for a meeting with İbrahim Kalın, the head of the National Intelligence Organization.

The meeting was reported by The Times of Israel.

According to the newspaper, the intelligence chiefs discussed efforts to resume ceasefire talks in Gaza and the possibility of Ankara facilitating these efforts.

Earlier, an unnamed Arab official told The Times of Israel that members of

the leadership of the radical Palestinian group Hamas were currently in Turkey.

Official Ankara, however, denied allegations about Hamas's Politburo relocating to Turkey. The Turkish Foreign Ministry stated that these accusations were unfounded.

Head of the Atlas Research Center, Elkhan Shahinoglu, points out that the tension in Turkish-Israeli relations has once again affected Azerbaijan:

"The President of Israel was unable to attend the COP29 event held in Baku because Turkish airspace is closed to Israeli planes. However, given that the Israeli side was aware in advance of Turkey's airspace restrictions, the Israeli leader could have participated in the Baku event by using alternative routes through other countries, even if it meant a longer journey."

The recent incident has clearly demonstrated that the tension in Turkish-Israeli relations has also affected Azerbaijan.

Meanwhile, a recent example of the information war between Israel and Turkey has also drawn attention. Reports claim that the political leadership of Hamas was forced to leave its headquarters in Doha, the capital of Qatar, due to internal disagreements. Israeli media quickly reported that Hamas had relocated its office to Turkey. While this sparked widespread discussions, Turkey's Foreign Ministry stated that these claims were unfounded.

"This ongoing conflict between the two countries shows no sign of subsiding. The sooner it ends, the better it will

be for Azerbaijan," he concluded.

Turkey could have handled a sensitive issue for Azerbaijan, such as the level of representation at COP29, differently, political analyst Ahmed Alili noted in an interview with Turan outlet.

"Of course, this situation has raised certain questions about Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. However, Azerbaijan's position on Israel has always been distinct. Azerbaijan's foreign policy is often criticized—for instance, the European Union and the United States accuse Azerbaijan of being overly dependent on Russia. After the 2020 Karabakh war, Azerbaijan's foreign policy was accused of complete reliance on Turkey."

Azerbaijan's foreign policy on Israel, Kosovo, and several other issues differs from Turkey's, and in some cases, Azerbaijan has taken positions contrary to Turkey's preferences. This demonstrates the independence of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. It is possible that Ankara has taken note of Azerbaijan's independent stance on issues related to Israel and decided to assert its own independent position, even if it runs counter to Azerbaijan's. In reality, this is a standard practice.

That said, I believe Ankara could have acted differently on such a sensitive matter for Azerbaijan, such as the level of representation at COP29 and the arrival of global leaders in Azerbaijan."

(This article originally appeared in [www.jame-news.net](http://www.jame-news.net) on November 22.)

# Community News

## Armenian Nursing And Rehabilitation Center Undergoing Extensive Renovation Project

JAMAICA PLAIN, MA — The Armenian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) announced recently renovation plans for the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (ANRC). The renovations began in October 2024; the interior work is expected to be completed by January 2025 while the exterior portion of the project is slated to be finished in fall 2025. ANRC provides both short-term rehab and long-term care for area families.

The renovations are handled by Applied Form + Space (AFS), an architectural firm based in Andover. The plans call for an extensive overhaul of both design and function to better service ANRC's elder residents.

"We are delighted to collaborate with Applied Form + Space on this project," said Wendy Segrest, executive director and president of AWWA and ANRC. "Their expertise in well-designed interior and exterior spaces perfectly aligns with our mission to provide a nurturing, comfortable and welcoming environment."

In terms of interior spaces, upgrades will feature a more formally designated intake lobby that is invit-



ing in style and concept as well as an enhanced and upgraded design for the residents' rooms. The building's exterior will include upgrades that are both aesthetically pleasing and structurally sound, focusing upon accenting the outdoor areas of reflection with abundant landscaping and foliage. There will be additional covered sitting spaces for outdoor relaxation, including an outdoor fireplace and tables for dining and socializing. Notably, all areas have been designed to honor the Armenian heritage.

Segrest added, "We are so thrilled to install what we hope is the first of many functional and aesthetic upgrades to ANRC in the coming years. Our goal is to improve the level of care, programs and amenities for our residents and families at ANRC."

The Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center is located at 431 Pond Street in Jamaica Plain. For more information about the residence, please email [info@awwainc.org](mailto:info@awwainc.org), or visit [www.awwainc.org](http://www.awwainc.org).



Members of the organizing committee

## Aznavour Spirit Infuses Inaugural Armenian Heritage Walk Event in Philadelphia

By Melissa Markaridian Selverian

PHILADELPHIA — In the words of the renowned late French-Armenian icon Charles Aznavour in one of his most adored songs, *Pour Toi Armenie* (For You, Armenia), one "could never forget" the magnificence of the tribute to him in Philadelphia on Saturday, November 16. The event was the inaugural celebration of the Armenian Heritage Walk, a spectacular expanse of public art and gardens soon to flank the world-famous Philadelphia Museum of Art. The evening of musical performances and French and Armenian delicacies drew more than 100 generous donors to the Philadelphia Club, an historic gathering place of American leaders since 1834.

With a planned unveiling in April 2026 in time for the 250th anniversary of America, the Armenian Heritage Walk is all-at-once an expression of pride in the Armenian-American story, a gesture of thanks to America, and an investment in cultural awareness in the diverse Philadelphia urban art and horticultural region.

The collaboration of the Armenian community with the city of Philadelphia has deep roots. Standing proudly beside the museum for nearly 50 years since Ameri-

ca's 200th birthday is a statue of the legendary Armenian figure, Young Meher. Epitomizing freedom and the indomitable spirit of the Armenian people, the statue will be rehabilitated and serve as a centerpiece of the new walk to include artistic and natural elements endemic to both Armenia and America. Visitors will reflect on the value of cultural diversity in Philadelphia as they travel through the story of a people exiled in genocide who found a home in and made lasting contributions to the birthplace of the nation.

The gala highlighted Aznavour's lifelong commitment to the Armenian people. One of Aznavour's greatest contributions followed the 1988 Armenia earthquake, when he drew together the most notable musical artists in France to raise awareness of Armenia through *Pour Toi Armenie*. The Aznavour tribute in Philadelphia drew similar awareness of the Armenian Heritage Walk, to serve as a monument to Armenia's endurance and resilience through the centuries. The evening featured a captivating performance by an acclaimed young French-Armenian singer, "Hakob Ghasabian," who was the 2015 winner of the singing contest on the French TV show "Prodiges" and a semi-finalist of "The Voice France." His soulful repertoire of Aznavour's most treasured songs drew rousing applause, standing ovations, and encores.

Likewise, soprano Lucia Papikian, a Juilliard School student and the First Place Award and Judges' Distinction winner of both the American Protégé International Voice Competition and the American Fine Arts Festival, enthralled the audience with proud and powerful renditions of the Armenian, American, and French national anthems. The evening also featured guitarist Kevin Henson and pianist Byron Kho, who accompanied both Ghasabian and Papikian.

A highlight of the evening was the French cuisine crafted by the Philadelphia Club's award-winning chef, Pierre Calmels, as an homage to Aznavour and his favorites. Outstanding specialties prepared by the Apricot Stone restaurant of



see HERITAGE, page 8

## 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Of Diocese Celebrated

BURBANK, Calif. — The Western Diocese celebrated the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America with a gala on November 17. To mark this milestone, the celebration honored St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and its alumni clergy serving in the Western Diocese.

More than 200 guests gathered at the Anoush Landmark in Mission Hills for an abundant cocktail hour before filling the ballroom for an elegant dinner and program. Welcoming everyone was Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese and Vice-President of the St. Nersess Board of Directors, who



Margarat Mgrublian receiving an award

extended his gratitude to Fr. Mardiros Chevian, dean of St. Nersess Seminary, seminarians, the seminary faculty, board members and staff in attendance, the honorees, all clergy present, guests, and gala committee members.

"Tonight, we are celebrating the legacy of faith and devotion, led by Khirmian Harig who established our Diocese 125 years ago," shared Derderian. "We also celebrate Abp. Tiran Nersoyan who established St. Nersess Armenian Seminary over 60 years ago, a seminary which continues to produce faithful stewards of the Gospel. Our hearts are full of gratitude and hope, with a vision for the future to make our church vibrant and relevant in the lives of our parishioners." Derderian also welcomed Nerses Nersoyan, the nephew of the late Archbishop Nersoyan, who attended the gala with his wife, Teres.

Archbishop Derderian presented Margarat Mgrublian a special gift for her continued dedication and for spearheading the gala along with a committee of energetic volunteers. Margarat, a parishioner of St. Gregory Armenian Church in Pasadena, is a member of the seminary board of directors. Additional board members present were Karnig Durgarian, David Onanian, Fr. Yeprem Kelegian, and Fr. Sarkis Petoyan. Dr. Ani Shalinian, seminary faculty, and Donna Sirounian, marketing and development director, also attended.

see ANNIVERSARY, page 8

# 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Diocese Celebrated

ANNIVERSARY, from page 7

Following lavish appetizers, dinner and delightful music by the Bravo String Quartet, Chevian was invited to share a few words. "Supporting St. Nersess is so important... our forefathers had the spiritual maturity to start a seminary to teach young people here in North America. The first donor of the seminary was a Western Diocese parishioner, Satenig Ouzoonian, who purchased the original building for St. Nersess in Evanston, IL, in memory of her husband Hagop," stated Fr. Mardiros. "Since then, we have been equipping Armenian priests here in America, and clergy who come to us from abroad. Be a part of our mission, keep us in your minds and hearts, and come visit us!"

Following, a video presentation titled "Filled with Grace" was unveiled highlighting the current seminarians — four of whom are students of the Western Diocese — and the six clergy alumni of St. Nersess.

Committee member Beth Broussalian announced a special presentation of gifts for all the honorees, artistically crafted by



Abp Hovnan Derderian with the Honorees



Mardiros Chevian addressing the guests

Lena Manoukian Dakessian, an artist currently living in Armenia. Derderian presented a beautiful handmade cross artwork to each honoree: Fr. Kevork Arakelian, Fr. Shnork Demirjian, whose wife Yn. Lydia accepted on his behalf as he is in Echmiadzin, Fr. Sarkis Petoyan, Fr. Stepanos Dingilian, Fr. Gomidas Zohrabian, and Fr. Yeghishe Ksachikyan. Fr. Mardiros also received one on behalf of the seminary.

Archbishop Derderian led the honorees and all clergy in singing Kovy Yeroosaghem before the final benediction. The guests left inspired and full of hope for the future. To learn more about St. Nersess Seminary, go to [www.stnersess.edu](http://www.stnersess.edu). Donations are still being accepted online at <https://stnersess.edu/resources/banquets/>.



Abp Hovnan Derderian welcoming the guests

## Aznavour Spirit Infuses Armenian Heritage Walk Event

HERITAGE, from page 7

Philadelphia accented the menu. Both French and Armenian wines were served throughout the night.

