

Armenian Ambassador  
Alleges Azerbaijani  
Counterpart  
Threatened to Kill Him  
In Brussels Bust Up

By Max Griera and Gabriel Gavin

BRUSSELS (Politco.eu) — The Armenian Embassy has lodged a formal protest with other diplomatic missions in Brussels after its ambassador claimed to have been on the receiving end of death threats from his Azerbaijani counterpart.

A letter circulated to envoys last week, seen by POLITICO, alleged that Armenian Ambassador Tigran Balayan was “verbally attacked and intimidated” by Azerbaijani Ambassador Vaqif Sadiqov, who “voiced explicit threats against his life.”

The incident is said to have happened at a reception at the Tangla Hotel in Brussels, hosted by the Turkish Embassy in honor of the country’s national day. It is understood to have been the first Ankara-sponsored engagement the Armenian Embassy had been invited to since a 2020 war between the country and Azerbaijan, a close ally of Turkey.

However, speaking to POLITICO, Sadiqov denied the incident had taken place, saying such allegations were “becoming ridiculous.” According to him, the reception had “good food, nice people” and was a “standard diplomatic event as usual.”

“I am not aware of any letter or allegation — Armenian diplomats can claim whatever they want,” he added.

The Armenian Embassy declined to comment further on the exchange. The Turkish Embassy did not immediately reply to a request for information.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have been bitter foes since the fall of the Soviet Union, fighting a series of wars since the 1990s over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh that left hundreds of thousands displaced on both sides.

A 44-day conflict in 2020 saw Azerbaijan take back control of swathes of Armenian occupied territory and, in September last year, Azerbaijani forces began a final assault on the mountainous area that triggered a mass exodus of its 100,000 ethnic Armenian residents, sparking allegations of ethnic cleansing.

The European Parliament has consistently called on Azerbaijan to respect the rights of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, as well as condemning Azerbaijan’s domestic human rights record.

A growing row between Brussels and Baku over its crackdown on activists and journalists has ignited in recent weeks, just as Western leaders prepared to fly to the country for critical climate

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Dadivank Monastery , Nagorno-Karabakh, October 22.

UNESCO Concerned about Fate of  
Cultural Heritage in Karabakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) has been the focus of UNESCO for many years and the organization is concerned about the reports on alleged destruction of various types of cultural heritage there, Krista Pikkat, director of the UNESCO Culture and Emergencies Entity and Secretary of the 1954 Hague Convention and its two protocols (1954 and 1999) said while in Yerevan on October 30.

Asked on the UNESCO position regarding the fact that Azerbaijan has been destroying the Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh since it took control of the region in 2023, Pikkat said, “The region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been at the center of UNESCO’s attention for many years already. We have received reports from all different concerned parties about the alleged destruction of different kinds and different cultural properties of different origin. So that’s why UNESCO has been monitoring the situation with concern.”

Pikkat said that during the previous conflict the UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay wanted to immediately dispatch a technical mission to the region to take stock of the situation and to understand the needs how UNESCO can help to preserve and protect the diverse heritage.

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UNESCO Official Krista Pikkat

Bilateral Talks Between Armenia, Azerbaijan  
On Regional Unblocking ‘Possible’

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan has indicated that discussions on regional unblocking between Yerevan and Baku may continue in a bilateral format, potentially excluding Russia.

“Everything is possible. We are

moving bilaterally, making small, very small steps towards a positive result, and everything is possible,” he stated in parliament on Monday, November 4, but provided no further details.

On Friday, November 1, Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan and Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev met primarily

to address border delimitation and demarcation, but also touched upon transport links, according to an official press release by the Armenian government.

Grigoryan’s office did not respond to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service immediately on November 4 when asked if discussions could shift to a bilateral

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155th Anniversary  
Of Gomidas  
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Women Filmmakers  
Empowered and  
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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Markey Says Azerbaijan Should be Held Responsible for War Crimes

WASHINGTON (Panorama.am) — In a post on November 4 on the platform previously known as Twitter Massachusetts Sen. Edward Markey said the upcoming COP29 climate gathering in Baku should be used to hold Azerbaijan accountable for war crimes

“We have a moral obligation to use COP29 to shed light on Azerbaijan’s war crimes against the Armenian people and hold the Azerbaijani government accountable — Azerbaijan must release all of its political prisoners,” he posted on Monday.

### Travel Agency Deletes Post Claiming Lori is Georgian

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Georgian travel agency Adjara Voyage has deleted its social media post describing Armenia’s Lori Province as “historical Georgia.”

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, who shared the post on her Facebook page, has not deleted the content, which is currently marked as unavailable.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry has not publicly reacted to Zourabichvili’s move.

“The post has been removed. We have no other comments to make,” the ministry said on November 5.

The post by the tour operator, called Adjara Voyage, described Armenia’s Lori as “historical Georgia.”

### Increased Citizenship Applications Prompt Digitized Process

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The government plans to make changes in the citizenship application procedures.

The services will be digitized and the fees for applying for/or revoking citizenship will be revised.

According to Armen Ghazaryan, the Director of the Migration and Citizenship Service, the move will significantly improve the efficiency of the processes.

Speaking with Armenpress, Ghazaryan presented data showing the overloaded process.

“In the 2000s there were about 3,000 to 4,000 citizenship request applications, and since 2018 the number of applications for Armenian citizenship has abruptly increased. This indicator reached its highest point in 2022, surpassing 25,000. In 2023 the pace decreased a little, amounting to 19,000. In 2024, in the nine months, we already have 16,060,” Ghazaryan said.

Citizens will upload their documents in the system instead of in-person visits to various agencies or departments. The applicants will make an appointment and visit the administrative body only once, after the application is approved and all necessary data uploaded.

The changes will take place 10 months after they are passed by parliament.

# Bilateral Talks Between Armenia, Azerbaijan On Regional Unblocking ‘Possible’

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format, suggesting a written request be sent instead.

Previously, Grigoryan and Mustafayev addressed regional unblocking in a tripartite format that included their Russian counterpart, Alexei Overchuk. This format was established under the Moscow-brokered 2020 ceasefire agreement that ended fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and outlined Russian control over a transport corridor through Armenia connecting mainland Azerbaijan to its western enclave of Nakhichevan. However, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly ruled out any Russian presence along this potential route, emphasizing Armenia’s need to maintain sovereignty over any transport links passing through its territory.

As a reflection of the current situation, the Armenian-Russian-Azerbaijani working group on regional unblocking has not convened for over a year now. Grigoryan noted two weeks ago that the lack of consensus was the primary reason for the group’s inactivity. “Until there is such a consensus, it makes no sense to continue discussing the details,” he remarked.

Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held bilateral talks on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 24, where they reportedly discussed the restoration of specific

cargo transportation. However, Parliament Speaker Simonian declined to provide details on these discussions. “I’d ask you to approach it with understanding and not to expect too much information from me or our other officials, as it could harm the process,” he cautioned.

The opening of a railroad was actively discussed between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2021-22 and the discussions were then mediated by Russia. The Armenian government had estimated the construction cost at \$200 million but insisted that formal agreements must be reached before any work begins.

Local Government Minister Gnel Sanosyan on November 4 offered limited insights into the current negotiations, putting emphasis on Yerevan’s vision of regional connectivity summarized in the government’s Crossroads of Peace project. He highlighted discussions about the Meghri, Yeraskh, and Ijevan sections — previously operational infrastructures that are currently inactive.

Without specifying amounts, Sanosyan mentioned that preliminary calculations have been made, and added that once concrete agreements are reached, these will be finalized, including construction timelines and budget planning. “We don’t see any problem. The Armenian government has the capacity to implement such large projects. In implementing such projects, coun-

tries often attract credit funds as well,” he noted.

Despite four years of negotiations on unblocking transport links, no significant progress has been achieved. Armenia opposes the extraterritorial logic of a potential road through its southern Syunik region, while Azerbaijan insists on unimpeded access to Nakhichevan via what it calls the “Zangezur Corridor.” An official in Baku said in August that this disagreement prompted the parties to remove the issue from ongoing peace talks by mutual consent.

Nevertheless, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan announced in parliament last week that proposals for unblocking transport links had been sent to Baku, although he did not clarify if this occurred before or after the issue was taken off the table in peace negotiations. He revealed that the proposals aim to simplify border crossing and customs procedures.

Rustam Badasyan, head of Armenia’s State Revenue Committee, explained the implications of these proposals, indicating that advance information exchange between the two countries could facilitate smoother processes. “For example, we have experience with Georgia where we exchange our export data in advance, making the import phase easier,” he said, adding that scanner images could also be exchanged beforehand.

## Armenia Feels ‘Cautious Optimism’ on Chances of Successful Peace Treaty with Azerbaijan

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenian top officials are optimistic about reaching an agreement on the remaining unsolved issues in a yet unsigned peace treaty, following a meeting of Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders in Kazan last week.

“Now we have an understanding that there are one-two more [details] around which we will continue the work. This is a normal negotiation process,” said Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan at the parliament on Thursday, October 31.

He expressed “cautious optimism” that soon they would succeed in agreeing on those issues, after which the treaty “will be ready for signing”.

Mirzoyan’s statement came after Pashinyan and Aliyev held talks last week at the BRICS summit in Russia. The leaders instructed their foreign ministers to finalise a peace deal “in the shortest possible period”. Other details of the meeting were not made public.

On Wednesday, October 30, Arayik Harutyunyan, Pashinyan’s chief of staff, said such contacts were “useful” and stated that the Armenian government “sees opportunity” to resolve the outstanding issues in the peace treaty.

However, he refrained from commenting if Azerbaijan accepted Pashinyan’s offer to finalise the peace agreement ahead of the COP29 summit.

“If there is a need for new meetings, there will be,” said Harutyunyan.

On Thursday, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov told the UK Foreign Ministry official Stephen Doughty that “there is serious progress in the process of negotiations on the peace agreement” and that work is being carried out on the agreement.

He reiterated that “territorial claims” against Azerbaijan in the constitution of Armenia are the main obstacle in the process.

### COP29 and other issues

Earlier this week, Deputy Foreign Minister Paruyr Hovhannisyan suggested that Mirzoyan could represent Armenia at COP 29 in Baku scheduled to be held between 11–12 November. Azerbaijan earlier announced that an invitation had been sent to Mirzoyan.

However, Armenia has not yet officially announced its decision on whether it will actually participate in the summit.

Azerbaijani sources stated this week that Mirzoyan might possibly participate. The unofficial sources claimed that Azerbaijan could possibly release some Armenian prisoners during the event.

Mirzoyan has not ruled out Armenia’s participation, but said that “we must understand what it is about,” hinting that the release of Armenian prisoners could be part of their decision.

The day before Mirzoyan’s statement, Harutyunyan noted that Armenia’s decision would depend on various developments, including “serious progress within the framework of the peace treaty”.

In another development following the latest bilateral meeting, after Armenia’s ratification, Aliyev signed a regulation that would allow the demarcation process with Armenia to move forward.

At the parliament, Mirzoyan praised “very tangible results” that had been achieved in the delimitation process. He noted that soon the sides would officially notify each other of the regulation taking effect.

“After which I hope the delimitation works will continue,” Mirzoyan said, add-

ing that no obstacles are presently visible.

Mirzoyan also touched upon the issue of unblocking transport and logistic connections, noting that there is “some positive atmosphere”.

“We have conveyed proposals to the Azerbaijani side which have been welcomed in a semi-official way,” he said, adding the two sides would continue to work on a mutual understanding on issues for which “it is possible to reach a general agreement at this stage”.

### Turkey–Armenia Relations

Mirzoyan stated that the number one priority of Armenia’s foreign policy is to ensure peace and stability around Armenia, as well as the normalisation and development of relations with neighbouring states.

In response to a question from an opposition MP, Mirzoyan said that the Armenian Genocide international recognition process “is not our number one priority”.

The Armenian Genocide orchestrated by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923 resulted to the mass killings of nearly 1.5 million Armenians living in Western Armenia — modern-day eastern Turkey.

The Armenian Genocide is one of the main stumbling blocks in Armenia’s relations with Turkey, which as the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, denies that the genocide took place.

Mirzoyan noted that Armenia and Turkey have a “dynamic” and “positive” dialogue, and expressed optimism for progress “in the near future”.

Mirzoyan said that Turkey conditions its relations with Armenia with the Armenia–Azerbaijan normalisation process, which Armenia assesses is “not a very constructive approach”. He noted that Armenia holds talks with Turkey “without preconditions.”



ARMENIA

# Armenian Churches Urge World to Pray for Hostages

H.H. Catholicos Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, asked for people to join the prayer for Armenian hostages on November 10.

“We are convinced that such a global prayer held by the World Council of Churches will encourage the participation of Christian communities, diplomatic missions, media representatives, and all relevant international organizations,” said Catholicos Karekin II. “It is our sincere hope that this spiritual effort will raise global awareness of this ongoing humanitarian crisis and will promote a peace-bearing solution, based on truth and justice.”

Answering this call, the World Council of Churches (WCC) is inviting all people of good will to join a prayer day for Armenia — for peace, for support for refugees, and the release of war hostages—on November 10, the day before the opening of the COP29 climate talks in Azerbaijan.

The military aggression against the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh in September-October 2020, followed by

the ten-month-long total blockade of the Lachin corridor and the forced displacement of around 120,000 Armenians from their ancestral lands in September 2023, remains a critical concern.

Catholicos Aram I, Armenian Orthodox Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, joined in calling for a day of prayer.

“We urge all faith communities, international bodies, and people of good will to join us in prayer, while strengthening efforts to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners of war, still detained in Baku, Azerbaijan,” he said. “We remind the international community preparing to meet in Baku for COP29, that justice and peace are closely interconnected and cannot be separated. We cannot call for climate justice without condemning violations of human rights.”

COP29 presents a unique opportunity to advocate for the unconditional release of the 23 Armenian hostages, as well as the Azeri political prisoners and journalists detained in Azeri jails.

WCC moderator Bishop Dr. Heinrich

Bedford-Strohm reflected that Armenia needs our prayers. “Christian faith has accompanied the Armenian people since the beginnings of the Armenian Apostolic Church in 301 AD,” he said. “The future is unclear.”

Bedford-Strohm reflected that God will accompany the people of Armenia, and we can join God in accompanying them through our prayers. “Our prayers will reach their hearts and souls and strengthen them,” he said.

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay invited all churches to join the call to prayer, and also urged continued support from the international community.

“We remain in prayerful solidarity with the Armenian Apostolic Church and ecumenical partners in Armenia,” he said. “We reiterate our call for a just and sustainable peace in full compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law.”

The WCC will organize a local prayer service in St Pierre Cathedral on November 10 at 5 p.m. CET Geneva in collaboration with the Armenian community.

# UNESCO Concerned About Fate of Armenian Heritage In Karabakh

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“The discussions on the dispatch of the mission, the composition and also what will be the focus of the mission was laid at the highest level with the concerned parties. Now that the situation has changed, this mission can no longer be dispatched under the 1954 Hague Convention. We are discussing now with the Azerbaijani authorities also how we can support them,” Pikkat said.

Pikkat added that taking into consideration that the Nagorno-Karabakh population fled to Armenia, UNESCO sent a mission to Armenia last year to offer support and help, and to make sure that the community’s needs are met in terms of education, as well as from the psychosocial perspective.

The mission also tried to understand how they can support the intangible cultural heritage. “We would like to propose to the Armenian authorities that we start with what we call a community-based inventorying of this intangible cultural heritage, practices of these communities. It is very important for us to have the community discuss whichever practices and traditions and customs they need to preserve and be more aware of that, and if necessary, if there are traditions that are on the verge of disappearing, also to seek measures how to keep these traditions alive. So UNESCO is very much eager to work with these communities and authorities to provide any possible support we can in the framework of our normative instruments in the field of culture.

Asked whether she believes Azerbaijan could agree to a UNESCO monitoring group visit to inspect and protect the ancient Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, Pikkat repeated that the organization is in discussions with Baku.

“We are in discussions with the Azerbaijani authorities. But I would also like to mention that the 1954 Hague Convention has an ad-hoc monitoring mechanism that was put in place, and that can be triggered by any member state. So, it is also the decision of the member states and the committee how UNESCO can engage and support the countries,” she said.

# Human Rights Watch Criticizes Armenian Surveillance Bill

By Heghine Buniatian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian government’s bill for the mandatory installation of video surveillance systems with 24-hour police access throughout the capital, Yerevan, is unjustified and interferes with privacy and other rights, Human Rights Watch said on Thursday.

The bill, which passed its first parliamentary review in June, requires private entities in Yerevan to install surveillance cameras and provide police with live feed and access to recordings on demand.

“Widespread, indiscriminate video surveillance would inevitably lead to unjustified intrusions on privacy and cannot be defended as a measure necessary to improve public security in a democracy,” said Giorgi Gogia, associate Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

“Mass surveillance in public spaces would have a chilling effect on fundamental civil and political rights,” he added.

The systems in question collect personal data related to individuals’ identities, movements, and associations, and therefore should be subject to clear limitations to protect the right to privacy and other rights, Human Rights Watch said, stressing that a number of international bodies, including the UN Human Rights Committee,

the European Court of Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have provided clear assessments on this issue.

Earlier, Armenia’s Data Protection Agency also criticized the bill, as did the Justice Ministry, the Ombudsperson’s Office, and the Central Bank of Armenia.

“However, the government remained undeterred by these criticisms and slated the bill for a parliamentary vote this year,” the New York-based watchdog said.

Human Rights Watch said that in August it addressed letters to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Interior Minister Vahe Ghazaryan and Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan, seeking clarifications over the controversial legislation. However, according to the organization, it has not received any replies.

Human Rights Watch also reminded that during the debate over the bill officials also did not rule out the use of artificial intelligence (AI) video analytics to monitor the recordings.

“When facial recognition technology is used on a large number of people, even low rates of error may result in the inaccurate flagging of hundreds of individuals,” the UN high commissioner on human rights said earlier.

Human Rights Watch, on its part,

stressed that “the mere existence of video surveillance in public areas can have a chilling effect on fundamental rights, such as freedoms of assembly, association, and expression, as well as the right to privacy” and that “using artificial intelligence to review widespread surveillance would heighten those risks.”

“It is clear that the proposed surveillance bill is inconsistent with Armenia’s international obligations. The government should rescind the legislative initiative or at least pause its adoption until it addresses the concerns raised by local and international actors,” said Gogia, emphasizing that sending the bill for the Venice Commission analysis would be “a critical first step.”

Armenian government officials did not respond to the criticism immediately.

The bill in question was posted on the government’s website in December 2022, but the government only greenlighted it in April 2024. The Armenian parliament is expected to vote on the bill before the end of the year.

# Pashinyan Unveils New Police Reform Plan For Armenia, Aims to Build Public Trust

YEREVAN (Caucasuswatch.de) — On November 1, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan led a [consultation](#) to review the draft Strategic Plan for Police Sector Reform for 2024-2026 and its corresponding action plan.

The discussion began by evaluating the outcomes of the previous strategy, which included establishing the Ministry of Internal Affairs, launching the Patrol Service, creating an operational management center, and implementing training programs for patrol personnel.

The proposed action plan under the new strategy aims to enhance the quality of public services delivered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, finalize the police management structure, and introduce a fresh institutional approach to human resource management. Planned initiatives include launching the Criminal Police, Community Police, and Police Guard with updated

structures and functions and developing a unified national operational management center.

In addition, the strategy outlines efforts to improve the educational environment, training, and professional development for police personnel, strengthen the Patrol Service, ensure the rights of individuals deprived of freedom, and prevent mistreatment.

The meeting also highlighted recent independent public surveys assessing trust in the Police. According to the 2024 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) survey, public trust in the Police stood at 72 percent, while surveys by the International Republican Institute (IRI) reported 58 percent in 2023 and 62 percent in 2024. Pashinyan underscored the importance of effective reform implementation and the need for ongoing, consistent efforts to raise public trust in the Police.

# Official Says Dialogue Continues with Turkey on Kars-Gyumri Railway

YEREVAN (News.am) — Gnel Sanosyan the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Armenia, told reporters at the National Assembly Monday that he met with his Turkish counterpart, Abdulkadir Uraloglu, within the framework of the International Transport Forum.

Sanosyan noted on November 4 that they used this opportunity as ministers of the transport sector and infrastructure to talk about existing opportunities, infrastructure that is not used, and the opportunities they can open for the countries and the region if they are used.

“We talked about the Crossroads of

Peace [of Armenia] project. We can assess that it was quite a good and productive discussion,” he said.

Sanosyan added that they talked about all existing non-functioning infrastructure, including the Gyumri-Kars railway.

“There are preliminary ideas as to how long the restoration work may last, and there is also an idea of how much financial resources will be required for it,” said the minister.

If the general discussions go forward, then according to Sanosyan, those preliminary thoughts and calculations will be concentrated, they will be given the shape of a project and will be implemented.

## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## ICRC Visits Armenian Captives in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited in October the detained Armenians in Azerbaijan, ICRC Armenia Communications and Prevention Manager Zara Amatuni said Monday, November 4.

“All detained Armenians who are in Baku and whose names have been confirmed by the Azerbaijani authorities were included in the visits,” Amatuni said.

The POWs contacted their families during the ICRC visit.

Azerbaijan has acknowledged that it is holding 23 Armenian POWs. They include also the former Nagorno-Karabakh politicians, former presidents Arkady Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan, Arayik Harutyunyan, as well as former State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, Speaker of Parliament Davit Ishkhanyan, former Defense Army commander Levon Mnatsakanyan, former Foreign Minister Davit Babayan and former deputy commander of the Defense Army Davit Manukyan.

## Head of the European Commission Will Not Attend COP29 Summit

YEREVAN (Euronews) — A spokesman for the European Commission has confirmed that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will not attend the COP29 climate summit in Azerbaijan, after UN sources told Euronews that the presidents of France and Russia will not go.

Earlier, Euronews also reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron would also not attend, citing sources close to the UN.

More than 100 heads of state and government have already confirmed their presence in Azerbaijan. Leaders of the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain have announced their participation.

## Putin: Moscow Is Doing Everything to Normalize Baku-Yerevan Relations

YEREVAN (News.am) — Russia is doing everything to normalize relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during the ceremony of handing credentials, TASS reported on November 5.

“Our [i.e. Russia’s] collaboration with Armenia and Azerbaijan is being built in this spirit. We have done and are doing everything for the normalization of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations, for the establishment of strong peace in Transcaucasia. We will continue to support the signing of the peace treaty, the delimitation of the state border, and the unblocking of economic and transport communications [between Armenia and Azerbaijan], in line with the well-known high-level trilateral agreements of 2020 to 2022,” Putin said.

## Trump Told Turkey’s Dictator He Could Invade Syria, Dozens of Civilians Died

By Dan Friedman

Five years ago, Donald Trump told Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan to go ahead and invade Syria — an unexpected capitulation to personal pressure from the Turkish strongman that upended US policy, allowing Turkish attacks on Kurdish fighters seen as staunch US allies.

Trump’s green light to Erdogan during an October 6, 2019, phone call forced US troops in Syria to hastily flee from posts near the Turkish border and shocked Washington, drawing bipartisan condemnation of the president’s decision.

The Turkish troops who invaded went on to display “shameful disregard for civilian life, carrying out serious violations and war crimes, including summary killings and unlawful attacks that have killed and injured civilians,” Amnesty International charged. News reports said at least 70 civilians were killed while hundreds of thousands of people were displaced by the invasion.

The okay to invade was one of various ways that Trump helped Erdogan while in office. Trump intervened with the Justice Department to aid a Turkish national bank, Halkbank, which was accused of helping Iran evade US sanctions. Prosecutors have argued the bank helped to finance Iran’s nuclear weapons program. The case against the bank implicated allies of Erdogan, who had authorized the sanctions-evasion scheme, a witness in the case said. Under personal pressure from Erdogan, Trump also pressed his advisers, including DOJ officials, to drop a case against the bank built by prosecutors in the Southern District of New York, according to accounts of former Trump administration officials.

Geoffrey Berman, at the time the US attorney in Manhattan, later said in a book that he received pressure from acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker in 2018 and that Whitaker’s successor, Bill Barr, pressed him to settle the case on terms favorable to Halkbank. Berman charged

that Barr urged him to grant immunity to Turkish officials with ties to Erdogan and suggested hiding those deals from a federal court—a step Berman said would be illegal. Berman and Barr did not respond to requests for comment.

Turkey’s invasion of Syria, oddly, caused problems Halkbank. The criticism Trump faced for allowing Erdogan to invade appeared to embarrass the US president. He responded by attempting to reverse course. In a bizarre public letter, he threatened to “destroy” Turkey’s economy. “Don’t be a tough guy,” Trump wrote. During this spat, Trump and his advisers, including Barr, dropped their opposition to indicting Halkbank. Berman later recounted that Trump’s “falling out” with Erdogan resulted in a “green light to indict Halkbank. And we did it within 24 hours.”

Trump’s approval of Turkey’s invasion of Syria, and his reaction to the criticism it drew, has received limited attention during the 2024 campaign. But it highlights several of Trump’s weaknesses in managing US foreign policy.

Though he casts himself as an effective negotiator, in office Trump consistently accommodated autocrats, offering concessions without winning concomitant benefits, former aides said. “He would interfere in the regular government process to do something for a foreign leader,” John Bolton, Trump’s former national security adviser, told the Times in 2020. “In anticipation of what? In anticipation of another favor from that person down the road.”

Bolton wrote in a book that Trump in 2019 told Chinese President Xi Jinping that his decision to detain Uighur Muslims in concentration camps was “exactly the right thing to do” and urged Xi to “go ahead with building the camps.” In another meeting that year, Bolton wrote, Trump “pleaded” with Xi to help Trump’s electoral prospects by purchasing US soybeans and wheat. Trump apparently hoped the trade would win him votes in rural states hurt by his

trade war with China.

This tendency to appease autocrats who flatter him is part of Trump’s personalization of foreign policy, a tendency to make diplomacy about his own interests, rather than those of Americans.

Then there are the conflicts of interest. Trump, in late 2015, acknowledged that “I have a little conflict of interest” in dealing with Turkey, due to his licensing deal that paid him for his name to appear on two glass towers in Istanbul. The 2020 leak of some of Trump’s tax returns revealed that he had in fact received at least \$13 million, including at least \$1 million while he was the president, through the deal. A man who helped broker Trump’s licensing deal later lobbied the Trump administration on behalf of Turkish interests.

If he is elected again, Trump’s business interests will result in similar conflicts with Vietnam, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, among others. Through his family, he would also have business-related conflicts with Albania, Qatar, Serbia, and Saudi Arabia, which has paid \$87 million to a fund set up by Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner.

It is not clear to what extent financial interests—as opposed to flattery or a wish for the approval of autocrats—influences Trump. The problem is that Americans don’t know what interests he follows.

But it is likely that Erdogan expects Trump will be accommodating if he wins, perhaps starting with Halkbank. A federal appeals court recently ruled that the bank’s prosecution can proceed, following the bank’s effort to claim sovereign immunity.

Turkish interests allegedly spent heavily to corruptly influence New York Mayor Eric Adams, who is accused of ordering that Turkey’s 36-story consulate be allowed to open despite safety concerns. If Adams would help fix a fire code issue, what might Trump do for Erdogan?

(This story originally ran in the magazine *Mother Jones* [motherjones.com] on October 31.)

## Turkey’s Interior Ministry Sacks 3 Mayors in Kurdish Majority Southeast

ISTANBUL (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — The government of Turkey on Monday, November 4, sacked three mayors in the Kurdish-majority southeast on alleged terrorism charges, despite Ankara’s efforts to seek a rapprochement with the Kurdish community, [Turkish Minute](#) reported.

In a sweep, the mayors of the southeastern cities of Mardin and Batman as well as Halfeti — a district in the Şanlıurfa province — were removed from their positions and replaced with trustees, the interior ministry said.

All three belong to the Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), the main pro-Kurdish party, and were elected in March’s local elections when opposition candidates won in numerous towns and cities, including Istanbul.

Ahmet Türk won the vote in Mardin, while Gülistan Sönük was mayor of Batman and Mehmet Karayılan represented Halfeti.

In a statement, the ministry outlined a string of allegations against them, from membership in an armed group to disseminating propaganda for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

Since 1984, the PKK has waged a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state that has killed thousand and is listed as a terror group by Turkey and its Western allies.

Kurds make up around 20 percent of Turkey’s overall population.

The DEM Party swiftly denounced the mayors’ removal as “a major attack on the Kurdish people’s right to vote and be elected.”

“The government has adopted the habit of snatching what it couldn’t win through elections through using the judiciary, the police and the trustee system,” it said in a statement on X.

Türk, a prominent Kurdish politician who was dismissed twice before, was in May sentenced to 10 years prison on charges of PKK membership for his alleged involvement in a series of deadly 2014 protests.

At the time, the HDP party — now DEM Party — called for protests over Ankara’s failure to send in troops to protect Kobani, a Kurdish city in northeastern Syria which was being overrun by the Islamic State (IS) group militants.

Writing on X, Türk promised not to give up.

“We will not step back from the fight for democracy, peace and freedom. We will not allow usurpation of the people’s will!”

Türk’s replacement, the Mardin governor, banned protests in the city for 10 days.

## ‘Political Coup’

Their dismissal comes days after another

mayor from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) party was arrested for alleged PKK ties in an Istanbul district and replaced by a trustee.

Ahmet Özer, 64, mayor of Esenyurt district, was arrested on October 30.

Both the CHP and the DEM Party slammed his arrest, denouncing it as politically motivated.

The wave of dismissals came after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed full support for efforts to reach out to Turkey’s Kurds, describing it as a “window of opportunity.”

Over the years, the Turkish government has removed dozens of elected Kurdish mayors in the southeast and replaced them with its own trustees.

Six months ago, the election authority removed DEM Party’s elected mayor in the eastern city of Van and replaced him with the losing candidate from Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP), sparking furious protests.