The event was made possible largely through the efforts of The Philadelphia Club past president, heritage walk board member, and Honorary Consul of Armenia for the Greater Philadelphia area, Harry S. Cherken, Jr. Cherken gave the welcoming remarks and introduced distinguished guests, who offered words of encouragement. In attendance were Lilit Makunts, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States; Agnès von der Mühl, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of France in Washington, D.C.; Lilit Harutyunyan, First Secretary and Consul of the Armenian Embassy in Washington, D.C.; Consul Honoraire Marine Fraval-Vennel of France in Philadelphia; and state Rep. Ben Sanchez. The greetings and performances were videorecorded for posterity through the generosity of Karen Bogosian of Visual Sound. Video Producer and Photographer Christian Sarkis Graham captured the night on camera.


Board member Karolyn Chebookjian gave an inspirational reflection, recalling how a dedicated group of volunteers led the Young Meher project in 1976 and that the legacy continues today. She applauded the donations to date and called on the community to continue giving to make the project a reality.

The Armenian Heritage Foundation of Philadelphia, the parent group of the Armenian Heritage Walk, comprises board members and committee members from throughout the Philadelphia Armenian community. Board members, in alphabetical order, are Steven Barsamian, Karolyn Chebookjian, Harry S. Cherken, Jr., David Hoplamazian, Ned Moore, Michael Santerian, Kurk Selverian, and Nanette Zakian. Former board members are Vick Bazarbashian and Simon Koumjian III. The walk is being designed by architect Simon Koumjian III.

The project grows strong through the work of a team of volunteers, including the following: Archpriest Fr. Nerses Manoogian, content; Raffi Berberian and Paul Sookiasian, research; Hagop Keshishian, engineering; Roy Binnion, statue restoration; Karlen Ghazaryan, stone; Derik Bogosian, social media; Melissa Selverian, Karen Bogosian, Julie Manoogian, Katrina Selverian, and Jessica Sarkisian, media; Matthew and Vivian Bouloutian, logo; Armen Yepoyan, Charles Garoian, and Peter Paone, artistic consultants; Antranig Garibian and Hadji Maloumian, legal; and Jake DerHagopian, Michael Manoogian, Arpy Minasian, Silva Santerian, Thomas Torcomian, Linda Vosbikian and Bob Zakian, fundraising.

To donate, visit [www.armenianheritagewalk.org](http://www.armenianheritagewalk.org).





**Tekeyan Cultural Association**  
Boston Chapter

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

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\$50 includes reception	





## OBITUARY

# US Army Sgt. Hagop Jack Zarifian

## Buried 8 Decades after Dying in WWII

By Jack Perry

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (*Providence Journal*) — U.S. Army Sgt. Hagop Jack Zarifian's sisters still remember him nearly 80 years after he was killed in action during World War II.

Marion Chapkounian of North Providence recalls walking with her big brother in a storm as the trees were swaying in the wind.

His sister Louise Goorhigian of Connecticut remembers big brother Jack taking her out for ice cream.

"Sgt. Zarifian took great care of his younger siblings," his obituary says.

The women lost their brother more than 79 years ago, when he died in combat at age 19, but Zarifian's remains, found recently in Germany, are finally being returned for burial with other family members in Providence.

"He'll be back with his family there," said John Paul Bellerose, a funeral director the Pontarelli-Marino Funeral Home in Providence, which is handling the arrangements.

Zarifian, who was of Armenian ancestry, was the first-born in his family and grew up in Bridgeport, Conn. After graduating from high school in 1943, he worked as a draftsman with General Electric in Bridgeport. He enlisted in the Army on January 10, 1944, and was promoted to sergeant within a year.

Zarifian died on April 6, 1945, when he was struck by a Nebelwerfer rocket during the Battle of Buchhof and Stein am Kocher, Germany, according to the U.S. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). Because of the intensity of the battle, his fellow soldiers couldn't recover his body, the agency said. Zarifian was initially listed as missing in action and later as killed in

action.

Family members wrote to the military seeking answers, but the location of Zarifian's body was a mystery until last year, when workers found what they believed were human remains while clearing a construction site for an underground electrical power line northwest of Buchhof.

Police officers in Germany on October 18, 2023, contacted the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). Excavation of the site revealed human remains, equipment used by U.S. soldiers during World War II, and personal items believed to belong to Zarifian, the agency said.

Among the items found with Zarifian's body was a sterling ID bracelet engraved with his name and Army serial number. It was a gift from his co-workers at GE. "Well-liked by his co-workers, they gifted him a sterling ID bracelet engraved with his name and Army serial number when they learned he enlisted to serve his country," his obituary says.

"Sgt. Zarifian's body was recovered and buried with dignity by local German residents with his rifle and uniform," his obituary says.

The evidence was transferred into the custody of the DPAA. His identity was confirmed May 10 through DNA analysis, as well as dental analysis and circumstantial evidence, the DPAA said.

Steve Almasian, chairman of the Armenian National Committee of Rhode Island, encouraged people to turn out for Zarifian's funeral.

"To us it's special," he said. "Hopefully, to the rest of the people in the state, it's special, too."

In the early 20th century, many Armenians settled in the United States as they fled genocide in their homeland, Almasian said. "Come 1940, they were shipping their



first born" to Europe to fight in World War II, he said.

Zarifian's body arrived on November 18 at Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport. His remains were escorted to the Pontarelli-Marino Funeral Home by a U.S.

military escort, honor guard and the Rhode Island State Police.

The funeral took place on November 23 and after a church service, burial with military funeral honors took place at North Burial Ground, 5 Branch Ave., Providence.

## Dikran Meguerditchian

### Entrepreneur, Descendent of Genocide Survivors

LEXINGTON, Mass. — Dikran Meguerditchian, of Lexington, passed away peacefully with his family by his side on November 15, 2024, at age 98.

Dikran was born on September 20, 1926 in Haifa, Palestine. He was the second child to Meguerditch Meguerditchian (of Moush) and Florentza Der Margossian (of Sepastia), survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Dikran was an entrepreneur from the age of 17, when the untimely death of his father obliged him to help take care of his family.

His first venture was a laundry business, washing uniforms for the British Army stationed in Palestine. The Nakba forced the family to flee to Lebanon, where he and his uncle opened a photo shop. It was there that he honed his skill in 6 languages, and where he learned the art of studio photog-

raphy — the profession that would become his backbone in the new world.

Unrest in Lebanon forced the family to flee again to the United States in 1956. After a few odd jobs, Dikran borrowed some money from friends and opened Cameras, Inc. on Tremont Street in Boston. This small photo store would move to Arlington and become an institution that spanned 40 years and multiple locations, where in turn he was able to provide the first stepping stone for many newcomers to the US. As photography gave way from film to digital, Dikran turned his sights to real estate and for the next 30 years he enjoyed the

challenges of building and maintaining properties.

Beyond his personal accomplishments, Dikran was a private person dedicated to his family. In 1960, he married Maro Kalemderian — a woman who had caught his eye while still back in Beirut — a love and union that would last 64 years. For many years they focused on raising their family and building their lives in the new world. As they settled into the community, Dikran and Maro enjoyed spending time with friends and family, taking trips and cruises, and later, discovered the warmer weather of Florida in winter months.

Dikran was the loving father of Armen and his wife Sylvie, and Arpi and her husband Rafi Kouyoumdjian. He cherished his grandchildren Araz and Sevan Kouyoumdjian, and Garen and Sarine Meguerditchian. Dikran was predeceased by his sisters Asdghig Nassar, Arpiné Meguerditchian, Araxy Toomajanian, and his brother, Vahe Meguerditchian. He is also survived by several nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews, and great-great nieces and great-great nephews.

Along the way, Dikran never forgot where he came from, especially the dashed hopes of higher education he and his sisters never had due to life's circumstances. Consequently, he was devoted to his father's legacy, the Headmaster of the Armenian orphanage in Haifa, of aspiring to education and devotion to the Armenian community. He was an ardent yet quiet advocate of numerous Armenian civic and political causes, and was most happy to know that he was supporting a hope for others that he or his sisters were not able to realize.

Funeral services will be held at the St. Stephens Armenian Church, 38 Elton Avenue, Watertown, on Saturday, November 30, at 11 a.m. Visitation will be prior to the funeral service starting at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary of the church. Interment to follow at Wildwood Cemetery in Winchester.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church or the Armenian National Committee of America.



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# Boyamian Honored for 35 Years of Dedication at St. Stephen's School Anniversary Celebration

By Alin K. Gregorian  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Saturday, November 16, was all about numbers for St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School (SSAES) in Watertown — and what good numbers they were, too. On that night, about 500 people from across the community came together to celebrate the school's 40th anniversary, while paying tribute to the recently-retired principal, Houry Boyamian, who led the school for 35 years, while raising \$500,000.

SSAES is the only Armenian day school in New England. It is also the first Armenian school to be accredited by the Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE).

The gala at the Hyatt Regency featured as guest speaker Dr. Mary Papazian. Serving as mistress of ceremonies was Kristina Ayanian, a member of the class of 2008, Miss Universe Armenia 2023 and an executive producer and reporter at Nasdaq. Vocalist Angelina Nazarian, a former contestant on the television singing competition "The Voice" and a current student at the Berklee College of Music, performed three songs, in English, French and Armenian, to the delight of the audience.

The theme of coming together of the community was front and center, and one spelled out by the Very Rev. Hrant Tahanian, the new pastor of St. Stephen's Armenian Church in Watertown.

After Tahanian offered the invocation prayer, he said, "We celebrate the past, in the person of our principal emerita, Digin Houry Boyamian. We thank you for keeping the citadel bright for three and a half decades. ... And we map out our future in its physical expansion, so we together can continue to develop and shape Armenian minds."

Tahanian paid tribute to fellow members of the clergy who were present for the celebration and praised "a unique form of Armenian cooperation."

"We have representatives from all the 'sides' and all the denominations who assist St. Stephen's," he said. He named Rev. Stephan Baljian of St. Gregory's Armenian Apostolic Church of Merrimack Valley, Very Rev. Ghazar Bedrossian of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church and Pastor Avedis Boynerian of the Evangelical church, as well as Rev. Arakel Aljalian of St. James Armenian Church of Watertown, which is a Diocese church.

Tahanian thanked Aljalian for his support for the school throughout the years, including by "sending his children here."



Nicole Babikian Hajjar (Candid Memories Studio photo)

"Unity does not necessitate uniformity. If anything, uniformity is the enemy of unity. Societies that have been completes monotonous, usually stemming from a heavy hand, have not lasted very long," he said. "The wealth of perspectives and knowledge" add to the whole of community, while Armenians "remain unwavering and united on our inalienable rights."

## New Principal

SSAES Principal Dr. Garine Palandjian paid tribute to her predecessor while looking toward a brighter future.

"Our students are joyful every day and SSAES is truly a labor of love. The school has blossomed over the past four decades into more than just an educational institution; it has become the cherished place where students are nurtured, where Armenian heritage thrives, where values are instilled and friendships are made that last a lifetime," she noted.

Palandjian said that over the next five years, the administration plans to build on this foundation and increase instructional opportunities for students.

"We will nurture this distinctive blend of academic rigor, Armenian-American cultural education and joy to ensure that every student thrives in a supportive and inspiring environment," she added.

Indeed, she said, serving as principal of an Armenian school is much more than a "nine-to-five job." She said, "It's a commitment to our ancestors who kept the Armenian faith and spirit alive for so many centuries. It is our responsibility to ensure the continued success of our school so that their sacrifices were not made in vein."

She also paid tribute to the school's annual class trip to

Armenia, which started two decades ago, taking students also to Karabakh (Artsakh) (before 2020), noting that the trip changes the students forever.

She addressed the alumni: "You all make us so proud as many of you have taken leadership roles both locally and globally."

Palandjian then invited Boyamian to the stage, where she presented her with a commendation from the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs for her services.

An unscheduled speaker was Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian, who presented Boyamian with a citation from Gov. Maura Healey, congratulating her for being "a pillar of the Armenian community," a recognition from Sen. Edward Markey, congratulating her on her 35 years of service, as well as from his own office, congratulating her for "instill[ing] a deep-rooted pride for our Armenian heritage and decades of students that" have become leaders of the community.

"Digin Boyamian has been more than just a great principal, a great leader, a great mentor, a great example; she has been a great supporter of other Armenian issues," he said, paying tribute to her and her husband, Avedis Boyamian, for supporting so many others in the community.

Referring to the honoree, keynote speaker Papazian, mistress of ceremonies Kristina Ayanian, and singer Nazarian, Koutoujian said, "I see a strong thread of powerful, intelligent, passionate, amazing Armenian women."

## Tribute to Armenian Education

In her keynote address, Papazian paid tribute to Armenian education in the US, as well as St. Stephen's in particular.

The school "represents a commitment by this community to its young people," she said.

Papazian is the executive vice president of the Association of the Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, and is the former president of San Jose State University and Southern Connecticut State University.

Armenians have recognized the importance of education for a very long time, she said, "and never more poignantly than after the tragedy of the Armenian Genocide, which nearly destroyed our people. Some of the first institutions that were established during the first Republic of Armenia ... when Yerevan province was overcome by refugees and extraordinary poverty, were schools and universities," including Yerevan State University in 1919 and



TEKEVAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION PASADENA GLENDALE CHAPTER

Join Us for an Inspiring Evening

**Elegance in Harmony**

Painting Exhibition

December 13, 14, 15

By

The Internationally Renowned Artist

**HRAIR**

The artist will be painting live creating a masterpiece for all present to enjoy and witness his unique talent.

Friday, December 13 at 7:00 pm at the TCA Beshgeturian Center, 1901 N Allen Avenue, Altadena

Champagne cocktail reception

Invitation

The exhibition will be open on December 14 & 15 from 4 - 8 pm





## COMMUNITY NEWS

the Armenian State Pedagogical University in 1922.

She then spoke about her family setting in California after surviving family members of both her parents fled the Armenian Highlands, as victims of the Armenian pogroms of the 1890s and the Armenian Genocide.

She added that the Armenian community in the diaspora will fade away unless it maintains ties to the Armenian state.

“The Republic of Armenia is all we have at present and we should do everything in our power to make it a contemporary homeland, one that our children can embrace,” she said.

Papazian, who also serves as a chair of the Advisory Board of the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST), praised the value of Armenian education, as she herself is a graduate of the Ferrahian School in Encino, the first Armenian day school in the



Dr. Mary Papazian (Candid Memories Studio photo)

US, where her mother taught there for 30 years.

She paid tribute to the young students and the Armenian people: “As Movses of Khoren wrote, we are a small people, but we have done many things worthy of being remembered. Of course, he meant small in number, not in stature, intelligence or determination.”

Fr. Antranig Baljian, the recently retired pastor of St. Stephen’s Armenian Church, then introduced the honoree, paying her a personal and heartfelt tribute, reflecting their longtime friendship and collaboration.

Boyamian is the daughter of Karnig Panian, the vice president of Beirut’s famed Nshan Palandjian Jemaran (an Armenian lycée). “Following in the footsteps of her father, an orphan of the Armenian Genocide who overcame much adversity to become a beloved and distinguished professor and vice principal,” Baljian said, “*Digin Houry* has led the school for the past 35 years with great passion, determination and commitment, providing the best possible educational opportunities to Armenian children residing in the greater Boston community.”

“Her greatest sense of achievement and fulfillment arises from the fact that St. Stephen’s graduates continue to be active in the Armenian community and many have gone on to top colleges and universities and have become successful leaders in their field,” Baljian said.

“I have known *Digin Houry* for 30 of her 35 years as our school’s principal,” he said. “I have witnessed a truly impressive and devoted educator and community leader who has had a truly amazing tenure. Her job has not been an easy one, yet no matter how serious a difficulty she was dealing with, she would come to school every day with her dazzling smile on her face and a fierce inner determination to overcome whatever obstacles the day may present.”

He then praised her husband, Avedis, and their children Ani, Taline and Stepan and their spouses.

“As we’ve worked together all these years, so we retire together,” he said.

#### A Beloved Principal

Boyamian and her young family were recent arrivals in the 1980s from Beirut and as a trained pharmacist, she was able to work. However, a few years after the school was founded, in 1984, one of the founders, Yervant Krafiyan, approached her to take over the school. She took a leap of faith and agreed, going back to school for a master’s degree in education from the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

When Boyamian took to the podium, she in turn paid tribute to her colleagues, teachers, volunteers and members of the community.

“Since its founding, St. Stephen’s has been an essential part of the greater Boston Armenian community, serving a student body that represents a cross section” of the community, she said.

She spoke about her late father, whose memoir, *Good-bye Antoura*, she helped put together. “He believed the



Alumni attending the banquet (Candid Memories Studio photo)

only way for the Armenian people to avoid total annihilation was to keep our language and culture alive through education. He fulfilled his calling by dedicating 40 years of his life to educating generations of Armenians in Lebanon. I have tried to follow in his footsteps.”

She added that Armenian education is “more important than ever.”

Then she praised her successor, Palandjian: “She is leading the school with energy and enthusiasm. I wish her success in her mission to advance the school. I invite you all to stand by her and support her endeavors.”

She also thanked her husband, Avedis, for his support, adding, “To my children and grandchildren, you are my hope for the future.”

Boyamian was gifted a captain’s chair from the organizing committee, with her name on it. In addition, it was announced her portrait would be installed at the school.

#### New Building

Michael Guzelian, the chairman of the board of SSAES, spoke next, praising the school’s low student-to-teacher ratio and academic standards. He said the school is incorporating modern technology, such as 3-D printers for students. “We’ve had over 1,000 students pass through our doors at St. Stephen’s. Our alumni have gone on to attend some of the best secondary schools, colleges, universities and they have become cultural ambassadors and leaders of the Armenian community both in the diaspora and Armenia,” he said.

Enrollment in grades 1-5 is increasing, he said, with more Kindergartners staying for higher grades. This year, there are 26 first graders.

“We are outgrowing our space at the ACEC,” he said. “We are at capacity.”

A “purpose-built” school is necessary, he said. To wild applause, Guzelian said that two buildings surrounding its current sites, the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center, which is home to the school’s K-5 grades, and the Afeyan Building housing the pre-school, have been purchased, and that a new building will be constructed for the K-5 students. “We will go from 9,000 square feet in the ACEC to 24,000 square feet in this new building,” he added. “This expansion is needed to meet our school growth, meet up to date state requirements and our ex-



Houry Boyamian and Sheriff Peter Koutoujian (Candid Memories Studio photo)

panded programs.”

Committee Chair Nicole Babikian Hajjar asked the members of her committee to stand up before she announced the amount raised by the program. “I think we can call this a success,” Hajjar announced to applause.



Avedis and Houry Boyamian (Candid Memories Studio photo)

The mother of three SSAES graduates, she recalled her first meeting with Boyamian. “I was immediately sold and I never looked back,” she said. “Over my years of interaction with her, I have always been amazed by her extraordinary work ethic, with her grace and elegance, both inside and out.”

“I want to reiterate how privileged we are to have St. Stephen’s in our backyard. We cannot take this privilege for granted. ... Now that even our language and heritage are endangered, it is our collective responsibility to take on the challenge and build together a strong future to this little gem in our community. Your school, my school, our school.”

Also speaking was Prelate Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, who said to the honoree, “I bow to you.”

When reached after the event, Boyamian said, “I was delighted to see so many of our alumni, teachers, parents, supporters and friends of the school. There was joy, excitement and hope in the air; hope for a bright future for our school. I was deeply touched by the outpouring expressions of love and appreciation.”

She added that for now, she is throwing herself into other efforts toward Genocide recognition, including serving as chair of the Armenian National Education Committee of the Eastern Prelacy, and being elected to serve on the board of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, as well as plans to make presentations to GenEd (Genocide Education Project) for public school teachers. In addition, she said she is working on publishing the rest of her father Karnig Panian’s works.

Said Babikian Hajjar after the event, “It was an honor to lead this well-deserved celebration. The overwhelming support from the community, especially the strong presence of alumni, was truly inspiring. It’s a testament to the School’s enduring impact and *Digin Houry*’s extraordinary legacy. We successfully raised over half a million dollars — an achievement that reflects the collective dedication and generosity of everyone involved.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

# SOAR 20th Anniversary Gala To Be Held Saturday, March 1, 2025

NEWTOWN SQUARE, Penn. — The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was founded in 2005 to provide humanitarian relief to orphaned children and adults with disabilities in Armenia, Javakhk and Lebanon. For nearly two decades, SOAR has played a critical role in

addressing child protection issues and the needs of the most vulnerable in the Armenian community. Today, SOAR boasts more than 600 volunteers in 145 Chapters worldwide, supports 35 institutions, including several of its own Centers in Armenia, and has funded \$11.6 million in distributions to Armenia, Artsakh, Javakhk and Lebanon.

Week-long SOAR anniversary festivities will begin on February 24, 2025 as staff from Armenia visit the US. On Thursday, February 27, SOAR will host a kickoff cocktail reception for Chapter Meetings where many of volunteers will meet each other, and staff and board members, for the first time. Chapter Meetings will take place Friday and Saturday at the Hilton Hotel in Newtown Square.

On March 1, SOAR's 20th anniversary gala will be held at The Ivy at Ellis Preserve in Newtown Square. For more information, please visit [soar-us.org/chapter-activity/#gala](http://soar-us.org/chapter-activity/#gala).

SOAR has three Transitional Centers; one in Gyumri for Young Women, and two in Yerevan, one for Young Women and one for Young Men.

The Centers are residential settings for older teenagers who have outgrown the tradi-



Residents and staff of SOAR's two Transitional Centers for Young Women, Gyumri and Yerevan

tional orphanage but who are not yet ready for independent living. The residents go to college; assist with SOAR's online business; are enriched by SOAR's academic programs; appreciate volunteerism; learn essential life skills, including home and money management; build self-nurturance and self-confidence; and prepare themselves for emotional, fiscal, and professional independence.