As a result of the backlash, the winning candidate was later reinstated.

The Turkish government also removed dozens of elected Kurdish mayors in the southeast and replaced them with its own trustees following the local elections of 2019.



INTERNATIONAL

# 155<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gomidas Vartabed Celebrated in Istanbul

ISTANBUL — On the occasion of the 155th anniversary of the birth of Gomidas (Komitas) Vartabed, on Saturday, October 26, a concert was organized in Beyoglu Holy Trinity Armenian Church, at the initiative of the Parish Council of the Balat Holy Archangel Armenian Church.

The guest of honor was a relative of Gomidas, musician Tamar Eskenian, who came from Switzerland.

The Lusavoric Choir also participated in the concert.

The ceremony was presided over by Patriarch Sahak II, accompanied by Archbishop Aram Ateshian.

Mari Kavafyan, the chairwoman of the

board of Balat S. Hreshdagabed Armenian Church, made the opening speech and announced that they planned a cultural event and invited Tamar Eskenian at the suggestion of Besse Kabak. The Lusavoric Choir was invited and took part in the program under the direction of Hagop Mamigonyan, and the concert was organized by the guidance of Very Rev. Fr. Harutyun Damadyan.

Then, Damadyan offered a welcome speech and said that this concert had a unique character. It marked the first time a musician related to Gomidas had given a concert in the region. “Today, we all become part of those unique celebrations. This is the day of the meeting between grandfather and grandchild. The ancestor is Gomitas Vartabet, and the grandchild is the grown-up musician Tamar Eskenian. Noticing this unique initiative, we took it upon ourselves to contact Tamar in a very short time and organize the program of the concert, the songs, for the loving meeting of ancestor and descendant,” said Damadyan.

Then Eskenian and the Lusavoric Choir came on stage. They were joined by Rober Doganay on the piano, and Sevan Garabedian on the Armenian *dhol*. When the choir performed the polyphonic songs, Eskenian played the flute, *shvi* and *duduk*, and sang as well.

One of the memorable moments of the ceremony was when the attendees also sang *Gakavig*, under the direction of Mamigonyan.

Souvenirs were handed over to institutions and people participating in the program.

Mashalian closed the program, discussing the greatness of Gomidas. He also thanked the performers and organizers.

The concert ended with the Lord’s Prayer.



Members of the Lusavoric Choir, conducted by Hagop Mamigonyan, sing as Tamar Eskenian plays the shvi



Very Rev. Harutyun Damadyan



Archbishop Sahak II Mashalian with the performers



A packed hall at the concert dedicated to the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gomidas



## INTERNATIONAL

# UK Lobbyists Accused of ‘Greenwashing’ Azerbaijan ahead of COP Climate Summit

By Luca Amin

LONDON (Democracy for Sale) — A lobbying firm with close links to senior British politicians and the oil industry is being paid \$4.7 million to help Azerbaijan’s authoritarian regime enhance its image ahead of the crucial UN COP climate summit later in November, Democracy for Sale can reveal.

The lobbying giant Teneo, which employs Labour’s former Culture Secretary Ben Bradshaw as well as Boris Johnson’s former business chief, has been awarded the seven-month contract which campaigners claim will help the oil-rich state “greenwash” its reputation.

On November 11, the UN will host its COP29 climate change summit in Baku, the Azerbaijani capital. The choice of Azerbaijan as a host for the summit has been controversial. Its economy is highly dependent on fossil fuels and critics have pointed to the regime’s human rights record including the imprisonment of climate activists.

An investigation by Democracy for Sale in conjunction with the i Paper and SourceMaterial, reveals that as part of the Teneo contract, one of its British consultants will be paid “a monthly fee of \$25,000, plus bonuses totaling \$50,000” while only working on a “part-time basis.”

Teneo’s lobbying team working on the Azerbaijan contract includes Boris Johnson’s former chief business adviser Alex Hickman.

According to US documents, Teneo will provide “media training” and advise on “narrative development” for the hosts of the COP summit. The lobbying firm’s work will be led by its Global Strategy President Geoff Morrell who is a former executive at oil giant BP, which is Azer-

baijan’s biggest foreign investor.

While working for BP, Morrell chided “opportunistic” environmentalists for exaggerating the impact of the company’s Deepwater Horizon explosion, an oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico that killed 11 people and discharged four million barrels of oil into the ocean.

Climate campaign groups have accused Teneo of helping Azerbaijan to “greenwash” its image. Lela Stanley, senior investigator at Global Witness said: “Firms helping petrostates like Azerbaijan ... are complicit in greenwashing.”

“Instead of focusing on glossing up their image, Azerbaijan and its partners should be making fossil fuel companies pay in to the UN’s Loss and Damage Fund. Planet-wrecking polluters should pay for the devastation they’ve caused.”

In addition to its work for the Azerbaijan regime, Teneo has also signed lucrative deals to work with Saudi Arabia and the UAE on other contracts, according to our analysis of US government filings. It also works for some of the world’s leading fossil fuel firms including British Gas owner Centrica and mining giant BHP.

Kathy Mulvey, campaigner at the Union of Concerned Scientists said: “It’s a clear conflict of interest for a PR firm to be paid to serve both oil and gas company clients that are driving the climate crisis and the host country government charged with shepherding the upcoming international climate talks.”

## Crackdown on Human Rights

Azerbaijan has been accused of intensifying its crackdown on human rights and media freedom since the country was made host of the world’s most important climate conference.

Last July, Gubad Ibadoghlu, a political scientist at the London School of

Economics, was arrested while visiting family in Azerbaijan. Ibadoghlu had been a vocal critic of the Aliyev regime.

“The regime’s main purpose is to eliminate those who stand against them. They saw my father as a threat, as a threat to their money, as a threat to their power. That was enough for them to decide that they needed to find a way to stop them,” his son Ibad, 24, told Democracy for Sale on a video call from Sweden, where he lives along with his sister and mother.

Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International said. “Azerbaijan is hosting an international conference on climate justice while actively undermining the main pillars of climate activism – repressing all forms of critical expression and protests and dismantling local civil society.”

Earlier this year, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said that “having oil and gas deposits is not our fault. It’s a gift from God.”

Speaking at a climate diplomacy event in Berlin, Aliyev said that “as the head of a country rich in fossil fuels, of course, we will defend the right of these countries to continue investments and production because the world needs it.”

World leaders, ministers, and negotiators convene at the COP to negotiate and rubber stamp plans to jointly address climate change and its impacts.

Despite hosting the environmental summit, Azerbaijan is planning to ramp up oil and gas production over the next decade, according to a report from a German NGO.

The country, which earns 60 percent of its entire revenue from oil and gas, has also massively increased its gas exports to Europe since the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## Lobbying Links

Founded in 2011 by a former aide to President Bill Clinton and headquartered in New York, Teneo has quickly grown into one of largest lobbying firms in the West.

A major part of Teneo’s growth has come from acquiring smaller lobbying firms including Tulchan Communications, set up by the former Conservative Party Chairman Andrew Feldman. Baron Feldman continues as a lobbyist for Teneo, leading the company’s UK strategy and communication business where clients include Thames Water, Severn Trent and McDonalds.

Shortly after the General Election, the firm also sought to bolster their links to the Labour government by appointing former Labour Cabinet minister Ben Bradshaw as a Senior Advisor.

Although the US documents do not list Bradshaw as one of the individuals working on the Azerbaijan COP contract, when he was hired by Teneo, the firm’s UK chief executive Nick Claydon said: “Ben’s deep insights and experience in helping to understand the priorities and approach of the new Labour administration will be of tremendous benefit to Teneo’s clients around the world.”

Teneo’s senior managing director in the UK is Patrick Loughlan, one of Tony Blair’s former Downing Street special advisors and Labour’s former Director of Policy and Head of Research. The firm’s managing director Robert Fuller also spent six weeks volunteering to help Labour during the recent election campaign.

Both Teneo and the Azerbaijan government declined to comment.

(This article originally appeared on the website [www.democracyforsale.com](http://www.democracyforsale.com) on November 3. Additional reporting by Peter Geoghegan.)

## Azerbaijan: Aliyev All in behind Georgian Dream Election ‘Victory’

President Ilham Aliyev’s regime in Azerbaijan is taking a decidedly partisan approach to political developments in a neighboring state, offering unqualified support for the incumbent Georgian Dream party’s efforts to retain power amid Georgia’s disputed parliamentary elections.

According to information obtained by an independent, Berlin-based Azerbaijani media outlet, Mikroskop Media, Aliyev administration officials issued instructions to pro-government Azerbaijani media outlets, along with government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOS), to praise Georgian Dream’s convincing victory in the October 26 elections. Official results showed Georgian Dream winning 54 percent of the vote and capturing 89 of the 150 legislative seats up for grabs. Opposition leaders say the vote was rigged and refuse to acknowledge the outcome.

The instructions reportedly distributed by Azerbaijani government officials contained a list of talking points covering the Georgian election results. Among the recommended comments were: “Voters voted against war and confrontation, and for peace, progress, and celebration of

national values;” and “The results of the elections are a big blow to the policy of the West in Georgia and the policy of creating dividing lines in the region.”

State-aligned media outlets appear to have dutifully fulfilled the administration’s wishes. For example, the state news agency, Azertag, published an interview with the chair of the National NGO Forum, Ramil Iskandarli, whose comments echoed some of the government-supplied talking points.

“Now it can be said that the result of the held elections is a big blow to the policy of the West in Georgia and the policy of creating dividing lines in the region,” Iskandarli is quoted as saying. “It is no secret that non-governmental organizations operating with financial support from the West supported the opposition and tried to increase pre-election tension. It is known that they also actively participated in the election process.”

Authorities in Baku also urged Azerbaijani media to emphasize the high level of support given by Georgian Azerbaijanis to Georgian Dream. “The vote cast by Azerbaijani voters to the ruling party is 7-8 percent of [Georgian Dream’s] total votes, which shows that they have an important

weight in the elections,” an editorial in the official government newspaper Republic stated. “Our compatriots opposed the pro-Western policy in the country and supported the peace and stability of Georgia. Azerbaijanis living in Georgia are of special importance in the current political arena of the country not only in terms of numbers, but also due to their social scope and influence.”

Shortly after the Georgian Dream-controlled Central Election Commission announced the results, Aliyev congratulated Georgian PM Irakli Kobakhidze on his party’s victory and invited him to Baku.

A shared desire to reduce Western influence in the Caucasus appears to be driving the Aliyev administration’s support for Georgian Dream. Of late, Aliyev has been a vocal critic of the European Union, France in particular, which he accuses of favoring Armenia in the Azerbaijani-Armenian peace process. Georgian Dream, meanwhile, has accused the United States and EU of trying to foment coups and revolutions designed to create a pro-Western puppet state.

Both Azerbaijan and Georgia have also strengthened relations with Russia of late. Russia’s foreign intelligence service chief,

Sergey Naryshkin, visited Baku earlier in October. A readout of Naryshkin’s meetings with Azerbaijani officials noted that among the near-term bilateral goals was “joint work to counter activities by Western special services ... aimed at disrupting the internal political stability of our states.”

Georgian Dream did win the vote in Azerbaijani-majority and other districts populated mostly by ethnic minorities. But questions about irregularities linger. One viral video filmed at an election station in Azerbaijani-majority Marneuli district captured an election official aggressively stuffing a bunch of ballots into the box. The polling station was closed shortly after, and investigation was launched. However, local observers asserted that this was far from an isolated case of fraud.

Prior to the elections in Georgia, state-aligned media in Azerbaijan advocated openly for a Georgian Dream victory. Editorials claimed that an opposition victory would ruin the country and described Georgian Dream as the only option for regional stability.

(This article originally appeared on the website [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on October 30.)



# Community News

## Glendale City Council Demands Action on Armenian Hostages

By Tristan Longwell

GLENDALÉ (Glendale News-Press) — The Glendale City Council adopted a resolution during its meeting on October 22 demanding the immediate release of Armenian hostages held by the Republic of Azerbaijan’s government.

The resolution marks another effort by the city to recognize the ongoing conflict between the Azerbaijan government and the Armenian people of Artsakh.

During a meeting on February 6, the council signed off on a resolution “condemning the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Armenians in Artsakh.”

In 1993, Armenia gained full control over the region and in 1994 Russia arranged a ceasefire deal, leaving Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) independent.

In November 2020, Russia organized another ceasefire deal, which ended the second Nagorno-Karabakh war and established the Lachin corridor, a strip of land connecting the region to Armenia for supplies.

Between 2022 to 2023, the corridor was blocked off for protests and a checkpoint was put in place to intercept military shipments to Artsakh from Armenia.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan forces launched an offensive on Artsakh and claimed to have regained full control of the territory.

Artsakh’s primarily ethnic Armenian population fled in January 2024.

### Council Calls for Action

Mayor Pro Tem Ardy Kassakhian, who requested the resolution be brought to council, said it calls upon the U.S. government and that of Azerbaijan to release the prisoners.

The city’s resolution names several Armenian elected officials and civilians who are reportedly being held captive in Azerbaijan.

“I think it’s important, given the number of individuals we have living in Glendale who are impacted by this humanitarian crisis, this gross violation of human rights against all of the principles that we as Americans stand for, to speak out and call upon our administration and the government of Azerbaijan to do the right thing and support the release of these captives,” Kassakhian said.

Kassakhian said the city’s involvement in the issue is partly related to its Sister City agreement with Martuni.

In September 2022, delegates from Artsakh came to Glendale to sign the agreement and establish a relationship between the city and Martuni in Artsakh, according to a news release.

One of the delegates who visited was Davit Babayan, foreign minister of Artsakh. He is one of Azerbaijan’s hostages, Kassakhian said.

During a meeting in August 2023, the council approved sending aid money to Martuni, according to a news release. In July 2024, the see HOSTAGES, page 8



Victoria Aslanian

## Presentation Armenian Wines Takes Place at St. John the Baptist Armenian Church

By David Lührssen

MILWAUKEE — On Sunday, October 27, Victoria Aslanian from ArmAs Estate gave a presentation and a wine tasting at St. John the Baptist Armenian Church in suburban Milwaukee.

ArmAs Estate has become a leader in Armenia’s wine renaissance, earning some 50 awards worldwide including gold and silver medals at the Mundus Vini wine festival in Germany, silver and bronze at London’s Decanter World Wine Awards and silver and bronze at the Vyno Dienes International Wine Competition in Lithuania. ArmAs has been favorably mentioned in publications ranging from *Wine Enthusiast* to *Forbes* and *Foreign Affairs*.

When her father founded the winery in 2007, the land it now occupies was “400 hectares where nothing existed,” she said. There were no roads, no irrigation ditches, not even running water or electricity. However, she added, the land has excellent terroir, a splendid natural environment for growing wine-producing grapes.

Although Armenia is located far from southern France and other familiar wine-producing regions, it lies along what Aslanian called “the magic line — the 45th parallel,” an ideal climate zone with cold winters and warm summers. The republic’s volcanic soil is also exceptional for growing grapes and the region has an abundance of sunny days.