SOAR's Ada Keshishyants Social Rehabilitation Center for Children with Developmental Disabilities was opened in July 2023. The first of its kind in Vanadzor, the center serves as a non-residential facility for children with developmental, emotion-

al, intellectual, physical, and psychological disabilities in Vanadzor, Armenia.

Ada Keshishyants suffers from a life-threatening, rare genetic disease called Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type 1. Children with SMA die slowly, rarely reaching two years of age. One shot of Zolgensma could have helped treat or even cure Ada, but at a cost of \$2.125 million. In 2021, the funds were raised to purchase Zolgensma, but complications arose, and unfortunately, Ada was not able to receive the treatment.

For questions or to help, contact George S. Yacoubian, Jr., at [gyacoubian@soar-us.org](mailto:gyacoubian@soar-us.org).



SOAR Transitional Center for Young Men, Yerevan



SOAR Transitional Center, Gyumri

addressing child protection issues and the needs of the most vulnerable in the Ar-



## Tekeyan Cultural Association

# Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia



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





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

\$240    \$480    \$700    other \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Memo: Sponsor a Teacher  
Mail your check to:  
TCA Sponsor a Teacher  
5326 Val Verde, Houston, TX 77056




Your donation is tax deductible.

# Arts & Culture

## Wiesbaden State Theater Welcomes Armenian Vocalist

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WIESBADEN, Germany — It was not simply a wonderful concert, but a rare and delightful musical encounter. The Wiesbaden Staatstheater opened its sumptuous foyer on November 11 to a Lieder-Soiree (evening song recital), where guests, served with a glass of wine, took their places at small tables in an atmosphere that evoked images of intimate gatherings of music lovers at the beginning of the 20th century. The song recitals are occasions for new members of the ensemble to be introduced to the Wiesbaden music scene. The three musicians appearing together came from three different lands and language cultures, and presented Lieder — art songs — from these and other music traditions.

Silvia Hauer, a German mezzo-soprano who has been a member of the Wiesbaden Staatstheater ensemble since 2015, welcomed Hovhannes Karapetyan, an Armenian bass-baritone who joined the ensemble this year, to sing solos as well as duets, accompanied by pianist Adam Rogala, who was born in Łódź, Poland. Rogala has been solo-repetiteur in Wiesbaden since 2023, and performs as accompanist as well as soloist.

From their opening duet, *Labor Lost*, from the “The Boy’s Magic Horn” by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), it was clear that newcomer Karapetyan is also a performer accustomed to the opera stage. Hauer followed with two solo Mahler works set to texts by poet Friedrich Rückert, *If You Love for Beauty and I Am Lost to the World*. Rückert, who had mastered 40 languages, translated poetry from many foreign tongues and was a beloved poet in the 19th century.

The musicians not only sang, but used the intervals to share their experiences and insights with the audience. Why choose Mahler was one question raised, for example. Hauer replied that hearing Mahler moves something deep within her; like the symphonies, the songs too evoke images of landscapes. Karapetyan, who sang three *Michelangelo* songs by Hugo Wolf (1860-1903), revealed that this was the first time he had sung German songs to a German audience, which constituted an artistic challenge. His delivery, the audience acknowledged with applause, was impressive. He added that the pieces, it is quite often that I think of my past life, Everything ends which comes to be, and Is my soul feeling the longed-for light? had a personal impact on him, in that they prompted reflection on the process of becoming older.

Music from one’s own cultural tradition has a special quality. Pianist Rogala, who performed *Nocturne* (op. 16, Nr. 4 B major) by Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941) and *Military Polonaise* (op. 40, Nr. 1 A major) by Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849), pointed out that Paderewski had been not only a composer but

see VOCALIST, page 16



Erhan Arik displays his photo of Murad Vartanyan, Christian militia leader in Havresk, Iraq (photo Aram Arkun)

## Erhan Arik’s Journey to the Stations of the Armenian Genocide and Beyond

WATERTOWN — Project Save Photograph Archive presented as part of its “Conversations on Photography” series an illustrated talk on October 24 by Erhan Arik at its new Watertown headquarters, which was cosponsored by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research. Arik showed images of Armenian life in Armenia, Turkey and the Middle East from his trilingual 2016 book, *Gayan* [Station], printed in Istanbul by Aras Publishing.

The book includes photos of Armenian communities in Tehran, Isfahan, Zakho, Dohuk, Beirut, Jubail, Antelias, Ainjar, Amman, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Bethany, Yerevan, Antakya and Istanbul, taken from 2014 to 2016. The title *Gayan* refers to the camps or settlements where Armenians lived after the Armenian Genocide and the book reflects the stories of descendants of survivors.

Project Save Executive Director Dr. Arto Vaun provided a brief introduction to Project Save, founded in 1975 by Ruth Thomasian (who was present at the event), and today holding well over 80,000 original photographs, all archived, from around the world. Vaun introduced Arik, who was born in Ardahan, Turkey, in 1984, and graduated from the Department of Journalism of Anadolu University in Eskisehir, Turkey. He was a student of Merter Oral in social documentary photography.

Vaun observed that Arik’s photography and video projects since 2010 focused on topics such as the 1915 Armenian Genocide and its survivors who scattered

see ARIK, page 15



Erhan Arik displaying his image of Tigranuhi Asatryan, born in 1910 in Kağızman, Kars province, holding a photo of herself as a youth (photo Aram Arkun)

## Inaugural Golden Gate Film Festival Takes Place

SAN FRANCISCO — The first Golden Gate Armenian Film Festival took place on Friday, November 15 to Sunday, November 17 at the charming “Vogue” movie theatre in the city’s Pacific Heights neighborhood.

The festival was launched to build and strengthen collaborations between the Armenian film directors and the Diaspora in the United States and to provide an opportunity both for the Armenians living in the Bay Area and the general public to enjoy the best selection of films created by Armenian film directors.

The festival night, opened with the full-length feature film “Yasha and Leonid Brezhnev,” by one of the best known Armenian film directors, Edgar Baghdasaryan. A live question-and-answer session with the director followed the screening. “Yasha and Leonid Brezhnev” is Armenia’s official submission to the Academy Awards 2025.

The three-day program presented the most recent, highly acclaimed art house Armenian movies including



Pictures were taken during the screening of the “1489”, Documentary by Shoghakat Vardanyan.



Welcoming speech to the audience at the opening night of GGAFF, the Co-Founder/Director, Gayane Pashayan-Nefian and Co-Founder Ara Nefian.

“Missak et Melanie Manouchian” by Katia Guiragossian, “Yasha and Leonid Brezhnev” by Edgar Baghdasaryan, “There Was, There Was Not” by Emily Mkrtychian, “Tonratun” by Inna Mkhitarian, “Luka” by Jessica Woodworth (co-production between Belgium-Italy-Netherlands-Bulgaria and Armenia, with one of the key roles playing Samvel Tadevossian), “1489” by Shoghakat Vardanyan (Closing film) and two of the best movies of the recent years “Yeve” by Armenian-Iranian filmmaker Anahid Abad and “Aurora’s Sunrise” by Inna Sahakyan.



# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



Game night at the Koobation house in Fresno. Cheese beoreg, Puff pastry bread sticks, phyllo stuffed with mushrooms, smoked salmon rilette, goat cheese and fig jam, asparagus wraps with herb cheese and sun-dried tomatoes and meatball in a sweet chili orange sauce. Photo courtesy Jon Koobation

## Jon Koobation's Armenian Cheese Beoreg

FRESNO — This family recipe is featured in Reedley chef, author and restaurateur Jon Koobation's *Cooking With Jon*, the celebrated cookbook he published in 2017. For decades he owned Jon's Bear Club in Reedley that is often showcased in his cookbook. Under Jon's professional direction, Jon's Bear Club became a cherished part of the local community that welcomed generations of Central Valley residents.

Founded in 1935 as a small bar for local farmers and farm laborers, the eatery became a beloved home for countless family meals and celebrations throughout the generations, according to a California Restaurant Association (CRA) news release. In 2017, Jon received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the CRA Fresno Chapter "Best of the Valley" Restaurant Awards.

"We had infants and young children brought into the restaurant by their parents, who grew



Jon Koobation with his wife Kitty was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2017 "Best of the Valley" Restaurant Awards.

up and came back and worked for us," he said. "After having been there 40 plus years, you see generations come and go."

Jon eventually sold the restaurant in 2013, and released *Cooking with Jon*, a legacy to his rich culinary background. It features many of his signature recipes along with old family photos and warm memories and anecdotes. It is a walk down memory lane about Jon's life growing up in the Central Valley -- interspersed among the recipes are many stories. Stories of how he trained to become a chef, of his deep love for family, cars and racing, and what it was like going from just being a chef to owning his own popular restaurant, and his lifetime love of really good food.

"Cooking has been my passion throughout my life. It has filled my entire life with joy," shares Jon in his cookbook. "At every family gathering, my father, Edward Koobation, said, 'Well, here we are.'"

The choices of Jon's authentic recipes and beautiful color photography will provide daily inspiration for many memorable meals throughout the year. Recipes include: Grandma Bazarian's Shish Kebab, Tomato Vermicelli Soup, Herb-Seared Lamb Tenderloins with Eggplant Caviar and Basil Oil, Chicken George, Lebanese Judra (Lentils and Rice), JBC Crab Cakes, Braised Lamb Shanks with Bulgur Pilaf (made with Swanson Chicken Broth), Cabbage Dolma with Beef and Lamb, Meyer Lemon Homemade Ice Cream, Heirloom Tomato Jam, and Cracked Wheat and Kale Salad.

"Cheese beoreg is another mainstay of Armenian culture and tradition," said Jon. "It is served as part of the appetizer course or a Middle Eastern mezze with platters of pickled vegetables (tourshee), cured olives, string cheese, nuts, grape leaves (yalanchi sarma), and cured meat (basterma)," he adds. Take the time to make these beoreg, and you'll have them on hand in your freezer for your next special occasion. Once you learn the technique, you can fold-in almost anything you want. These were a staple in my Armenian family sharing many meals with my parents and grandparents... and in our home today for family and friends. Easy to make and assemble, they're the perfect appetizer for buffets, dinners, or to serve at holiday dinners."

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound Monterey Jack Cheese, shredded
- 1 cup cottage cheese
- 2 medium eggs, beaten
- 1 bunch flat leaf parsley (leaves only), minced
- Kosher salt and cracked black pepper
- Athens® Phyllo Dough, fully thawed
- 1/2 pound melted butter

### PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Combine ingredients in a medium bowl, cover and set aside.

Lay out a sheet of phyllo dough on a floured work surface, and brush with butter, top with another sheet and brush with butter, and repeat with a third sheet.

Cut the stack of sheets into thirds, lengthwise.

Spoon a walnut-size of cheese mixture (about 2 tablespoons) on the bottom strip closest to you. Fold over to form a triangle. Fold again to form another triangle. Continue to the end of the phyllo sheet. Brush the end of the final triangle with butter. Re-warm the butter as needed to keep it melted so it's easy to brush onto phyllo. Repeat with the remaining phyllo sheets and cheese filling. (Keep in mind that minor tears or cracks won't be noticeable once the beoreg is folded and assembled, especially if they end up on the inside, so don't worry too much as you work with it.)

Arrange the sealed beoregs on parchment-lined baking sheets and brush the tops with egg wash. Bake for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown. Do not burn. Serve immediately as an appetizer or a special complement to your salad course.

Note: The cheese and parsley mixture should be cold when making this recipe.

Options: Jon has used a combination of sauteed mushrooms, green onions, and thyme added to the cheese and parsley mixture. Cooked and drained spinach with Feta cheese is another option. Store leftovers at room temperature. For more information on working with phyllo dough, see: <https://www.seriousseats.com/borek-5185229>

Serves 12.

**ORDER TODAY:** Professional recipes you can make at home from award-winning chef Jon Koobation. Jon is the recipient of the 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award in the California Restaurant Association's "Best of the Valley" award. Contact Jon at: [chefjonkoobation@gmail.com](mailto:chefjonkoobation@gmail.com) to order his book and for a personally signed copy.

Or order his cookbook directly at Amazon Books at: <https://www.amazon.com/Cooking-JON-Jon-Koobation/dp/0692769315>

For all of Jon's recipes featured in the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* newspaper, go to: <https://mirrorspectator.com/?s=jon+koobation>

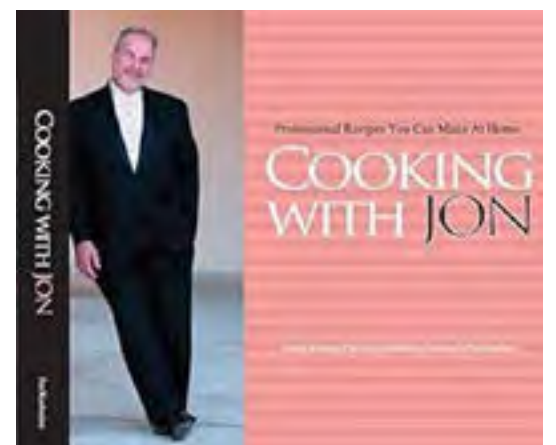
For the 2017 Kings River Life interview with Jon, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET4Rj4H0FLc>

See: <https://thebusinessjournal.com/best-valley-restaurant-award-winners-announced-2/>

Connect at:

<https://www.facebook.com/jon.ekoobation/>

[https://www.facebook.com/p/Cooking-With-JON-100057156711820/?\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/p/Cooking-With-JON-100057156711820/?_rdr)



# Arik's Journey to the Stations of the Armenian Genocide and Beyond

ARIK, from page 13

wwto many countries. His photographic and multimedia project called *Horovel* was shown in Turkey, Armenia and France. His documentary short films “Remembering,” produced after visiting villages on both sides of the Turkish-Armenian border, and “Voice” were shown in the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in 2010.

Arik, in 2012, directed the short Turk-

with them.”

(A cursory look at the Internet shows that he began writing about Armenian issues, primarily the Turkish-Armenian protocols attempting to establish diplomatic relations, at least a year earlier, in 2009, at [Bianet.org](http://Bianet.org).)

So Arik started to go to border villages and in Armenia, met Tigranuhi Asatryan. As he spoke, he projected photos from his trips, including of her. Asatryan was a sur-

The father corresponded with a friend from Malatya, Turkey, and later they found another mutual friend, Krikor, who had moved to Armenia. Eventually, the friend in Turkey, Riza, realizes that only Haroutioun is writing to him while Krikor does not. He asks Haroutioun why Krikor does not write me any letters.

Arik concluded about this episode: “I think it is a very symbolic thing for me about this issue. When we understand as a society in Turkey why Krikor does not answer us, and when we feel that we are living without him, then maybe we can talk about the future.”

## Reactions

Before questions were taken from the audience, Vaun commented about the powerful dialogue between past and present and asked Arik about the reaction to these photographs from various communities. Arik replied that he was not concerned about getting a wrong reaction in Lebanon, but more about getting some bad or wrong reactions in Turkey. He felt in fact that the Lebanese or Middle Eastern Armenians could not give a wrong reaction, while he was conducting his project.

In the Republic of Armenia, he said, people were at times suspicious, not only about the issues but also thinking that he could be a spy from Turkey. Telling his dream, however, seemed to get them to understand him.

He remarked that his method of photography took a lot of time. Whenever he met a person, he speaks with them and eventually gets their permission, but this could initially take anywhere from two to four hours. An article in the local Armenian newspaper however could speed this process up because after that, everyone would know about you.

journey, and this is just the result that I am showing you.”

## Identity

A series of audience questions explored issues of identity in Arik's native region of Ardahan. He said he did not know of any Islamized Armenians there who retained some Armenian consciousness. His family came from the Caucasus, and he said that personally, identity became a real question in his mind when he began this journey. Armenians would ask who he was and as he tried to explain himself, he began to ask himself questions too. He started to read about Akhalkalak society and shared lots of articles with his brother, who told him to stop this.

Arik concluded, “I am somehow I think, quite okay not knowing anything about my past. I call myself culturally, I am from the Caucasus, because I know there are a lot of things I cannot discover about my identity.”

When asked whether he would consider doing a DNA test to discover more, he said, “I think who I am, my background, my identity, my preferences, all of that, I think, in this journey somehow maybe I discovered my past. I think living through life...looking at the memory of some of the more common places, I think, enrich who I am. So that is why really I don't think ... who I am, I am Armenian, I am Greek, I am Persian — I am something.”

He added that on the other hand, he felt it was his responsibility living his life this way to tell stories such as that about the Armenian *ojak*. When pressed as to whether there were other things besides the dream that got him to do this project, he said he didn't know if he would have done it without the dream. However, he said, “Somehow I am more interested in going deeper



Erhan Arik displayed his photo of Murad Vartanyan, Christian militia leader in Havresk, Iraq (photo Aram Arkun)

ish-language video “An Educational Institution Seized in Ortaköy: The Andonyan Armenian Catholic Monastery and School” and in 2021 served as cinematographer of “Retourner à Sölöz” [Return to Sölöz], about French-Armenian filmmaker, director and actor Serge Avédikian's return to the village of his grandparents, south of Istanbul.

Vaun first met Arik in Beirut in 2015 while the latter was working on *Gayan* and again connected with him in Armenia and Turkey.

## Following the Dream

Arik retold the story of how he began this project and his work. He related that though he was born in Ardahan, which is not far from Georgia and Armenia, his grandfather and grandmother were from the southern part of Georgia known as Samtskhe-Javakheti today (including Akhaltskha and Akhalkalak), which is on the Armenian border. They came to Turkey after the 1920s, but the other relatives who remained there were deported during the Stalinist period (as Meskhetian Turks presumably) and so he does not have information about his ancestors beyond his grandparents.

In Ardahan, his family moved to an old Armenian and Greek village, and they knew that their home used to belong to Armenians. Later, his family built a new house but continued to use the old Armenian one as a barn. In this barn, there is a stone oven, called *ocak* (*ojakh*) in Turkish. In 2010, Arik had a dream about this oven in which someone was declaring that “here is my house and my wife cooking in the oven, and my children playing in this room, but today you use this house as a barn.”

Arik said that this dream affected him greatly, because the oven is very important as it symbolizes family and should not be touched. Yet, he said he realized that his family not only touched it but used it as a barn. He said, “I realized that the memories that are living in these houses are not only the memories that I established. There are also other memories alive, and I realized that every place has a memory. I started something. I just wanted to come together with the Armenians. I just wanted to talk

vivor of the Genocide, he said, and at first, on the advice of a friend accompanying him, he did not state that he was not Armenian. She eventually realized that he did not speak Armenian and asked him why. Arik then said he realized he had to tell the truth. After telling his own story, Asatryan started telling him her life story and Arik videoed this.

Later, an Armenian friend in France, viewing the video, said that she must have been scared, when she said please send my love from me to Turkey, to the people you see over there. Arik however wondered whether it might also have been because, he said, “she knows very well I am a subject of this story. I am a subject of this memory, so she knows very well how much it is important that this door opens.”

Arik presented the video to the Project Save audience too, though it was a little hard to hear and understand.

He said after the video that when he started his work, it was a personal journey because he felt that a great gap existed in the memory that he was living. As he opened more doors, the gap, instead of being filled, became deeper.

The photos from *Gayan* were the first part of his project on the post-genocide period, he said.

Arik continued to show images, sometimes in silence and sometimes telling stories connected to the individuals depicted. Hagop Hagopian, for example, experienced the September 6-7, 1955 pogroms in Istanbul and moved to the Middle East in the 1960s. Though he missed Istanbul, he said that at the end of the day, at least nobody called him *gavur* [infidel] in his new home.

Arik visited several Armenian villages in Duhok, Iraqi Kurdistan, and took the picture of a leader of a small Armenian military group defending Havresk village from ISIS. In Jordan, he met a woman who showed him the scarf of her mother who said she was Armenian and this was the only thing left of her past. In Isfahan, Iran, he met a woman in a nursing home and took her picture holding the picture of her mother as a sort of family portrait.

In Lebanon, he met a family which kept letters of the woman's father, Haroutioun.



Erhan Arik displayed his photo of master jeweler Hagop Berj Hagopian in his Amman, Jordan, workshop (photo Aram Arkun)

In response to a follow-up question about whether people in Turkey understand his motivations, Arik replied that he was not sure whether most people in Turkey really care about what he is doing. He gave the example of a presentation he did in Istanbul several years ago for an organization. Most of the attendees were at a high intellectual level, he said, and made a lot of beautiful comments about his framing or composition of photographs and his methods of photographing, but one also continued, “but you are doing some kind of propaganda with your pictures, propaganda about the genocide, and you are trying to tell us that we should recognize the genocide.”

Arik said he tried to explain to this person: “I am not trying to persuade you with my pictures. I am not a historian. I am not a politician. I am just starting this journey for some inner way. I am just thinking of my

about some issues, and I feel that inner connection that is quite important for your job and for your stuff, especially if you can talk about the arts.”

After the event, Vaun declared to the *Mirror-Spectator*, “As Project Save enters its 50th year in 2025, it's a priority for me to continue and grow these kinds of programs as well as other initiatives such as the Artist and Research Residencies. Our new location is one of the few photography-centered organizations in this whole area and it's been exciting to see a growing interest, especially from non-Armenians and younger people.” He added that Project Save is starting the celebration of its 50th anniversary with a holiday party on December 19. For details on the party or to view information on previous Conversations on Photography events, see the website [projectsave.org](http://projectsave.org).

## ‘Monsieur Aznavour’ Pays Tribute to the Most Armenian of French Singers

AZNAVOUR, from page 1

front row. “Not ideal for our necks, but we don’t care. We are going,” joked Elisa Samourcachian, 24, who attended with her friend Tina. The two French-Armenian girls were among the few who fully understood the film’s opening scene, where Aznavour’s parents converse in Armenian. “It was emotional to hear Armenian in such a large, packed theater,” Tina shared.