During the Soviet period, Georgia was designated as the USSR’s wine producing republic and Armenia was given responsibility for brandy, which became one of the Soviet Union’s luxury exports. Armenia’s wine industry was largely ignored until after independence.

ArmAs grows native varieties of grapes, many of ancient origin. Adjacent to its vineyards are apricot, peach and plum orchards, whose fruits contribute to the wine’s unique flavors. The ArmAs Estate is a walled complex complete with a tasting room and a boutique hotel for guests. “The goal was to become one of the region’s best wine destinations,” Aslanian said, with tours taking visitors “from grape to glass.”

see WINES, page 8

## US Senate Candidate Mike Rogers Commits to Join Armenian Caucus

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. — On the evening of Tuesday, October 29, Michigan United States Senate Republican candidate Mike Rogers hosted a meeting featuring special guest US Sen. Tim Scott (R) of South Carolina. The event was attended by Dr. Gary Assarian and Corinne Khederian, Esq.

John Jamian and Corinne Khederian serve as co-chairs of the Michigan Chapter of the Armenian Assembly of America, while Assarian is a member and supporter of the Assembly.

Rogers, a former Congressman and Army veteran, has expressed his support for Armenian causes and communities. At the program, he reiterated his commitment, stating, “I am grateful for the support of the Armenian community throughout Michigan, and I am dedicated to upholding their long history of striving for peace in their homeland. The Armenian people have made significant contributions to American society in business, faith, government, and our communities, and we are all appreciative of their impact.”

The urgency of addressing issues important to Armenia and Arme-



From left, Dr. Gary Assarian, Mike Rogers, Corinne Khederian (not pictured is John Jamian)

nians, along with supporting elected officials who prioritize these matters within the legislative branch, remains a top priority for the members of the Armenian Assembly of Michigan.

At a previous meeting, John Jamian noted that “Mike Rogers committed to joining the Armenian Caucus and serving in any capacity within the Caucus.”

Assarian added, “If Rogers is successful, this will mark the first time that both US Senators representing Michigan are members of the Caucus.”

Corinne Khederian emphasized the importance of support from US Congressional members, stating, “At this pivotal time for Armenians, it is crucial that we have the backing of our Congressional representatives. We are encouraged by Rogers’ support for our community.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

# ‘Khatchkars: Emblematic Art of Armenia’ Lecture by Hrair Hawk Khatcherian

FRESNO — Photographer Hrair Hawk Khatcherian will give a lecture titled “*Khatchkars: Emblematic Art of Armenia*” on Thursday, November 14, at 7 p.m. in the University Business Center (5245 N. Backer Ave.), Alice Peters Auditorium. A reception, from 6 to 7 p.m., will precede the talk, with the Andrew Hagopian Trio performing during the reception.

Khatcherian’s presentation is part of the Grace and Paul Shahinian Armenian Christian Art Series and is co-sponsored by the AGBU Greater Fresno Chapter.



A page from Khatcherian’s book

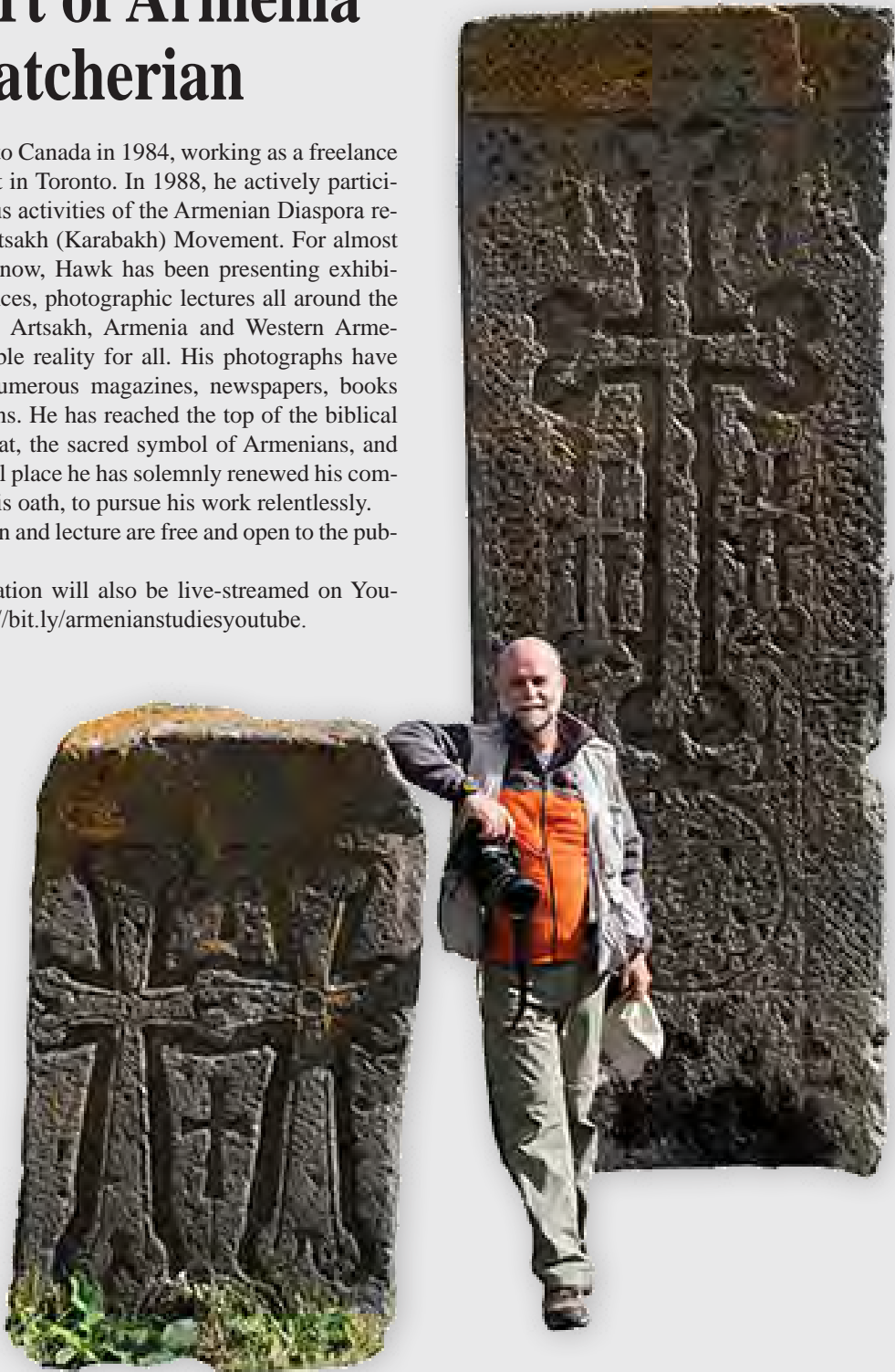
Among the creations of Armenian artistic genius, which gives this nation an important place in art’s universal history, the *khatchkar* (*khatch*, meaning cross; *kar*, meaning stone) is probably the most iconic example of this in Armenia. Khatcherian will present his new book, *Khatchkar: Art and Soul-An Armenian Visual Journey*, and will link the *khatchkar* to images in Armenian manuscript painting. Khatcherian’s new book will be on sale at the lecture.

Khatcherian was born in Lebanon in 1961. In 1982 he earned his wings as a commercial pilot in Hayward, Ca-

lif. He moved to Canada in 1984, working as a freelance photojournalist in Toronto. In 1988, he actively participated in various activities of the Armenian Diaspora related to the Artsakh (Karabakh) Movement. For almost three decades now, Hawk has been presenting exhibitions, conferences, photographic lectures all around the globe, making Artsakh, Armenia and Western Armenia an accessible reality for all. His photographs have appeared in numerous magazines, newspapers, books and publications. He has reached the top of the biblical mountain Ararat, the sacred symbol of Armenians, and in that mythical place he has solemnly renewed his commitment and his oath, to pursue his work relentlessly.

The reception and lecture are free and open to the public.

The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.



## Glendale City Council Demands Action on Armenian Hostages

HOSTAGES, from page 7

council voted to amend the city’s investment policy to prohibit investments of city funds related to Azerbaijan.

Councilman Ara Najarian said the prisoners are not soldiers or mercenaries, they are officials elected by the people of Artsakh. The crisis is a reflection of Azerbaijan for detaining and imprisoning the elected leaders, he added.

“Their only crime was trying to serve their residence. It is very painful to think of these hostages,” Najarian said. “I applaud this motion and this resolution because we really have to do more to free these people who have committed no crime.”

Najarian said he and Bako Sahakyan, former president of Artsakh and a captive, were good friends.

Kassakhian said he and Najarian met with an attorney who is representing and monitoring a lot of the hostages. During a visit to City Hall a few weeks ago, Kassakhian said the attorney detailed some of the hostages’ “harrowing” stories, detailing the negligence, torture and inhumane conditions they have experienced.

Councilman Vartan Gharpetian said the elected officials who are being held captive could have left during early evacuations of “the forced removal of people from their



Glendale Mayor Ardy Kassakhian

native lands,” but they decided to stay and help.

“They decided to stay and make sure that everyone else got out safely ... as many people as they could, and they got captured at the end,” Gharpetian said.

The item’s only public commenter, Mihran Toumajan, a 19-year Glendale resident who is the great-grandson of Armenian Genocide survivors, extended his gratitude to the city for proposing the resolution. He said despite the ceasefire agreement from 2020, the Azerbaijan regime continues to hold hostages.

Mayor Elen Asatryan was not present to take part in the discussion.

## Presentation Armenian Wines Takes Place At St. John the Baptist Armenian Church

WINES, from page 7

When ArmAs began, “no market existed for Armenian wine. We created it,” Aslanian said. The winery’s line of a dozen varieties of red, white and rose, are available at Michelin five-star restaurants around the world and Total Wine outlets in California. She stressed her winery’s economic impact in agricultural development, job creation



Oscar Tatosian

and tourism as part of the republic’s goal of transitioning from “aid to trade.”

Archeology as well as biblical narratives suggest that Armenia was the world’s original vineyard with wine production beginning as long ago as 6,100 years. The rise of Armenia’s wine industry is an example of “our nation’s resilience and capability in the face of many challenges,” Aslanian



AramAs Wine

added.

The ArmAs wine tasting and sale was organized with the help of Armenia’s honorary consul in Chicago, Oscar Tatosian.



## OBITUARY

## Garabed ‘Chuck’ Hayatian

### Top Republican Who Once Held Big Power in Trenton

By Brent Johnson

TRENTON (NJ.com) — Former New Jersey Assembly Speaker Garabed “Chuck” Haytaian, one of the leading figures of the Republican wave that took over Trenton in the 1990s and an influential lawmaker for more than two decades, has died at age 86, state officials said Friday, November 1.

A cause of death is unclear, though Haytaian reportedly suffered health issues in recent months, officials said.

A lawmaker from the northwestern corner of the state, Haytaian was both affable and blunt, loyal to his party, and sometimes combative with the press — a precursor of sorts to some modern politicians.

Haytaian assumed the top post of the state Legislature’s lower house in 1992 as Republicans took control of both chambers in a voter revolt over Democratic Gov. Jim Florio’s \$2.8 billion in tax increases. Republican Christie Whitman ousted Florio in

the next gubernatorial election.

Haytaian later ran for U.S. Senate in 1994, when he unsuccessfully tried to unseat Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg, falling by only 3 percentage points. Haytaian was then chairman of the New Jersey Republican Party from 1995 to 2001.

“New Jersey has lost a giant, and I have lost a dear friend,” Assembly Minority Leader John DiMaio, a fellow Warren County Republican, said in a statement. “Chuck was the heart and soul of New Jersey politics. His tireless commitment to this state inspired everyone around him, including me.”

Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, said Haytaian had a “storied career of service to New Jersey,” becoming “a household name across the Garden State.”

Haytaian was born in the Bronx in 1938 to parents who were survivors of the Armenian Genocide. He later worked several odd jobs to pay his way through college



Chuck Haytaian, R-Warren, was speaker of the state Assembly from 1992-96. Star-Ledger file photo

and ultimately received his degree in electrical engineering from the University of Alabama. He worked at several engineering firms but also ran a dry cleaning business for 16 years.

Politics beckoned in the 1970s. Haytaian was elected to the Mansfield school board and then a Warren County freeholder in 1976. He was elected to the Assembly four years later, in 1981.

Haytaian later was both majority and minority leader of the chamber before becoming speaker in 1992 — a position he held for four years, until 1996. During his time in the job — one of New Jersey’s highest-ranking — Republicans controlled both the governor’s office and Legislature in the now-blue state.

As speaker, Haytaian helped usher through Whitman’s income tax cuts, led a battle to roll back the state sales tax by a cent, and fought for the nation’s first legally mandated Holocaust education program.

But Haytaian lost his 1994 U.S. Senate bid to Lautenberg, then a two-term senator, even though Republicans — two years into Democrat Bill Clinton’s presidency — took control of Congress for the first time in 40 years.

“I truly hope for the people of New Jersey and the people of the United States that Sen. Lautenberg has learned from this campaign that people want the government to cut spending, cut taxes and fight crime,” Haytaian said after his loss. “And most of all, they don’t want the government wasting their money.”

After that race, Haytaian declined to see a seventh term to the Assembly and instead became head of the state GOP. He ran for Assembly again in 2003 but finished third in the Republican primary.

When Haytaian left the speakership in 1996, Whitman praised him for having “delivered on an agenda.”

“He is a man of his word,” the then-governor said.

Haytaian’s exit, though, was mired in controversy. In 1996, Beth Herbert, a legislative staffer, sued Haytaian for sexual harassment, claiming he kissed and fondled her several times between 1994 and 1995. Haytaian denied the allegations countersued her for defamation.

Both suits were dropped when the state paid Herbert a \$175,000 settlement. The state also paid \$170,000 in legal fees to defend Haytaian.

## Ann Shakeh Tarvezian

### Devoted Wife, Mother and Grandmother

WALTHAM, Mass. — Ann Shakeh Tarvezian (82) of Waltham, formerly Belmont, Mass., passed away on October 29, after a long illness, surrounded by family.

She had been married to Richard Tarvezian for 50 years. She was the mother of Talene Tarvezian Choly and her husband, Andrew, of Watertown; grandmother of Theodore Tarvezian Choly and the late Ani Tarvezian Choly.

Ann was predeceased by her parents Vartan Mavisakalian and Sirvart (Teknayan) Mavisakalian, and her brother, Jack Mavisakalian. She is survived by her sisters, Alice Papazian, Hilda Assarian and her husband Steven; her niece, Christi Ann (Christian Zortea) Papazian; her nephews, Marc (Sara) Papazian, and Adam Assarian; and her grand-nephew, Kyle Papazian. Ann was godmother of Christi Ann Papa-

When Ann and Richard’s daughter, Talene, arrived, Ann left the workforce to stay home and care for her family. She was a doting mother who found tremendous joy attending Talene’s tennis, swim, dance and piano lessons and recitals.