For once, an Armenian story graced the French silver screen not as a tale of genocide but as a celebration of life and culture. It appears as a contrast to “The Cut” (2014), a Genocide-focused film that struggled to draw audiences beyond the Armenian community. What both films have in common is French-Algerian actor Tahar Rahim.

Tahar Rahim portrayed Aznavour from his 20s to 50s, a demanding role that required months of preparation. “I thought I would never make it; it seemed like a crazy idea,” Rahim admitted. “But the producers believed in me, and that gave me the strength to push through. This turned out to be the most beautiful experience of my career,” he recognized.

Rahim’s transformation was meticulous. He studied Aznavour’s gestures, vocal style and even his idiosyncratic mannerisms through archival footage and family insights. “There were three versions of Charles in my head: the performer, the public figure and the private man,” he explained. Rahim sang live on the film, mastering Aznavour’s signature husky voice after months of piano and vocal training.

“It wasn’t about mimicry. To convey real emotion, I had to bring a part of myself into the role. The goal was to meet in the middle, to ‘shake hands’ with him and move together,” he said.

### Armenian Touches

The film honors Aznavour’s Armenian heritage, incorporating cultural symbols like Mount Ararat paintings, Armenian cross necklaces, and family dialogues in Armenian. A recurring line spoken by Aznavour’s father, “Naye our eink, our hasank” (“look where we started from, and where we are today”), captures the family’s immigrant resilience.

Tigran Mekhitarian, an Armenian actor better known for his theater work in Paris, portrayed Missak Manouchian, the



The movie team present at the Opéra Pathé theater, including Tahar Rahim (on the right, with a burgundy suit), Grand Corps Malade (with the mic) and Jean-Rachid Kallouche (sitting next to Grand Corps Malade), October 23, Paris / © Mélanie Tuysuzian

famous resistance leader hidden by the Aznavourian family during World War II. Initially indifferent to Aznavour’s music, Mekhitarian came away with newfound respect: “I discovered how determined, resilient, and hardworking he was. In him, I see a bit of my own journey — proving that talent and effort transcend where you come from.”

### A Family Affair

Producer Jean-Rachid Kallouche, Aznavour’s son-in-law, began planning the film in 2018, months before the singer’s passing. Aznavour entrusted Kallouche and his daughter, Katia, with bringing his story to life. “He believed in us, and we’re so grateful,” Kallouche said. Katia’s involve-

ment was pivotal; she frequently visited the set, offering insights and even sharing her father’s imperfections to humanize the portrayal.

Directed by Mehdi Idir and co-produced by Grand Corps Malade, a famous French singer and longtime admirer of Aznavour, the film highlights his pre-fame struggles. “He wanted people to see the journey, not just the star,” Grand Corps Malade noted. Among the 1,300 songs written and sung by Aznavour, the movie includes his classics like *La Bohème*, *Emmenez-moi* and *Je me voyais déjà*, capturing defining moments of his life.

“Aznavour grew up in France and became a global ambassador of French cul-

ture, emerging as one of its most iconic symbols — this is precisely what we aim to convey” Grand Corps Malade noted.

Nowadays, he is still very much part of the fabric of the country’s culture; his song *Formidable* was sung by rap artist Aya Nakamura during the Paris 2024 Olympics opening ceremony — proof of his enduring influence.

The film’s premiere ended with a standing ovation that lasted over five minutes.

“We had tears,” Elisa and Tina confessed as they exited the movie theater, humming together *La Bohème*’s few last notes.

To see the film’s trailer, click on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evoYNC-dZGOQ>.

## Wiesbaden State Theater Welcomes Armenian Vocalist

VOCALIST, from page 13

also a politician, having served as prime minister and foreign minister. The piece by Chopin was especially appropriate, since the concert was taking place on Polish Independence Day, November 11.

Karapetyan, endowed with a powerful, resonant voice, delivered a controlled and nuanced rendition of *Tsirani tsar* (Apricot Tree) by Komitas (1869-1935), which was moving. He spoke then of how important music, especially the music of Komitas, is for him during this, his first year away from Armenia; it is what keeps him close to his homeland. He told the audience how Komitas, a “hero,” had travelled from village to village, collecting and writing down traditional local melodies, including lullabies. Apricots, the subject of this song, are very special in Armenia, he said; not only are the colors of the national flag red, blue, and “apricot,” but the musical instrument Duduk is made from the wood of the apricot tree; -- not to mention, that Armenian apricots are delicious, he added. Silvia Hauer said that though she lives and works in her native land, on her frequent travels to perform abroad, she too experiences the



From left, Adam Rogala, Hovhannes Karapetyan, and Silvia Hauer

same need for music and visited the opera every night when in Vienna.

There were somber notes to be heard as well, especially in Karapetyan’s performance of pieces from the “Songs and Dances of Death” by Modest Mussorgski (1839-1881), *The Song of the Flea* and *The Field*

*Marshal*. The latter song evokes the loud sounds of war. The reason he had chosen it, however, was to issue a plea for peace. “There are no winners in war,” he stated, with reference to the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. “May we all live in peace.”

This was the implicit message of the mu-

sical evening. What the performers from different backgrounds, presenting music from their own and other cultures — and in different languages, as Hauer stressed — communicated was a sense of universality and oneness of the human experience. The selections sung by Hauer that concluded the soiree were in English, *Black Max*, *Waitin* and *Amor* from the Cabaret Songs by William Bolcom (\*1938).

Karapetyan was exuberant when he declared that he “really loved Gershwin and jazz,” and had in fact sung in clubs with jazz groups. His spirited rendition of *Somebody Loves Me* by George Gershwin (1898-1937) was the proof. For an encore the enthusiastic audience was treated to the duet, *Some Enchanted Evening* from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*.

It was a warm welcome for Hovhannes Karapetyan, whose program for this season in Wiesbaden includes roles in Rossini’s “Barber of Seville” (Doctor Bartolo), “The Creation” by Joseph Haydn (Raphael/Adam), Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Fidelio” (Don Fernando), and Gyögy Ligeti’s “Le Grand Macabre” (Black Minister).



# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### CALIFORNIA

**DECEMBER 15** — The Getty Center will host a talk about Armenian cultural heritage sites called *Survivor Objects and Captive Sites: Art and Cultural Heritage in Genocide*. This lecture is free with a reservation and will be presented from 4 to 5 p.m. (PST) in person and online at <https://www.youtube.com/c/gettyresearch>. As scholars of genocide have shown, the genocidal process extends beyond the physical extinction of the targeted community to include the erasure, appropriation, or transfer of the community's cultural assets. During the Armenian Genocide and its aftermath, sites associated with Armenian culture, particularly religious sites, were destroyed, repurposed, appropriated, sold or transferred. Some became cultural heritage sites sundered from their connection to any remaining Armenian communities, while certain sacred objects were looted or relocated to museums far from the Armenian homeland. These sites and objects eventually acquire a "second life as heritage" and as works of art. This lecture considers the implications of genocide with the processes of making sites into patrimony and objects into museum pieces. It reflects on extinction and transformation into art and what this portends for art history and museums in the 21st century. 1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 800, Los Angeles. (310) 440-7300 [visitorservices@getty.edu](mailto:visitorservices@getty.edu)

### MASSACHUSETTS

**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](mailto: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:ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**DECEMBER 14** — Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston presents *Dinner Dance With Barteve Garyan*. First time in Boston @ Al Wadi Restaurant, 1249 VFW Parkway West Roxbury. Doors open at 7 p.m. RSVP by mailing checks no later than December 1 to PO BOX 331 Belmont, MA 02478. Tickets \$125. RSVP Arto 857 222 2212 or Garo 617 620 9899

**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).

**DECEMBER 19** — Project Save will host "Holiday Lens and Libations" on December 19, from 6 to 9 p.m. The event will mark the launch of the organization's 50th anniversary. Gathering will take place at the organization's headquarters, 600 Pleasant St., Watertown. RSVP at [projectsave.org](http://projectsave.org) or email [archives@projectsave.org](mailto:archives@projectsave.org).

### RHODE ISLAND

**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.

## Katia Guiragossian

*Dreaming about Dream House of Manouchians*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/MARSEILLE — Born in Paris, Katia Guiragossian has long worked in the French cultural field, combining her interests and training in literature, cinema and journalism. With a master's degree in audiovisual production, she served as an editorial manager at OCS, a television platform specialized in films and series. Her personal commitment is expressed through her first feature film, "Missak et Mélinée Manouchian," which tells the story of her great-uncle and great-aunt, emblematic figures of the foreign Resistance in France.

As a member of the Elysée select committee for the pantheonization of these heroes, Katia is actively involved in the preservation of historical heritage.

Recently, she re-edited the testimony of her great-aunt, Mélinée, enriched with new documents, including unpublished notebooks found in Armenia. Passionate about the transmission of knowledge, she participates in research, conferences and exhibitions, and gives talks in schools to raise young people's awareness of memory and the essential values of our society. Katia was honored to take on the role of godmother of the Fonds Arménien de France's Phonéthon 2023, placed under the banner of Resistance. Deeply attached to her two home countries, she is firmly committed to mobilizing efforts on behalf of Artsakh refugees and promoting solidarity in response to current crises.



Dear Katia, French-Armenian community life is quite vibrant and you are one of its activists. What are your success stories and what should be still done?

Dear Artsvi, first of all, I am grateful to you for highlighting the vitality of the Franco-Armenian community. I completely agree with this vision. I have visited Armenia very regularly for many years, and I can feel the current cultural evolution and vibrancy. More and more initiatives and partnerships are emerging in France and Armenia, and I am delighted about this. I believe that we need to build connections between initiatives that focus on the same topics to pool our active resources. I just had a conversation with a filmmaker friend, Niagara Tonolli, who is currently in Yerevan, and I shared with her my desire to create portraits of artists and artisans as part of my Haylights project, and she mentioned that she had a similar idea.

I also have, through my association Hokisslab, the project of creating an artist residency: the Missak and Mélinée Yerazatoun (Dream House). And, of course, other writing

projects. From my perspective, as long as there are men and women who resist, work, and fight for freedom, there will be heroes.

**You are the great-niece of Mélinée Manouchian, an iconic figure, about whom you made a documentary. Do you have memories of her?**

My grandmother, Armene Cuiragossian, was Mélinée's sister. Yes, I have many memories. My grandmother and I would regularly visit Aunt Mélinée in Paris. We would go to the Belleville market, a long walk with a rolling shopping cart, to buy groceries that we would bring to Aunt Mélinée's home. And, since I loved sole meunière, I would always have my favorite fish dish on market days. I loved observing her apartment, the scattered papers, the books, her entire world. In my documentary *Missak et Mélinée Manouchian*, I share even more memories.

**How was the Manouchian family's reaction when you heard about the governmental decision on entry of Manouchian couple's into the pantheon? What do you think, why it happened?**

It is always delicate to speak on behalf of others, but for this particular question, I believe I can say that the Manouchian family felt especially proud and honored by this decision. Being admitted to the Panthéon is the highest distinction. It means joining, at the heart of the republican temple, those who have made history through their actions, and it means remaining among these great figures for eternity.