Ann was a fabulous cook, and her home always smelled of delicious Armenian cuisine. She loved hosting family and friends for holidays and celebrations filled with laughter, music and dancing. In fact, upon hearing the first note to any song, Ann was always the first on the dance floor. She was a self-taught pianist and a member of the church choir.

As Talene was preparing to enter college, Ann studied to become a real estate agent. It was not long before she established herself as a highly respected and award-winning agent, known for her integrity and steadfast work ethic.

Ann was also an avid Boston sports fan and excelled herself at basketball, bowling, tennis and ping pong, along with swimming, playing backgammon and cards. She was fiercely competitive, once even winning a Texas Hold ’em Tournament while on vacation in Aruba, the island she loved to visit with Richard and Talene.

Ann treasured the beach and their summer house in Marshfield. She always looked forward to seeing her special summer neighbors and friends, and their families. Later in life, her grandson, Theo, made beach walks all the more magical, collecting sea glass and searching for tiny creatures with his “Nani.” Theo was Ann’s pride and joy. She cherished the time they spent playing games and dancing, which started with their first tango when Theo was 4 months old.

Ann was a very patriotic American and very proud of her Armenian heritage.

Ann’s family would like to acknowledge the special caregivers who rendered loving care to Ann during her last 2 years.

At the request of the family, funeral services were held privately at St. James Armenian Apostolic Church.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Ann’s memory to St. James Armenian Apostolic Church, 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, for the purpose of establishing a scholarship fund in Ann’s memory.



zian, Danielle Krikorian, Melissa (Krikorian) Giragosian, Nadine (Krikorian) Hoplamazian, and Melanie (Guleserian) Metz. Ann is also survived by many extended family members and friends.

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Ann relocated to Massachusetts with her entire family in 1958. She attended Newton High School and graduated from Wakefield High School. She attended Burdett College and upon graduation, she worked in the accounting field, and later was assistant to the lower school principal at the Perkins School for the Blind for several years until Talene arrived.

On June 2, 1974, Ann married the love of her life, Richard, at St. James Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown, where the two had met a few years prior.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Giants Hire Tommy Lasorda’s Godson, Zack Minasian, as General Manager

By Steve Henson

LOS ANGELES (*Los Angeles Times*) — Buster Posey was a splash hire by the San Francisco Giants a month ago as president of baseball operations, his pedigree including three World Series championships with the franchise and a likely Hall of Fame induction on the horizon.

First item on his to-do list was to bring on a general manager. That would not be a splashy hire. Posey, who has zero front-office experience, needed someone well-versed in player evaluation, a grinder with a history of deep-dive scouting.

He didn’t look far, tabbing Giants pro scouting director Zack Minasian as the new GM, the team announced Friday, November 1. The name is familiar because Zack’s brother, Perry Minasian, has been the Angels GM since the 2021 season.

The Minasians are the first brothers to be general managers at the same time in MLB history.

Oh, and the latest one’s middle name is Tommy to honor his godfather, Tommy Lasorda.

Tight family, no doubt, but don’t expect Zack to get much assistance from Perry, his older brother of four years.

“People always say, ‘Oh, look at those loving brothers all trying to help out each other,’” Perry told *USA Today*. “It’s the furthest thing from the truth. We want to beat each other’s asses as much as possible.

“We’re not trying to hurt each other, but we’re sure the hell not helping each other, either.”

As kids, Zack would get annoyed when he believed Perry was cheating during Madden NFL video marathons. OK, beyond annoyed.

“We would sometimes come to blows,” Zack said. “I’m not even joking. Sometimes, we would literally be fighting.”

Perry doesn’t deny his brother’s recollections, although these days they generally behave like adults.

“At that point in time,” Perry said, “I was out of my mind.

I would do anything to win. There would be fights all of the time. We would come to blows.”

Legacy hires and unabashed nepotism are prevalent in baseball — in all professional sports, really, — but the Minasian connection has humble origins.

Zack and Perry’s father was a clubhouse manager for the Texas Rangers from 1989-2009. His four sons — Rudy is the oldest and Calvin wedged between Perry and Zack —



Zack Minasian

all served as bat boys and clubhouse attendants, immersed in the day-to-day routines of big league players.

Three of them embarked on careers in baseball as adults, although none played even in the minor leagues. Calvin is clubhouse director with the Atlanta Braves while Perry and Zack ascended through front offices, Perry with the Braves and Toronto Blue Jays before the Angels and Zack in a 14-year stint with the Milwaukee Brewers before moving to the Giants in 2019.

Zack is not a junior because his parents gave him the

middle name Tommy. Why? Lasorda was a close friend of Zack’s maternal grandfather, and when he took his first managerial job in the Dodgers organization in 1966, Lasorda asked a teenage Zack — Perry and Zack’s father — to run the clubhouse at rookie league in Ogden, Utah.

The younger Zack was hired by Brewers GM Doug Melvin in 2005 to supervise minor league scouts, and by age 27, he became the youngest scouting director in the major leagues. With the Giants, Zack gained a greater appreciation for analytics working under GM Farhan Zaidi.

Meanwhile in Anaheim, Perry signed a two-year contract extension in August despite the Angels struggling to their worst record in franchise history and fourth consecutive losing season.

Both brothers have their work cut out for them.

The Angels made the first trade of the off-season Thursday, acquiring slugger Jorge Soler for underachieving starting pitcher Griffin Canning. Yet they have daunting needs, including both starters and relievers on the mound, and not much money to spend.

“Over the last four years, Perry and his baseball operations staff have begun to lay the foundation for a bright future of Angels baseball,” Angels owner Arte Moreno said in a statement. “We have been impressed by the

steps Perry has taken to infuse our major league team with young and exciting talent while also revamping our player development process.”

The Giants finished fourth in the National League West at 80-84, with three playoff hardened teams ahead of them in the Dodgers, San Diego Padres and Arizona Diamondbacks. Posey and Zack Minasian are new to their roles but familiar with the franchise. They should accelerate the adjustment period, which is desirable when the free-agent market is about to begin.

## Tekeyan Cultural Association

# Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

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

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

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# ABMDR Walkathons on East and West Coasts Mark 25 Years of Saving Lives

LOS ANGELES — On September 21 and October 5, respectively, the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR) held walkathons in Watertown and Glendale. The pan-Armenian events, carrying the motto “unity and hope,” marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of ABMDR and benefited its life-saving mission.

Taking place in festive community atmospheres, both walkathons drew enthusiastic youth participation, with hundreds of students from schools and colleges in attendance. The events were also supported by organizations, businesses, and community leaders.

Major sponsors of the 13th annual Walk of Life New England included PRO-METRIKA, LLC; the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; and the Armenian Women’s Welfare Association.

The opening ceremony of the walkathon took place on the grounds of the Charles Mosesian Center. The invocation was performed by Archpriest Antranig Baljian. Manneh Ghazarians of the Organizing Committee said, “We’re touched once again to see so many community organizations and individuals coming together today to participate and collaborate for this walkathon. We couldn’t do this without you!”

For their individual efforts in raising funds for the Walk of Life New England, Telo and Rubina Ghazarians, Sossy Yorgurtian, and Miganush Stepanians were awarded the Gold, Silver, and Bronze fundraiser awards, respectively. It was also announced that for the 12th consecu-



Glendale: the Walkathon Committee with sponsors and supporters. (Photos by Aleko Boghoskhanian/ABMDR)

tive year, the Armenia Tree Project was to plant commemorative trees in Armenia in honor of the walkathon winners, as part of the #LivingCentury initiative.

In her closing remarks, Narini Bada-

lian of the Organizing Committee said, “Funds raised through the walkathon go a long way in ensuring that ABMDR is able to continue to fulfill its mission, by educating the public, recruiting donors, and facilitating bone marrow stem cell transplants for patients throughout the world.”

The walk concluded at Saltonstall Park, in Watertown Square, where volunteers at the ABMDR booth, along with Kidest Mequanen, a Dana-Farber Cancer Institute representative, answered questions and provided informative pamphlets.

On October 5, over 350 supporters gathered at the plaza of the Glendale City building to participate in the 19th annual Walk of Life in Los Angeles. In addition to individual teams of walkers, there were several teams representing local schools, among them AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School, Ferrahian High School, Providence High School, and Rose and Alex Pilibos Armenian School.

During the opening ceremony, remarks were delivered by Walkathon Committee co-chairs Dr. Christina Garabedian and Hratch Postik. Garabedian welcomed the attendees and acknowledged the presence of community leaders and other dignitaries, including Arda Tchakian, a representative of California State Senator Anthony Portantino, a longtime ABMDR supporter.

Garabedian went on to thank the walkathon’s sponsors, including major sponsor Feral Cosmetics.

“It’s thanks to fundraising events such as this that we’re able to move the mission of ABMDR forward,” Garabedian said. “Currently our organization, which is run entirely by volunteers, has over 33,500 potential bone marrow donors in 32 countries, and has facilitated 43 bone marrow transplants.”

The invocation was performed by Fathers Yeghia Isayan of the Western Diocese and Ardak Demirjian of the Western Prelacy.

Next to deliver remarks was ABMDR’s

co-founder and president, Dr. Frieda Jordan, who said, “I want you to be very proud of yourselves for being here today, because every one of you, by participating in this gathering, are giving hope to all our cancer patients and their families. We want to let them know that they are not alone in their fight, and we’re here to support them. You are all anti-cancer heroes.”

Following Dr. Jordan’s remarks, Rosie Diremsizian, an ABMDR supporter and the mother of young cancer survivor Alex Darbinyan, addressed the participants. “For so many patients, a bone marrow transplant is their only hope for survival,” Diremsizian said. “The more people who register, the greater the chances we have to save lives. Registering as a donor is simple, but the impact is beyond measure.”

Also delivering remarks was Lori Meh-dikhani, vice chair of ABMDR NextGen. “We are the youth initiative of ABMDR,” Meh-dikhani said. “Our members come from several college campuses, including Stanford, UCLA, UCSD, CSUN, USC, Berkeley, UCI, and Glendale Community College. Together, we organize registration drives, recruit young donors, and raise awareness of ABMDR’s life-saving mission.”

Prior to the start of the walkathon, awards were presented to Team Arpine Zohrabyan as the team that had raised the most funds; and the Providence High School team as the one that had the most participants.

Following the ribbon-cutting, the 5-K walk-run looped through central Glendale. The walkathon concluded at the plaza of the Glendale City building, where the festivities continued into the day. The event also gave participants the opportunity to join ABMDR as potential bone marrow stem cell donors, while volunteers were on hand to answer questions and welcome new recruits.

For more information, visit [abmdr.am](http://abmdr.am).



Young Telo and Rubina Ghazarians won the Gold Award. (Photos by Aleko Boghoskhanian/ABMDR)



# Arts & Culture

## Khatchig Mouradian To Speak at NAASR On ‘The Armenian Memory Book as Artifact and Road Map’

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host an in-person and online illustrated lecture by Dr. Khatchig Mouradian titled “Recreating Home in Exile: The Armenian Memory Book (Houshamadean) as Artifact and Road Map,” on Thursday, November 14, at 7:30 p.m. (Eastern) / 4:30 (Pacific), at the NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave.

The program will be presented in memory of in memory of long-serving NAASR Board Member Shushan Yeni-Komshian Teager (1931-2024). It is free and open to the public and a reception will follow the program.

This will be an in-person event and also presented online live via Zoom (Registration: <https://bit.ly/3TJjCtS>) and YouTube ([www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies](http://www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies)).

Mouradian will explore the memorial book as a literary genre, art and artifact. Guided by published and unpublished works and more than 20 research trips and pilgrimages to the very spaces the books celebrate and memorialize, Mouradian reflects on the agency of the *houshamadeans* and their enduring legacy.

“Every home opened its doors to me save for my ancestral abode,” wrote Armenian poet Mushegh Ishkhan in 1936. His was a generation of genocide survivors forced out of their homeland and scattered around the globe. A yearning to reenact erased histories and recreate inaccessible geographies — tucked behind the borders of Turkey — defined many of their lives and pursuits. The literary genre of the memory book (*houshamadean* in Armenian) emerged from this cauldron: more than 300 published titles (and many unpublished ones) dedicated to Armenian-populated regions, towns, or villages in the Ottoman Empire were produced in the Armenian Diaspora since the 1920s.

Mouradian is Armenian and Georgian Area Specialist at the Library of Congress and a lecturer in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. He is the author of *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915-1918* and a member of the NAASR Board of Directors and Academic Advisory Committee. His article, “Recreating Home in Exile: The Armenian Memory Book as Art, Artefact, and Roadmap,” is forthcoming in a special issue of the journal *Wasafiri*, guest co-edited by Tatevik Ayvazyan and Naneh V Hovhannisyan.

Teager was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1931 to Helen (Krajian) Yeni-Komshian (1911-2005) of Aintab and Dr. Hovsep Yeni-Komshian (1895-1994) of Kilis. A long-serving see MOURADIAN, page 13



From left: Valerie McCaffrey, Romanian director Toma Enache, Diane Baker, and Mary Apick (Karine Armen photo)

## Women Filmmakers Empowered And Thriving at Arpa International Film Festival

By Karine Armen  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — The 27th Arpa International Film Festival (Arpa IFF) started its three-day event on October 25 with a panel discussion featuring women filmmakers Mary Apick, Diane Baker and Valerie McCaffrey, moderated by director and author Sebastian Siegel.

The panel, which took place at the Harmony Gold Theater in Hollywood, discussed the challenges and triumphs of being a female filmmaker. The discussion included how each member was inspired to work in the movie industry, their challenges and achievements, and their thoughts on the importance of music in films.

Mary Apick is an actress, screenwriter and producer. Her impressive portfolio includes acting in Iranian movies and plays. She was the first Iranian actress to win the Best Actress Award at the Moscow International Film Festival for her performance in “Dead End,” a feature film written and directed by legendary Iranian actor and director Parviz Sayyad, a frequent collaborator.

see ARPA, page 13



Mary Apick got an award for the Best Feature Length Documentary (Karine Armen photos)

## Clark Art Institute Receives ‘Princely’ Collection of European Treasures

By Ted Loos  
NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Museums are lucky if they receive either a large collection of valuable artworks or a big check. Getting both at the same time is rare.

The Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass., is announcing this week that it has received the rare twofer gift from the Aso O. Tavitian Foundation: a trove of 331 works by revered European artists of the 15th through the 19th centuries — including Hans Memling, Peter Paul Rubens, Parmigianino, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Jean-Antoine Watteau and Gian Lorenzo Bernini — plus more than \$45 million to build a new wing to house it all and care for it, and to fund a new curator’s position.

“It’s an unbelievable thing that’s happening to the Clark,” the museum’s director, Olivier Meslay, said, adding that it was the “most transformational gift” since the founding bequest from the collectors Sterling and Francine Clark, for whom the museum is named.

The value of the gift — 132 paintings, 130 sculptures, 39 drawings and



“Madonna of the Fountain,” an oil-on-panel painting dating from around 1440 by Jan van Eyck and workshop, is the oldest artwork in a gift from the Aso O. Tavitian Foundation to the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass. Credit...via Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts

30 decorative arts objects — is likely several hundred million dollars, said Candace Beinecke, president of the Tavitian Foundation.

“He had princely taste,” Meslay said of Tavitian. “He was extremely refined.”

Tavitian, a philanthropist who died in 2020 at age 80, was born in Bulgaria of Armenian descent, immigrated to the United States in 1961 and made a fortune in software. He lived in New York City and Stockbridge, Mass., also in the Berkshires, and developed a deep relationship with the Clark. Tavitian, who began collecting in 2004, served on the Clark’s board see CLARK, page 13

ARTS & CULTURE

Women Filmmakers Empowered and Thriving at Arpa Film Festival

ARPA, from page 12

Arpa IFF previously honored Apick for her humanitarian efforts. Her acclaimed play, “Beneath the Veil,” has been performed at Lincoln Center in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington and Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles.

Apick’s mother, Apick Youssefian, was a theater and film actress in Iran who had a significant influence on Mary. “My mom was my role model. I learned acting from her,” Mary Apick said. She added, “I grew up with music. I always played music in the car for my children.”

Diane Baker is an actress, producer, and educator with a notable career in Hollywood. She has starred in movies by Alfred Hitchcock and Mark Robson and appeared in several TV shows, including “The Fugitive” and “Here We Go Again.” She also had a significant role in “Beneath the Veil.”

Valerie McCaffrey, an Armenian-American talent manager, casting director and producer from Fresno, produced “Here’s Gianni!,” which was screened on the opening night of the film festival. The film is about a Greek restaurant owner diagnosed with dementia who imagines himself as a late-night talk show host.

McCaffrey said, “My parents empowered me to follow my dream.”

McCaffrey’s mother was born in Lowell, Mass., grew up in New York, attended many Broadway shows, and sang in a choir. She met Valerie’s father in Fresno. McCaffrey said, “My Armenian father encouraged my sister and me to pursue our dreams. I always dreamed of being in the motion picture industry.”

On Sunday evening at the awards ceremony, her movie received awards for Best Director and Best Feature Film.



Valerie McCaffrey with the actor of “Here’s Gianni!” Joe Cortese (Karine Armen photos)

After the thought-provoking panel discussion, they screened “Women in Armenian Cinema,” a short documentary written and directed by Mariam Ohanyan. This documentary covered female filmmakers in Armenia since 1930 who studied in

Moscow and created films. More recent directors address once-taboo subjects such as domestic violence, men’s preference for having boys, abortion and the journey to becoming independent women.

A new documentary by Apick, “Jewel of

the Desert,” was screened on Sunday, October 27. The film focuses on a group of retired individuals who have created a brass band. She followed the band members for two years and included some of their stories. Some of them are not professional musicians, yet they follow their passion for playing music. Apick proudly presented her mother, who attended the event. During the Q&A, she said, “I have always wanted to do something with music.” She continued, “This film was an excellent opportunity to capture these musicians; they all have hearts of gold. When they play their instruments, they come alive.”

Apick received the Best Feature Length Documentary award that evening.

Another illuminating documentary was titled “Missak and Melinee Manouchian,” by Katia Guiragossian from France. It received the Armin T. Wegner Humanitarian Award. The couple were leaders in the French Resistance during World War II.

Another feature-length documentary produced by Aviva Barkhourdarian and Norik Keshishian from Germany is titled “Vigen, Berlin and the Cold War.” The Berlin-based Barkhourdarian is the director, writer, and animator of the film, which is about her father’s life during the 1960s. Vigen was able to travel back and forth between East and West Berlin. Her film was nominated for Best Documentary at the festival and received a Mayor’s Commendation from the City of Glendale.

Women play important roles in organizing the annual festival in Hollywood. Sylvia Minassian, the founder of AFFMA, promotes independent filmmakers. Sonia Keshishian is the festival’s jury liaison, and Maral Kazazian is the festival director.

The festival closed on October 27.

Clark Art Institute Receives ‘Princely’ Collection of European Treasures

TAVITIAN, from page 12

of trustees and showed some of his personal holdings there in a 2011 exhibition.

The collection he gave to the museum is “portrait-heavy,” Meslay said. Notable



The late Aso O. Tavitian

examples include Rubens’s “Portrait of a Young Man” (circa 1613-15), Parmigianino’s “Portrait of a Man” (circa 1530) and Vigée Le Brun’s “Self-Portrait in Studio Costume” (circa 1800).

The donation will give the Clark its first works by more than 100 artists, including the 16th-century Italian painter Jacopo da Pontormo (“Portrait of a Boy,” circa 1535-40) and Bernini, who is considered to be one of the greatest Italian sculptors of the 17th century (two works, one of which is the bronze “Countess Matilda of Canossa,” circa 1630-39).

The earliest work being donated is “Madonna of the Fountain” (circa 1440), by the 15th-century Flemish painter Jan van Eyck and his workshop.

The gift is notable partly because sculpture — a medium that Meslay said has not previously been “a big strength of the Clark” — accounts for nearly half of it.

Sculptural highlights include Andrea della Robbia’s glazed terra-cotta “Portrait



“Countess Matilda of Canossa,” a bronze sculpture from around 1630-39, is one of two works by Gian Lorenzo Bernini that were included in the gift.Credit...via Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts

of a Youth” (circa 1470-80), Jean-Antoine Houdon’s marble bust “Little Lise” (1775) and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux’s “La Can-deur” (1873).

“The collection is vast, but he wanted a significant portion of it to stay together,” Beinecke said of Tavitian.

Beinecke added that the Tavitian Foundation would sell the bulk of its remaining holdings, more than 900 works, in four Sotheby’s sales in February (those sales are not related to the Clark gift). The foundation focuses its grant-making on education and peace, particularly in the Armenian region, and on the arts.

Opened in 1955, the Clark has long been known as a jewel among museums for its strong collection of American and European art. In 2014 it built an addition designed by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando.

The New York firm Selldorf Architects, led by Annabelle Selldorf, has been selected to design the Aso O. Tavitian Wing, which is scheduled to be completed in 2027 or 2028. The new building will be located on the Clark’s campus between two existing structures, the Manton Research Center and the original museum building, for which Selldorf designed previous renovations.

Discussions about the Tavitian gift began in 2019. Meslay and the Clark curators had a give-and-take with Tavitian and, after his death, with Beinecke and the foundation, about what the museum would receive, making requests for artworks they thought would fill gaps or otherwise dovetail with the Clark’s holdings.

“It’s a great addition, a great complement to what we have, but we’re not changing the Clark experience,” Meslay said. “Just making it far, far deeper.”

Khatchig Mouradian to Speak on ‘The Armenian Memory Book as Artifact and Road Map’

MOURADIAN, from page 12

member of NAASR’s Board of Directors, she was also dedicated volunteer and invaluable resource at NAASR’s Mardigian Library, where she took a special interest in raising awareness of the collection of *hushamadeans* and acted as unofficial ambassador while selflessly offering her own time, knowledge, and fluency in several languages in order to assist researchers. NAASR invites all to join us in honoring her memory and extraordinary life.

For more information about this program, contact NAASR at [hq@naasr.org](mailto:hq@naasr.org).

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# From 'Four Letter Words' to 'Anora,' Karren Karagulian's 30-Year Collaboration with Filmmaker Sean Baker

By Preston Barta - Film Critic

HOLLYWOOD (*Denton Record-Chronicle*) — After nearly three decades of working together, one of cinema's more unnoticed but enduring collaborations returns.

"Anora" sees writer-director [Sean Baker](#)

2000. This long-standing partnership has seen Baker consistently cast Karagulian for various roles in his films, each more diverse and challenging than the last, from a gas station attendant and taxi driver to a porn impresario to now an enforcer of a wealthy Russian family.

Despite not having a formal film or acting education, Karagulian's love for cinema led him to the students of New York University film school, including Baker. Their unique connection was sparked by a shared admiration for Sergio Leone's 1984 crime epic *Once Upon a Time in America*.

"When we first realized we loved the same film, we were both like, 'What?' We couldn't believe it and started laughing," Karagulian recalled in a recent interview with the *Denton Record-Chronicle*. "Then, he asked me to be in his films. He even claims that the scenes he put me in, in both ["Four Letter Words" and Baker's 2004 sophomore film, "Take Out"], are his favorite scenes."

After Baker's first two films, their relationship became more collaborative in the development stages. By their fifth project together, 2015's "Tangerine," which

was a significant milestone that put Baker more on the cinematic map, Karagulian is credited as a producer.

"I try to help in any way I can when it

comes to working with [Baker]. My main goal is to try to create the highest quality product, and that would require us to wear many hats with such small crews. So, for "Tangerine," I helped find Armenian actors, wrote Armenian dialogue, translated, or wrote subtitles for the film. It's a process, but I don't think about credit when I work with him. I just think what can I do to make it the best I can for him," Karagulian said, humbly downplaying his significant contributions to the films.

exhilarating thrill ride as Toros pursues his godson across New York City. It expertly balances tension and comedy, featuring memorable scenes like Toros answering a phone call during a christening, which shifts the audience from grimaces to bursts of laughter. A standout moment occurs when Toros's SUV is being towed; in a desperate bid for time, he unhitches his vehicle, causing damage in the process.

"With his income at risk, Toros is forced to activate his survival instincts. As an im-



Actor Karren Karagulian

er and Armenian-American actor Karren Karagulian joining forces for the ninth time in film since they first linked up in 1996 for "Four Letter Words," later released in



In their latest collaboration, *Anora*, which earned Baker the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, Karagulian portrays Toros. The film tells the story of a whirlwind romance between Anora, also known as Ani (played by Mikey Madison), an exotic dancer in Manhattan, and Vanya (Mark Eidelstein), the spoiled, wiry son of an oligarch. Vanya enters Ani's club and quickly becomes infatuated with her. They soon fall in love and marry in secret. However, their fairytale romance faces challenges when Vanya's godfather, Toros, is assigned the task of dissolving their marriage at the request of Vanya's parents.

"Toros could be seen as the villain of the story," Karagulian said about his character. "But, at the end of the day, he's a family man. He serves as the godfather to a child, which is an important role in Armenian culture. In the story, the family's reputation is at risk when the two kids get married, and this forces Toros to take action to annul the marriage."

Toros is the kind of character who boldly declares, "damn the consequences," because he must. With so much at stake for the family he serves, the film becomes an

migrant, he knows how to survive in different situations. He's determined to solve this. There's even a line in the film where he vows, 'I'm going to find [Vanya] tonight, no matter what.' So, I feel sorry for him," Karagulian shared.

Karagulian's role as Toros has sparked a deep love for acting within him, a love that may lead him to seek out more performance opportunities in the future, even beyond Baker's narratives. However, Karagulian's respect for Baker is unwavering, as he always heeds Baker's call, acknowledging himself as Baker's quiet muse.

"This time around, after working on *Anora*, I'm taking my acting career more seriously. I want to do projects that touch my heart and soul, and [Baker] consistently delivers that. He has a unique ability to discover hidden neighborhoods and fall in love with them. Then, he connects with the people there and falls in love with their stories. And then he invites audiences to share in that same love for the neighborhood and its characters. I will always answer [Baker's] calls, but we'll see what happens. I'm open to suggestions and going with the flow," Karagulian concluded.



Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Boston Chapter

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

Thurs., Dec. 5 Baikar Building  
7 p.m.

755 Mt. Auburn St. Watertown  
via Norseman Ave. door  
\$30 includes reception

Series Coordinator Rita  
Balyozian

RSVP Required @ Sossy  
Yogurtian 617 281-1647 or  
syogurtian@comcast.net



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## My Greek Dish's Imam Bayildi

“According to Gastronomos, the recipe for Imam Bayildi is of Roman origin. It traveled through the empire to Asia Minor where the Greeks incorporated it into the cuisine. The translation means ‘the imam fainted,’ of course because this combo of tender eggplants and savory tomatoes tastes so incredibly delicious. It’s a Turkish name because that was the official language of the time. (The Greeks were not permitted to write their language or practice religion during the Ottoman occupation),” says Christina Xenos, a professional chef, cookbook author, recipe developer, and journalist based in Los Angeles. Her company is Sweet Greek Personal Chef Services.\*

This recipe and photos are courtesy of Ms. Eli K. Giannopoulos, the gifted food writer and blogger at My Greek Dish. My Greek Dish began with the idea of preserving and sharing these treasured family recipes with a wider audience. The site offers a collection of traditional Greek dishes, inviting visitors to explore and enjoy the colorful flavors of Greece. Discover over 200 of the best authentic Greek recipes and how to make them to perfection. These are original Greek recipes made easy. Made from locally sourced, tried and tested recipes with quick step by step instructions.

“Imam Bayildi (stuffed eggplants) is a delicious vegan dish, packed with so much flavor. An amazing combination of fresh eggplants stuffed with a juicy tomato based filling, caramelized onions, garlic with aromatic herbs and spices,” says Eli. “If you want to try something beyond traditional Greek dishes but stick with something that many Greeks enjoy, Imam Bayildi is a perfect idea. This dish is a classic of Ottoman and ‘Politiki’ cuisine, that is the best way to serve eggplants, and it is really easy to make,” says Eli.

“Imam Bayildi is great on its own but you can also serve it as part of a meze-style meal. You can serve it with plain rice pilaf or steamed vegetables but avoid anything too spicy as this could make the meal too strongly flavored.”

### INGREDIENTS:

2 large eggplants  
Salt  
2/3 cup olive oil, to taste  
1 medium brown onion, thinly sliced  
4 large garlic cloves  
4 large plum tomatoes  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 teaspoon sweet smoked paprika  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
1 tablespoon tomato puree  
Handful fresh parsley or mint, or a mixture of the two, plus extra to serve  
Black pepper, to taste

### PREPARATION:

Pre-heat the oven to 300°F (or higher, depending on your stove).

To make this recipe start by preparing the eggplants. Half the eggplant and score the flesh on a cross hatch, trying not to break the skin with the tip of your knife. Rub a generous amount of salt into the flesh, and set aside.

Measure out the olive oil in a measuring cup or jug, and keep it by the stove. Add a generous splash to a large, non-stick frying pan set over a high heat. Rinse the salt off the eggplant. Fry the eggplant, working in batches and adding a little more oil if necessary until their exposed flesh is golden. As you remove them from a pan, nestle them cut side up in a baking dish just large enough to fit them snugly.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the onion, thinly sliced into half-moons along with another splash of oil and another pinch of salt. Fry for 5-6 minutes or so until the onions are soft and just starting to color. Finely slice the garlic cloves before adding them to the pan and cook for another few minutes until they’re soft and aromatic.

Roughly dice the tomatoes and add them to the pan, cooking for a further 5 minutes until they start to break down into a rough sauce. Stir in the cumin, paprika, oregano, tomato puree and the fresh herbs, finely chopped. Season generously to taste with more salt and a little black pepper.

Remove from the heat and stir in 4 tablespoons of water before spooning the mixture over the exposed cut sides of the eggplant. Drizzle the remaining olive oil over the dish before covering with foil and baking for 1 hour and 30 minutes, or until the eggplants are soft and have collapsed. Leave to stand and serve either warm, or at room temperature.