The emotion one feels during a ceremony like this is pure and intense. The reasons for a Panthéonization, beyond being entirely deserved, are closely tied to politics and history. Of course. And we all know that moments of crisis within a nation crystallize fears and resentments. It is important, in these challenging times, to come together and reconnect, united, around emblematic figures who carry humanist and universal messages, like Missak and Mélinée do.

**Documentaries usually do not reach large audiences. Your film has been done in a short time. How has the reaction been?**

Yes, documentaries are unique works, especially today when fictional series are spreading everywhere. But documentaries do find their audience, and in the end, people are often quite enthusiastic after a screening because they learn something, and their interest is rewarded in that way. All the documentaries made in the context of this Panthéonization complement each other in the end. Each one highlights a specific angle. As for the one I made, it offers access to history through the lens of personal, intimate stories, and I believe that is what resonates with viewers.

It was made in record time with very limited resources; it's my first feature-length film, and it certainly has many flaws, but it was created with heart and soul. The feedback from the audience tells me that they feel this and are moved by it. Recently, in Los Angeles, two artists I greatly admire

praised my work and expressed their appreciation. Knowing that this film touched them so deeply is the greatest reward for me.

**You travel to Armenia frequently. What brings a third-generation Diasporan to the country with lots of issues?**

Above all, for most people in the diaspora, and for me as well, Armenia represents the missing piece. I am French and proud to be so, and I am Armenian and proud to be so. These two cultures have always coexisted within me, enriching each other. I need both to feel balanced.

Yes, Armenia has problems — serious ones. France also has problems, as does the entire world today. In Armenia, there is a surge of vital energy, almost as if to say: we are alive, like in the poem by Hovhannes Shiraz: "Eternal we are, like our mountains, And you will pass like raging winds." I like to think that the new generation will move beyond what divided us yesterday to focus on what unites us: our love for our culture and our homeland.

**Is Manouchian an outdated topic? Do you have other "heroes" for your next projects?**

In Armenian, there is a saying I am particularly fond of when someone passes away: "He is not dead; he has become eternal." That is also how I feel. Missak and Mélinée are now in the Panthéon, surrounded by their peers. It is a gathering of the greatest souls, and I like to think that they watch over us and inspire us to be worthy of them, a little more each day.

You mention outdated topics—in my film, I talk about history as a symphony, with its abrupt movements and clear upheavals. A topic that was silenced yesterday can suddenly find itself in the spotlight... we never know. But what we do know is that we should never say never.

As I said, I also wish to create a house in Armenia: "Missak and Mélinée Yerazatoun," a place that would hold Missak and Mélinée's dream library and discography and serve as an artist residency for writers, musicians, painters... who would collaborate on major themes such as freedom, commitment, and resistance.

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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## What Will Trump Do with the Armenia-Azerbaijan Negotiation Package?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The Biden administration has actively mediated efforts to normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Armenia and Turkey. These situations are closely linked, whether we like it or not. Outgoing President Joe Biden urged Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to finalize a peace agreement by year-end, likely aiming to boost his reputation as a mediator and dealmaker. If Harris would have won, the Democrats' political course would likely have continued, but this prospect seems doubtful with Trump.

Aliyev probably disregarded Biden's letter, as Azerbaijan is not keen on a peace treaty that would limit his ambitions and constrain his options. Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia urgently needs to sign a peace agreement as quickly as possible.

Afterward, it is likely that the Armenian leadership will focus all resources on domestic political processes, such as organizing elections to legitimize the peace agreement and other painful concessions. These concessions may include renouncing elements of the Declaration of Independence, the symbolic image of Mount Ararat on the Armenian coat of arms, and other national and historical values.

Realistically, two scenarios arise concerning the peace process.

#### Delaying the Peace Agreement

The Trump administration may hesitate to quickly finalize the agreement, as doing so would imply crediting the Biden administration — or at least sharing that credit with the Democrats. Alternatively, Trump could continue negotiations and delay the signing to claim the credit himself, especially as he seeks successful peace narratives and success stories for his record. This delay would also align with Baku's interests, enabling Azerbai-

jan to press Armenia for more while experiencing less external pressure, especially from the US.

#### Limited US Involvement in the South Caucasus

A second scenario involves Trump showing little to no active engagement in the South Caucasus, leaving regional initiatives to Russia, Turkey, and Iran. This scenario also serves Baku's interests since Azerbaijan would not face external pressure and, unlike Armenia, is capable of successfully negotiating with Tehran, Ankara, and Moscow. However, such a scenario could destabilize the region by removing the US as a balancing actor, thereby increasing the influence of the dominant regional powers such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran. This scenario seems more ambitious, particularly if Trump negotiates an agreement with Putin on Ukraine. Such a deal would likely include a comprehensive package addressing their mutual interests and concerns globally, including the strategically important South Caucasus region for Russia.

However, if we look at all this from a more global perspective, particularly in terms of US-Russia relations and in the context of the South Caucasus, there is a further possibility: heightened tensions surrounding Iran potentially may turn the region into a "thoroughfare" with all the associated negative consequences. If Russia and the US fail to reach a consensus on Ukraine, and Washington takes more aggressive actions against Iran, Armenia will face new and profound challenges, particularly in the realm of security. This would be the biggest challenge that Armenia will face after the war in 2020.

Such potential developments will largely depend on the priorities and policies of a Trump-led administration in handling regional and international affairs in general. Predicting future actions is challenging due to Trump's silence on the matter. The situation is further complicated by the recent meeting between Trump and Biden, where Biden reportedly aimed to persuade Trump to support Ukraine. However, shortly after the meeting, Biden authorized the deployment of American long-range missiles against Russia, which Trump's son criticized as an "imbecile decision." This suggests that they did not come to an agreement on this issue.

(Suren Sargsyan is an expert on US foreign policy, researcher and author. He is a graduate of Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Suren Sargsyan is a founder of the Armenian Center for American Studies, a research center based in Yerevan.)

## Azerbaijan Resorts to Lies to Justify Its Unwillingness To Make Peace with Armenia

By Levon Zourabian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

*The following op-ed is a response to an op-ed by Hikmet Hajiyev – the advisor to the president of Azerbaijan – which Newsweek had published on October 16, 2024. As I point out in it, Hajiyev's op-ed was based on a blatant falsehood. One would think that a reputable newspaper like Newsweek would be eager to publish a rebuttal to such a piece if for no other reason than at least to safeguard itself from criticism of its standards. Not only did it refuse to publish it, but it also justified this by saying that it has already published a "handful of responses" to it, which, alas, are nowhere to be found.*

Azerbaijan secured the much-coveted right to host a high-level United Nations Climate Change Conference session, called COP29, in Baku on November 11-22 this year thanks to a diplomatic deal with Armenia, which saw the return of 32 Armenian PoWs from Azerbaijani prisons. The deal, reached on December 7, 2023, was back then seen by the international community as a step towards the final conclusion of a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan after decades of bitter conflict between two countries. Today, almost one year later and a few days before the conference starts, it is increasingly obvious, however, that Azerbaijan's embrace of a diplomatic deal with Armenia was nothing more than tactical maneuvering aimed at cleaning the international posture of the

country after multiple acts of aggression against Armenians since 2020.

With this aim, Azerbaijan has recently started a forceful propaganda campaign to picture the country as the one that spearheads the effort to establish long-lasting peace in the South Caucasus. The country that unilaterally broke a three-decade long ceasefire in 2020 and started a military campaign resulting in the deaths of thousands of soldiers and the complete ethnic cleansing of more than 100,000 Armenians from their historic homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the seizure of 200 square miles of sovereign Armenian territory, now says it is ready for peace.

In a lengthy op-ed published in *Newsweek* on October 16, the foreign policy advisor to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev states that "Peace is within reach" and continues: "Still, there remain major obstacles in our way. First is the Constitution of Armenia, which calls for a joining of Azerbaijan's Karabakh region with Armenia. This constitutional revanchist claim has been an impediment to peace before: In 1996, Armenia's then-president refused to sign the final declaration at an OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] summit, arguing that the Armenian Constitution did not permit the signing of an international document recognizing Karabakh as part of the territory of Azerbaijan."

Hajiyev's assertion has no basis in reality and cannot be left unanswered. As someone who was closely involved in the negotiating process at the time and is well-in-

formed about it, I feel compelled to set the record straight. Here are the real facts:

In 1996, during the OSCE Summit in Lisbon, President [of Armenia Levon] Ter-Petrossian made the following statement during the debate at the plenary session (full address can be found here): "It is our deepest conviction that if the Karabakh issue is resolved based on the principles proposed by Azerbaijan, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh will be under the permanent threat of genocide or forced expulsion. The experience of the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait (February of 1988), Kirovabad (November of 1988), and Baku (January of 1990) as well as the expulsion of the inhabitants of 24 Armenian villages in Karabakh (May-June of 1991) makes it evident that Azerbaijan, despite all of its assurances, is not capable of providing security guarantees for the population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, we believe that the only way of preventing a new tragedy is to respect the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination." As your readers can see, there is no mention of the Armenian Constitution in this statement.

The position of the Armenian delegation is also reflected in the final Lisbon Declaration of the summit as Annex II (page 16). While it speaks about the necessity to respect the right to self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh and states that the proposed solution contradicts the 1992 decision of the OSCE Ministerial Council, it makes no reference to the Armenian Constitution here as well.

continued on next page

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Book Reveals 8,000 Letters By Armenian Survivors of 1890's Turkish Massacres

I just received the first volume of a valuable book published in Yerevan in 2021 that makes public for the first time some of the 8,000 handwritten letters by survivors of the 1894-96 Turkish massacres of 300,000 Armenians in Western Armenia (present-day Turkey), organized by Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

This unique book, authored by Vera Sahakyan and published by the Matenadaran, the repository of ancient manuscripts and documents in Yerevan, reproduces the eyewitness testimonies of 200 Armenian survivors of the Turkish massacres from the 28 villages in the Bulanekh province of the Mush region who had fled to Eastern Armenia. The heart-wrenching letters were sent to Catholicos of All-Armenians Mkrtych Khrimian (1893-1907), known endearingly as Khrimian Hayrig, located in Etchmiadzin, the headquarters of the Armenian Apostolic Church, seeking his compassionate aid for their basic necessities of food and lodging.

The letters of the Armenian survivors were kept for several decades in the archives of Etchmiadzin and subsequently transferred to Matenadaran. The author plans to publish several more volumes in the future to cover the rest of the 8,000 letters. Many of the letters in volume 1 were translated into English by Lucine Minasian.

Here are excerpts from some of the letters written to the Catholicos by the Armenian survivors of the 1894-96 Turkish massacres:

— On October 29, 1896, Yeghiazar Hagopian, a refugee from Bulanekh's Kakarlu village of Mush, wrote: "I was able to flee the barbaric Kurdish killings. Besides totally looting us, they murdered my son, and I barely escaped, only losing the fingers of my right hand. It's already been four months that I have been wandering around here begging for alms.... My family, famished and naked, is impatiently waiting for me back in the homeland. I beseech you to at least grant me some travel money."