Note: Seasoning: To add flavor to the ingredients, use cumin, smoked paprika, oregano and either a little fresh parsley or mint. Have some tomato puree to use to bind them together and a little black pepper to finish. If you have any leftovers, allow them to cool then store them in an airtight container and keep them in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. You can freeze it once it is cold and use a freezer-safe bag or container. Store for no more than 3 months and allow to defrost overnight before reheating in the oven for 10-15 minutes.

\*See: “Imam baildi: the legendary food of the Roma of the City with the Turkish name” at: <https://www.gastronomos.gr/topikes-kouzines/imam-mpailnti-to-thryliko-fagito-ton-romion-tis-polis-me-to-toyrkiko-onoma/146306/>. “Imam baildi is a food that the Greeks of the City classify as stuffed-butter. Although it has a Turkish name (like many of the foods cooked by the Romans of Polis and all of Asia Minor, since Turkish was the official language), it has Greek origins. It belonged to the category of artful, sophisticated Roman dishes, which delighted the Turkish population mainly because it contained olive oil. The bulk of the Turkish population was unfamiliar with olive oil – it was expensive to buy and, to a large extent, the way of olive cultivation in the depths of Turkey was unknown. So they preferred the abundant butter they had available, and cooked with it.”

For this recipe, see: <https://www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/imam-bayildi-recipe/>

For Eli’s Traditional Moussaka recipe with Eggplant and Potatoes, go to: <https://www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/mousakas/>

For Eli’s Vegan Moussaka with Lentils, go to: <https://www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/vegan-moussaka-with-lentils/>

For more eggplant recipes, see: <https://www.mygreekdish.com/?s=eggplant>

Also see:

<https://mirrorspectator.com/people/eli-k-giannopoulos/>

<https://www.grocerslist.com/blog/best-greek-food-recipe-creators>

<https://mysweetgreek.com/greek-food/easy-imam-bayildi-recipe/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2016/aug/18/how-to-cook-the-perfect-kleftiko>

### Eli Giannopoulos



Eli is also a contributor to Greek Recipes, Recipes for People Affected by Cancer, Produced and Published by Centre for Rural Health, University of Tasmania, Launceston, Tasmania 7250 in 2020. Go to: [https://www.cancersa.org.au/uploads/recipes/CCTAS\\_greek-recipes.pdf](https://www.cancersa.org.au/uploads/recipes/CCTAS_greek-recipes.pdf)

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DISH



ARTS & CULTURE

# Late Antique Egyptian Textiles Find Home at Boston College: History of the Tellalian Collection

CHESTNUT HILL, Mass. (Boston College) — The story of the Tellalian Collection, and its voyage to Boston College, is interwoven with the stories of two Armenian-American families — the Kelekian art dealers of New York City and the Tellalian collectors of Newton, Mass. This offers the broad contours of their stories.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Armenian art dealer Dikran Garabed Kelekian had swiftly become a world-renowned purveyor of Coptic, Islamic, and classical art, with shops and galleries in Paris, London.

His business clients included the likes of John D. Rockefeller, Louisine and Henry Osborne Havemeyer, and Henry Walters; indeed, much from their private collections are now on display at institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, in large part due to Dikran Kelekian’s facilitation of the original sales.

In old age, Dikran was painted by the likes of Milton Avery, John Graham, Hans Moller, Walt Kuhn and André Derain. His friendships with fin de siècle artists are exemplified most, perhaps, by the fact that his son Charles was painted not once, but twice by the legendary Mary Cassatt. (Her portrait of Charles, aged 10, is at the Walters; her portrait of Charles, aged 8, is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.)

A *New York Times* article, reporting on his death in 1951, described him as “the dean of American collectors.” When he died and his New York business passed down to his son Charles, the elder Kelekian’s indelible mark had been left upon not only the collections that would ultimately wind up at the Met, the Walters, and elsewhere, but also on the art world as a whole.

By the mid-1970s, Charles Kelekian had left his own indelible mark on the art market. His own 1982 obituary in the *New York Times* described him, like his father, as the “dean of antiquities dealers in the United States.”

Meanwhile, just up Interstate-95, a Boston architect by the name of Donald Tellalian was chosen as the lead designer of a new wing of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, the very same museum whose collections were so indebted to the Kelekian family. It was at the Walters, in 1973 during a reception honoring the successful completion of the new wing, where Donald and his wife Barbara first met Charles Kelekian, and began what the Tellalians fondly recall as a veritable “Initiation into Collecting.”

Donald recalls that the museum’s executive director at the time, Dick Randall, had decided to display a selection of Armenian manuscripts as part the reception honoring the new wing. Dick introduced Donald and Barbara to Charles, and here, at this celebration of new architecture and Armenian culture,



Charles Dikran Kelekian, Mary Cassatt 1910, Walters Art Gallery (Public Domain)

the Tellalians received an invitation to visit the Kelekian family business in New York.

Upon the occasion of the Tellalian donation to Boston College, Donald wrote the following about their first encounter at the Kelekian dealership in New York City in the mid-70s:

“About a year later, intrigued by the man, his reputation, and our high level of curiosity, we did indeed seek out [Charles] Kelekian Ancient Arts. Checking the addresses on Madison Avenue, we did discover #667. Down a second floor corridor, we knocked on a plain wood door with an eye hole. The door opened and we were warmly greeted by Mr. Kelekian. While familiar with antiquities through international travel and exposure to museum collections, we were nevertheless overwhelmed by the four small galleries filled with Greco-Roman sculptures, architectural fragments, Egyptian Fayoum portraits, old German painted wood panels. But unlike a museum, you could touch and, if so inclined, purchase and take home!”

This was the material experience of doing business with the Kelekians — an unassuming set of rooms down a sixth-floor hallway in an anonymous building in the

heart of Manhattan, filled with beautiful objects of near and far antiquity. It was the legacy of the international dealing empire that Dikran had spent a lifetime building, and that Charles had worked to continue.

But it was not the statuary that enticed the Tellalians, and Charles knew it. He took the husband and wife pair into yet another back room, and opened a nondescript drawer, this one filled with late antique textiles from Egypt. Donald recalls that after seeing this drawer, and after a period of study at the Boston Public Library, he was reminded of “the close historical affinity between the Armenian Apostolic and Coptic Orthodox Churches,” and he and Barbara decided to revisit the Kelekian dealership in 1978. It was during this visit, on 25 November, that the Tellalians bought the first objects in their collection, which are now categorized as McMullen



Tapestry Fragment with Six Birds, 7th-8th century, Tellalian Collection, McMullen Museum of Art (Public Domain)

2018.2 and McMullen 2018.3.

Over the years, Donald and Barbara grew their collection, acquiring textiles mostly from the Kelekian business but also from auction houses such as Sotheby’s and Skinner. When Charles died in 1982, his daughter, Nanette Kelekian, took over the business, and she did not share the same passion for art dealing that her father and grandfather had epitomized. Fortunately for the public, Nanette spent the next few decades donating her family’s manifold objects and artworks, such as the “Head of a Woman” displayed below, to various institutions such as the Met, the Walters, and the Harvard University Art Museums. (Indeed, “Gift of Nanette Kelekian” is one of the more common phrases found in the credit lines of American museums to this day).

After maintaining and preserving an extensive collection in their Newton home for three decades, the Tellalians approached McMullen Museum of Art’s director Nancy Netzer in 2008 and mentioned their many decades of collecting and cataloguing Egyptian textiles. Later, the McMullen asked them to lend many of their textiles to a major joint exhibition in 2014 and 2015 between the Yale University Art Gallery and the McMullen Museum, entitled “Roman in the Provinces: Art on the Periphery of Empire.” Although some of the Tellalian collection had been lent to other museums before, this event represented its largest ever exhibition, placing many of the textiles alongside glass, mosaics, coins, sculpture, and other objects from the later Roman Empire’s periphery.

In 2018, the Tellalians donated most of their collection to the McMullen’s permanent collection, where the textiles live today.



Dikran Garabed Kelekian, Unknown Photographer, c. 1900 (Public Domain)



Fragmented Tapestry Roundels, 5th-6th century, Tellalian Collection, McMullen Museum of Art (Public Domain)



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR  
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

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

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

**NOVEMBER 23** — Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church 75th Annual Food Festival. 11 a.m. – 7 p.m., 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Eat-in or Take-out. The Food Festival menu includes lamb, chicken, losh kebab, and kheyma dinners, and a vegetarian platter; a country store with a variety of Armenian specialties and deserts. The festival also features a jewelry table, gift items from Armenia as well as tours of the church’s sanctuary and a Backgammon (Nardi) Tournament. For further information, call the church office at 978-256-7234.

**DECEMBER 5** — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents Armenian Cooking Demonstration III: Holiday Desserts Anoushabour and Halawet el Jibn. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown (En-

trance on Norseman Avenue). \$30. RSVP required @Sossy Yogurtian, 617-281-1647 or [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net)

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

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

NEW JERSEY

**NOVEMBER 12** — Armenian Art Culture and Resilience Today, tour of fine arts exhibit at Ben Shahn Gallery, at William Patterson University, Wayne. 4 to 5 p.m., Ben Shahn Gallery, Tour of “Before, After: Reflections on the Armenian Genocide.” 5 to 6.30 p.m., Science Lobby, featuring speakers Vicki Shoghag Hovanessian, Dr. Ani Kalayjian and musician Lusine Yeghi-azaryan. Refreshments will be served. Sponsored by the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at William Patterson University, 300 Pompton Rd, Wayne.

RHODE ISLAND

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

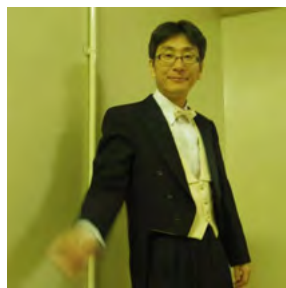
**DECEMBER 13** — Christmas Concert @ Sanctuary of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, 70 Jefferson St., Providence, RI, featuring Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island, Junior Choir, Soloists. 7 p.m. Details to follow.

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

Shinnosuke Matsui  
*Studying Armenian Diaspora in Japan*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN-MIYAZAKI, Japan — Shinnosuke Matsui is an associate professor at the University of Miyazaki’s Center for Language and Cultural Studies. From 1998 to 2001, he studied at the Kobe University, Japan, and in 2007 he defended his doctoral thesis titled “Identity Reacquisition among Armenian-French.” From 2011 to 2020



he was a lecturer at Kobe University, Kyoto University, Osaka Sangyo University and Yamato University. Since 2020 he has been a research fellow at the Research Center for Promoting Intercultural Studies at Kobe University. He has

written and translated six books and 25 papers in academic journals (mainly in Japanese, as well as in English).

I first met Shinnosuke Matsui in 2010 at the international conference in Osaka, Japan. Seeing my name on my badge, he greeted me with “barev,” and since then, we have kept in touch.

**Shinnosuke, your academic interests are varied — from French, Armenian, Immigration, Diaspora Studies into Minority Language Pedagogy, Muslim schools in France, modern Assyrian and the Yazidi people. What is the threat connecting your various areas of interest?**

I believe that my research themes can be summarized as 1) an interest in what is being lost (some cultures and languages), and 2) an interest in the enthusiasm and strategies of those who are trying to protect them. I have recently realized that these are the criteria for choosing my research theme.

**You have also studied Armenian schools of France. How are such micro-histories of interest for a Japa-**

nese academic researcher?

Japan also has begun to accept “foreign workers” (in effect, they will become “immigrants”) in the past few years, a century after France, due to the shortage of young workers caused by the declining birthrate and an aging population. The problems of integration of their children into schools, identity crises, etc. have already begun to emerge. Then, it is quite possible that after a few more generations, they and their descendants, as adults, will establish their own schools in order to pass on their own language to their children while living in Japan, or so that their children will not have difficulties with the language when they return to their “home” country. At that time, the history of the establishment of Armenian schools in France and their management strategies would be of great help. Although “Korean schools” and “Brazilian schools” already exist in Japan, they are not recognized as general schools in Japan. Legally, they have the same status as entities such as driving schools. The Armenian schools of France are not “schools only for Armenians” but “bilingual French-Armenian schools open to all students residing in France” and are regular private schools in France. Therefore, students who do not have Armenian roots can also enroll. Thus, Armenians in France are creating schools that are open to both the French nation and Armenia, and I believe that this strategy will be very helpful for future school education in Japan.

**As a researcher of French-Armenian community, how would you describe its peculiarities?**

In France, immigrant groups usually assimilate completely after a number of generations, and most of them retain their roots only in their names. However, Armenians are already in their sixth generation of immigration to France, yet many of their descendants have strongly maintained their Armenian identity while assimilating. I think this is their particularity. Another feature not found among other former immigrant groups is the existence of full-time Armenian schools. No other immigrant group is supposed to have its own full-time school.

**This year in the International Conference “Armenia as a Civilizational Crossroad: Historical and Cultural Ties” your presented paper was “The Influence of Armenian Traditional Weaving Techniques on the Mode – ‘Trompe-l’œil sweater’ by Schiaparelli.” Very few know that famous Italian fashion designer Elisa**

**Schiaparelli owes her first success to an Armenian migrant Aroosiag Mikaelian. Could you please inform about this story and why this interested to a Japanese researcher?**

Since there are few researchers in Armenian studies in Japan, other researchers contact me as soon as they find the word “Armenian” in the text. For example, a German literary scholar says to me, “I saw an Armenian magician in Schiller’s works. Do Armenians have an image of sorcerers in pre-modern Europe?” and so on. In such a situation, a researcher of mode said to me, “There is a story about an Armenian in the biography of Elsa Schiaparelli. I heard that her debut work was successful thanks to Armenian refugee women in Paris.” For some reason, this is not mentioned at all by the Armenian Studies side, and I had no idea about it, which is why I decided to look into it. However, since it is completely unknown to the Armenian Studies side, I am having a hard time gathering any more information about it. I wish I could find someone who knew Aroosiag Mikaelian, who became Schiaparelli’s secretary and worked for her for many years. She was called “Mike” by Elsa.

**You have been in Armenia for many times – how would you characterize this country and your connections with it?**

Since I specialize in the Armenian diaspora, I ultimately did not have much need to stay in the Armenian homeland. However, I have made connections with Armenian researchers and with the Armenian National Academy of Sciences and have been able to come to Armenia every year for the past few years after the corona disaster.

**On your opinion how might Armenian studies be developed in Japan in the future?**

Armenian studies in Japan have been pioneered by a few predecessors using local materials with little prior research. The main focus was on very detailed, academic, historical research on the main country of Armenia. The quality was good, but there were too few researchers involved. However, thanks to their efforts, we are now able to expand our research from there to other areas such as culture and architecture, and even to the study of the Armenian diaspora. Now there are more and more young researchers who understand the Armenian language and are doing research on Armenia as their main topic. I am sure that Armenian studies in Japan will develop further in the future.