— On October 14, 1894, Mardiros Mouradian, an inhabitant from Khoshgaldi village of Lower Bulanekh, wrote: "The unlawful Tajiks [Turks] attacked my lamentable and poor family beating us with stones on the one hand, and fatally shooting my 20-year-old son on the other hand. They pillaged my whole fortune and even disrobed us."

— On July 11, 1895, Parish Priest Hovhannes Der Bedrossian from Molahkant village of Mush wrote: "Being attacked by Kurds and Hamidian troops, we abandoned our homes and possessions and barely fled secretly to Russia to survive. Now, we are wandering poor, delusional, famished... bereft of a single piece of dry bread."

— On January 2, 1896, Hagop Levonians from Bulanekh's Liz village wrote: "Our intention is self-defense -- we appeal to you that you will free

us, our people, and our homeland from the Turkish iron yoke. Hand us a few weapons so we can go and reach our eight friends who have been writing us letter after letter, asking us to reach them soon."

— On January 13, 1897, Mkrtych Haroutyounyan from Bulanekh's Khrishtam Kadouk village wrote: "We barely survived the atrocities...and freed ourselves from the pitiless claws of the furious Ottoman government.... I plead for some rags and some rubles that will cover my travel costs, so I can protect my family from the frost and attain daily sustenance for them during the winter-time."

— On September 30, 1895, Yaghush Mkrtychian (five people) and Yalduz Mardirosian (six people), two widows of refugee families from Bulanekh's Kharakhlo village of Mush, wrote: "Both of us have been widowed for almost two years, as the heads [of our families] were killed by the Kurds. Being frightened, we fled here. They took everything we owned. They didn't leave anything -- neither cattle nor possessions."

--On March 15, 1894, Baghdasar Margosian from Keakarlou village of Mush wrote: "Enduring numerous tortures and sufferings, we could barely free ourselves from death. The unlawful warden released us from prison, demanding 80 pieces of gold. Afterwards, they looted all my movable and immovable property and forcibly imprisoned my son."

— On July 17, 1895, Sahag Garabedian from Hamzasheikh village of Bulanekh Province wrote: "Because of the barbarity committed by the government and the Turks, we left our homeland and fled to Russia. My father died. Now there are five of us, including my old mother. Presently, my family lives in a hut with lice in the Armidlu village."

— On April 19, 1894, Priest Mateos Der Kevorkian from Bulanekh village and Sahag Serovpian from Karakilise village wrote: "Since September 1893, the Kurds and Turks of Turkey have been torturing our Armenians intensely and oppressing them. They have been looting our harvested wheat. They have been pillaging our stored wheat. At nights they commit adultery with our wives and then kill them. When the Armenian laborers come back from abroad, they rob their money and homes and kill them. Eighteen families from Hamzasheikh village were forcibly converted into Turkish religion. Three of them were killed and now there is an order to hang 28 people.... Effendis and aghas forcibly demand 40-50 gold pieces from Armenian peasants or kill them. Prelate Priest Nercess has been sentenced to two years in jail. They forcibly demanded from him 450 gold pieces which were collected by passing a plate [in church] and now he is in prison. Effendis and aghas are forcibly taking over the Armenian villages, harming and torturing people...."

This is a valuable book because it:

- 1) Documents the 1894-96 massacres of Armenians through eyewitness accounts of the survivors;
- 2) Gives present-day Armenians the opportunity to find the names of their ancestors who used to live in Western Armenia;
- 3) Reveals that some of the little-known villages in the region were indeed inhabited by Armenians.

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In fact, the Armenian Constitution has never been referred to by any Armenian delegation in the whole process of the negotiations with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

On October 26 this year the Constitutional Court of Armenia ruled that the Armenian-Azerbaijani agreements on the delimitation of mutual border on the basis of 1991 internationally recognized boundaries do not contradict the Armenian Constitution, once again underlying that no provision in it can be interpreted as containing any territorial claims beyond those boundaries.

All of this clearly demonstrates that Azerbaijan resorts to easily refutable lies in order to justify its unwillingness to make peace with Armenia and to close this tragic page of the history of conflict and war in the South Caucasus once and for all.

Hajiev's other arguments about impediments to peace are no better. His references to "the intensive militarization of Armenia by France and other Western countries" and "the chorus to release warlords who committed heinous crimes against Azerbaijani civilians" as the two other "major obstacles" on the way to peace are no more credible than the excuses about the Armenian Constitution. Whatever Armenia has acquired from France (and I know no other Western country that sells arms to Armenia) is aimed at rebuilding its defenses against an increasingly aggressive Azerbaijan. These acquisitions, incidentally, are dwarfed by

what Azerbaijan is purchasing from Turkey, Israel, Italy, Serbia and Pakistan.

And it is not "the chorus to release" Armenian detainees that actually poisons the atmosphere between the two countries, as Hajiev states, but the refusal by Azerbaijan to release all Armenian POWs in violation of the trilateral ceasefire agreement of November 9, 2020, torturing POWs and keeping the leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijani prison only for their "crime" of exercising the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination.

Azerbaijan has seized more than 200 square kilometers of sovereign Armenian territory in 2022, i.e. two years after the end of major hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh; its official representatives routinely refer to Armenia as Western Azerbaijan sending alarming signals of revisionist intentions toward Armenia; its state propaganda is systematically fueling hatred toward Armenians; its regime persecutes political opponents, which sometimes even takes the form of kidnapping them from countries where they have found refuge or killing them; it violates human rights and basic freedoms of its citizens on a massive scale. Azerbaijan has now become the single most important threat to the security and democracy in the South Caucasus.

A true obstacle to peace.

(Levon Zourabian is vice chairman of the Armenian National Congress and former advisor and chief spokesman to the president of Armenia in 1994-1998)

## Generation AI: Armenia's Experimental Education Project

An experimental Generation of Artificial Intelligence project has been launched in 15 schools across Armenia. This three-year educational program, aimed at students in grades 10-12, started in September 2023. The initiative allows students to dive deep into mathematics, programming (Python), and the basics of artificial intelligence. Participants will also work on practical AI projects to gain essential skills for pursuing further education in the field.

Schools were selected for the program through a competitive process. According to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, the criteria included the quality of English-language instruction, the presence of advanced mathematics clubs, qualified teaching staff, and adequate school infrastructure. The program is being carried out in partnership with the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST).

The program includes 420 high school students from the selected schools.

Elen Davtyan, an 11th-grade student at Yerevan High School No. 198, is among the participants. For the past year, she and her classmates have been studying the Python programming language. This academic year, they also began learning a new subject: "Artificial Intelligence."

She said, "My dream is to master the skills needed to make diseases like cancer and periodic disease curable with the help of artificial intelligence. I am confident that AI will contribute to Armenia's progress and global recognition. I'll do everything I can to help bring that day closer."

Computer vision specialist Alla Barseghyan teaches at schools in Yerevan and Hrazdan. She notes that students show great enthusiasm for studying AI and the Python programming language: "Teenagers view this knowledge as an opportunity to pursue further education in information technology or artificial intelligence. Students with strong math skills, in particular, are eager to deepen their understanding in these areas and gain foundational knowledge while still in school."

Barseghyan aims to provide her students with as much knowledge as possible.

"Artificial intelligence is now applied everywhere. In this technological era, it is see EDUCATION, page 20



COMMENTARY

# Generation AI: Armenia's Experimental Education Project

EDUCATION, from page 20  
crucial to introduce children to AI and its applications from an early age, preparing them to become the creators of future AI models and systems," the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports stated in response to a written inquiry.

The program is expected to equip graduates with foundational knowledge and the motivation to pursue further education in this field. Experts also highlight the significance of launching such an experimental program.

"Armenia already offers undergraduate programs specializing in AI. This project is an attempt to introduce the subject at the high school level, encouraging students to consider careers related to artificial intelligence. It's an important experiment, and significant effort is needed to achieve maximum results and increase the flow of graduates into AI-related professions," says Hrant Khachatryan, head of the Machine Learning Research Group at YSU

and director of the YerevaNN Lab.

The introduction of innovative solutions as part of this program is expected to significantly enhance the effectiveness of Ar-

menia has the potential to position itself as an innovation hub in AI," the Ministry of Education stated.

Hrant Khachatryan, an expert in the

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menia's education system.

"The geopolitical situation and Armenia's limited natural resources demand the adoption of innovation. AI could become the technological tool that unlocks new opportunities for the country's develop-

ment. Armenia has the potential to position itself as an innovation hub in AI," the Ministry of Education stated.  
Hrant Khachatryan, an expert in the field, offers a more cautious view on this vision: "If by innovation hub we mean creating something similar to Silicon Valley, that's likely unrealistic, primarily because of our small population. However, improving the quality and quantity of specialists

in this field could play a significant role in generating value on a global scale."

He is confident that if Armenia can produce a few hundred highly qualified specialists, it will become more attractive to major international companies in terms of investment and collaboration with Armenian talent: "This would represent a global-level achievement and a significant value. It would also strengthen Armenian companies. Currently, we are integrating AI developed by others into our businesses, but with a larger pool of skilled local specialists, we could develop our own advanced technological products. That would benefit both individual companies and the nation as a whole."

Representatives from FAST point to Armenia's long-standing professional potential in this area. They believe that "Armenia has the capability to secure a leading and influential position in global innovation."

At the same time, they acknowledge the current shortage of specialists, which is a critical barrier to Armenia's competitiveness in the global market.

Teaching AI to young people will contribute to the development of various sectors, says educator Barseghyan: "It's crucial to harness these opportunities, particularly in the defense sector. This could be beneficial and might even start during mandatory military service, where conscripts could apply their AI knowledge and skills."

She also highlights the program's potential impact on the economy: "The world is increasingly moving toward digitalization and solving business challenges using AI technologies. If we can cultivate a large pool of specialists capable of addressing business needs through AI, they will not only drive individual business growth but also improve the overall economic health of the country."

### Global Experience and Future outlook

The Ministry of Education notes that international experience is being continuously studied throughout the program's implementation "to maintain its competitiveness and alignment with global trends."

Both organizations driving the program aim to position Armenia as a leader in advanced AI education on the international stage. For example, FAST promoted this vision during UNESCO's "Digital Learning Week" conference held just before the start of the academic year.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, by 2030, approximately 70 percent of organizations will be utilizing AI technologies, enabling significant economic advancements.

The 2023 World Economic Forum (WEF) report predicts a 40-percent increase in demand for AI specialists over the next five years, which will play a key role in transforming industries.

If these predictions hold true, meeting the growing demand for AI professionals will be a major challenge, says Hrant Khachatryan, director of the YerevaNN Lab. However, he remains confident that the coming years will be decisive—not just for Armenia, but for any nation: "The global need for AI specialists will only continue to expand. It's vital to train a large number of highly qualified professionals to position Armenia effectively and ensure its active role in the sector's development. The country that trains the most specialists will claim the largest 'share' of the market."

(This analysis originally appeared on www.jam-news.net on November 22.)



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