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COMMENTARY

# Pashinyan in Kazan: Will Moscow Seek to Take the Initiative?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The 16th BRICS+ summit took place in Kazan, Russia from October 22 to 24. This was the most significant international event for Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. At the time of the summit, nine countries confirmed their membership in BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Iran, the UAE and Ethiopia. More than 30 delegations from all over the world participated in the summit, 24 of them at the level of heads of state and government. Among those invited were Xi Jinping from China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Among the attendees was UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who has been criticized in Ukraine for his participation. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Kazan summit was a chance to demonstrate that, despite sanctions, Russia remains a significant global player.

Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan also arrived in Russia to participate in the summit. Earlier, in the Armenian National Assembly Pashinyan had stressed that one of the important reasons for attending the summit is the personal invitation of Putin. Otherwise, Armenia is currently not planning on becoming a member of the association as confirmed by Armenia’s Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan.

Pashinyan’s attendance at the event is noteworthy, especially since he previously avoided similar gatherings. This time, he participated openly, supporting Russia’s intent to demonstrate its ability to host large-scale events despite sanctions. Russia invited leaders from countries like India and China. Consequently, the presence of numerous heads of state was significant.

In Kazan, Pashinyan held a meeting with President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian and emphasized that “further development of relations with Iran is one of the priorities of the Armenian government.” Apart from that, Pashinyan was noticed having an informal discussion with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev during the plenary session of the 16th BRICS+ Summit in the outreach/BRICS Plus format. In the beginning of the session Pashinyan and Aliyev, who were seated next to each other, exchanged a few phrases. Later a bilateral

meeting occurred between Aliyev and Pashinyan, during which discussions focused on advancing the bilateral peace agenda, including a peace agreement, border delimitation and demarcation, and other mutual concerns. The Armenian PM’s office stated that the two countries’ foreign ministers were tasked with continuing negotiations on the Agreement on Peace and Establishment of Interstate Relations, aiming for its prompt finalization. In his turn, President Putin stated that the demarcation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the proper path to a peace treaty.

Only days ago, President Biden sent letters urged both countries’ leaders to accelerate peace talks and complete an agreement by years-end. The Biden administration has three months left to transition power to either Trump or Harris. Biden aims to see the progress made during his administration on Armenian-Azerbaijani relations reach a logical conclusion, hoping to be viewed as the “godfather” of a peace agreement. With more foreign policy experience than any US president in the past 30 years, Biden understands that neither a Trump nor Harris administration will prioritize this region, which could hinder the impact of his achievements. He desires to leave behind a significant legacy in peacebuilding that is currently unparalleled.

The conclusion of a peace agreement in the South Caucasus, as highlighted in Biden’s national security strategy, is a key factor in US foreign interests, compelling the Biden administration to advocate for these objectives until the very end. But the Pashinyan-Aliyev meeting location in Russia, rather than Europe or the US, is notable, as the Russian Federation may seek a mediating role, especially given the outgoing Biden administration and the contentious US elections. Whether Russia can take the lead from Washington will depend on the next US president. For either Harris or Trump to continue Biden’s policies in the South Caucasus could complicate matters for Moscow.

(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.)

## Parliamentary Elections in Georgia: Why Do They Matter For Armenia?

By Benjamin Poghosyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On October 26, parliamentary elections were held in Georgia. Long before election day, they were called the most crucial Georgian elections since the 2003 Rose Revolution. Opposition parties presented the election as a choice between Russia and Europe, while the ruling Georgian Dream Party described it as a choice between peace and war. In both cases, geopolitics played a significant role.

The opposition accused the Georgian Dream of steering Georgia away from European integration. At the same time, the government claimed that the opposition sought to open a second front against Russia, transforming Georgia into another Ukraine. Georgian Dream even displayed posters on Tbilisi streets contrasting images of a peaceful Tbilisi with war-ravaged Ukrainian cities.

Recent actions by the Georgian government, including the passage of a law on transparency of foreign influence and an anti-LGBT propaganda law, have strained Georgia’s relations with the West. The European Union halted the accession process and canceled funding from the European Peace Facility, while the United States imposed sanctions on several Georgian officials. The opposition used these developments to allege that the ruling party sought closer ties with Russia. Meanwhile, Georgian Dream leaders attributed anti-Georgian actions to an unspecified “Global War Party.”

The elections occurred amid positive developments in the Georgian economy, which saw substantial growth in 2022, 2023,

and the first half of 2024, largely driven by Russian migration and re-exports to Russia. The government cited this economic growth to justify its strategic decision not to join anti-Russian sanctions, arguing that it had ultimately raised living standards for Georgians, which, it said, was the government’s primary responsibility.

According to the Georgian Central Election Commission, Georgian Dream won the election with about 54 percent of the vote. Four opposition blocks won more than 5 percent of the vote, the threshold for achieving representation in Parliament. The Coalition for Change, composed of former leaders from the United National Movement (the former ruling party), received 11 percent. Unity to Save Georgia, led by the United National Movement, won about 10 percent. Strong Georgia, led by Lelo for Georgia, won nearly 9 percent, while For Georgia, led by former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, took close to 8 percent. The official results showed that Georgian Dream’s share was slightly lower than Gorbi exit polls commissioned by the pro-government Imedi TV. The official results contrasted sharply with exit polls from HarrisX (for the pro-opposition Mtavari Arkhi TV) and Edison Research (for opposition-leaning Formula TV), which projected the opposition as winners.

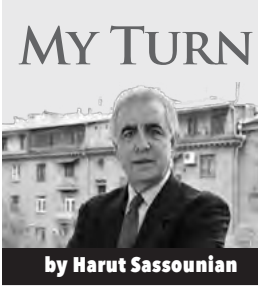
All four opposition groups that entered Parliament refused to recognize the election results. President Salome Zurbishvili, a critic of the Georgian Dream, also refused to acknowledge the results, alleging large-scale election fraud, and called for a protest rally on October 28, which brought thousands in front of the parliament building.

The joint observation mission from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and the European Parliament reported irregularities during the election campaign, noting that the process was marred by an uneven playing field, pressure, and tension, although voters had a wide choice. United States President Joe Biden expressed his alarm at the democratic backsliding in Georgia, saying that Georgia’s October 26 parliamentary elections were marred by numerous recorded misuses of administrative resources as well as voter intimidation and coercion, and calling on

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COMMENTARY



# Next week’s UN Climate Summit in Baku Will Further Enrich Ruling Aliyev Clan

Over the years, there have been several reports exposing the billions of dollars that Azerbaijan’s ruling Aliyev family has embezzled from the state coffers and the large amount of bribes the government has given to various European and U.S. officials.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the next week’s COP29 Climate Summit in Baku is another example of how the ruling elite takes advantage of every opportunity to line its pockets.

The OCCRP (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) exposed Azerbaijan’s scandalous actions titled: “‘Official Partners’ of Azerbaijan’s COP29 Climate Summit Linked to Ruling Aliyev Family and Their Inner Circle... Everywhere this year’s international visitors in Baku look, they’ll see companies that have been linked to the family of Azerbaijan’s authoritarian president, Ilham Aliyev.” This extensive report was written by James Dowsett, Kelly Bloss, Fatima Karimova, and Eli Moskowitz.

OCCRP described Azerbaijan as “the most authoritarian country to ever host the event.... Whether it’s mining, banking, hospitality, or construction, there is hardly a major industry in Azerbaijan” that the ruling Aliyev family has not dominated. “As a result, the Aliyevs and their inner circle have built up staggering wealth, much of it held overseas or tied up in property abroad. Even the president’s 11-year-old son owned a London office building.”

Here are the links between the inner circle of the family of President Ilham Aliyev and the ‘official partners’ of the Climate Summit:

- 1) “Pres. Aliyev’s daughter’s ex-husband [Emin Agalarov]... won a \$5.2-million government contract [without any competitive tender process] to host 5,000 COP29 guests at his luxurious Sea Breeze Resort on the Caspian Sea.” The guests “will stay in ultra-luxurious rooms... with access to a seven-kilometer-long beach, over 50 bars and restaurants, and 60 swimming pools.” The six Azeri journalists who exposed this arrangement are now sitting in a Baku jail.
- 2) “PASHA Holdings, one of the biggest companies in Azerbaijan, owns many of the host city’s top hotels and has extensive interests in tourism, construction, insurance, and banking. PASHA belongs to Aliyev’s two adult daughters [Leyla and Arzu].” The company’s deputy board chairman, Mir Jamal Pashayev “is a cousin of Azerbaijan’s first lady and vice president Mehriban Aliyeva.”
- 3) “Azersun Holding... is chaired by [Abdolbari Gozal] the uncle of [Has-

san Gozel] who set up three companies in the British Virgin Islands for the Aliyeva sisters.”

4) “Silk Way West Airlines... is responsible for transporting materials and supplies to the conference. It’s owned by a former state official, but has been previously linked to one of the Aliyeva daughters through a sister company, Silk Way Bank.... The airline is ultimately owned by a former state official, Zaur Akhundov, but it has also been linked to the first family in the past through a sister company: A 2010 investigation by Radio Free Europe found that Arzu Aliyeva, the president’s younger daughter, was one of three owners of Silk Way Bank, the former financial arm of Silk Way Group, which the airline is also part of.”

5) “GILTEX, a firm that controls nearly three quarters of the local textile market and until last year was part of a conglomerate [Gilan Holding] in which the president’s daughters held a majority stake [alongside the children of Kamaladdin Heydarov, Azerbaijan’s Emergency Situations Minister. Heydarov is also a member of the COP29 organizing committee]. Gilan Holding was liquidated in 2023.”

6) “SOCAR Green... is a subsidiary of Azerbaijan’s state oil company, SOCAR, which plays an outsized role in the oil-producing nation’s economy.”

7) Bank ABB, “rebranded in 2021, but under its former name, the International Bank of Azerbaijan, made unflattering headlines for the central role it played in the \$2.9-billion money laundering scandal known as the Azerbaijani Laundromat. An account at the bank was used as a key conduit for moving a large portion of these funds. The bank’s former chairman was jailed in 2016 for stealing almost \$3 billion from the institution. His wife, who lived in the U.K., was later served with the country’s first-ever ‘unexplained wealth order,’ with British authorities demanding that she prove her vast wealth had a legal origin. She later agreed to forfeit a \$17.8-million mansion and a golf club to the British state.”

OCCRP further stated that it “has been reporting on Azerbaijan — and exposing corruption, human rights abuses, and self-dealing — for over a decade.” Here are the highlights of some of the reports:

- 1) “How the ruling Aliyev family profited from a currency collapse, how it sought to buy Kyrgyz gold fields, and how it appeared to siphon off a staggering \$1 billion from the acquisition of a telecom company.”
- 2) “A 2016 investigation from data in the Panama Papers that revealed how the [Aliyev] family used offshore structures and multiple layers of ownership to secretly hold a fortune.”
- 3) “The jailing earlier this year of a group of independent journalists on trumped-up charges ahead of February’s presidential election.”
- 4) “How American lobbyists have promoted and taken money from the regime, and how the ‘Azerbaijani Laundromat’ was used to funnel billions of dollars out of the country on behalf of its elite.”

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the Georgian government to conduct a transparent investigation into the election irregularities. Secretary of State Antony Blinken supported calls from both international and domestic observers for a full investigation into election-related violations. He expressed specific concerns about the pre-election environment and underscored the need for transparency in the electoral process.

European Council President Charles Michel called on the Central Election Commission and other bodies to investigate all election-related violations. He urged Georgia’s leaders to reaffirm their commitment to European integration. On October 28, ministers from 13 European Union member countries issued a joint statement condemning all violations of international norms for free and fair elections, sharing the observers’ concerns, and calling for an impartial investigation and remedies for the confirmed violations.

Meanwhile, late on October 26, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban congratulated the Georgian government on its victory, with congratulations from Azerbaijan’s president and Armenia’s prime minister following on October 27. Orban arrived in Georgia on October 28 and met with the Georgian prime minister on October 29. Turkey’s and UAE’s presidents also congratulated the prime minister of Georgia.

Following the elections, Georgia entered a political crisis, recalling the post-election unrest of the 2020 parliamentary elections, when all opposition parties that crossed the threshold refused to take their seats in Parliament. At that time, a compromise was reached through mediation by Charles Michel. The stakes are higher now, and geopolitics plays a more critical role. Although future developments are uncertain, the Georgian Dream appears positioned to retain power for the next four years.

## Why These Elections Matter for Armenia

First, Georgia is Armenia’s primary gateway for trade with the world, as roughly 70 percent of Armenia’s exports and imports pass through Georgia. Georgia also provides Armenia with a land route to Russia and access to the Black Sea. Thus, any long-term political instability destabilizing Georgia could affect Armenia’s economy.

Beyond economic ties, Georgia’s foreign policy direction and its relations with the West are critical for Armenia. Yerevan is pursuing a policy of foreign diversification, deepening cooperation with the EU and the US. This includes signing the New Partnership Agenda with Brussels in early 2025 and transforming the US–Armenia strategic dialogue into a strategic partnership. However, with Russia–West relations at their lowest since the Cold War and Iran–West relations tense, Armenia’s success in strengthening ties with the West depends on the regional balance of power.

Should relations between Georgia and the West continue to deteriorate — and if other regional players such as Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran oppose greater Western engagement — this could complicate Armenia’s cooperation with the West and force Yerevan to adjust its foreign policy.

(Benyamin Poghosyan is chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan, and Senior Research Fellow at the Applied Policy Research Institute [APRI] of Armenia.)

# Time for Israel to Do What’s Right: Recognize Armenian Genocide, Establish Embassy In Yerevan

By Nadav Tamir

The High Holidays are a time for reflection on one’s actions, and a resolution to do the right thing in the coming year. That goes, or should go, for countries as well. In international relations, doing the right thing can often feel difficult, especially when strategic interests are at stake — but Israel finds itself at such a juncture, and it is one that has nothing to do with the war that currently consumes our thinking.

Israel’s close relationship with Azerbaijan, Armenia’s long-standing rival, is such a case. Yes, Azerbaijan will be unhappy. Baku supplies Israel with significant oil reserves and purchases advanced weaponry, forming an essential part of Israel’s defense strategy against regional threats, particularly Iran. But Azerbaijan will understand because the relations with Israel are a two-way street and Azerbaijan benefits from them as well.

Israel and Armenia share more commonalities than meet the eye. Both nations are non-Muslim civilizations on the periphery of a largely Muslim region. Both have endured immense historical tragedies and are survivors of near annihilation — Armenians during the genocide of 1915, and Jews during the Holocaust. Israel’s recognition of the Armenian genocide would, in many ways, be a moral affirmation of shared history, acknowledging the suffering of another people with whom it shares a deep affinity.

The political calculus behind Israel’s hesitation has long been rooted in its strategic ties with Turkey, not just Azerbaijan. Recognizing the genocide could have once jeopardized relations with Turkey, a NATO ally and key regional player.

But Turkey’s position in Israel’s foreign policy calculus has drastically shifted, especially under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government. His outrageous comments in recent years, including comparing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Hitler and his unlimited support for Hamas, have led to a serious strain in relations. There is little reason left for Israel to fear Turkish retaliation for recognizing the Armenian genocide. In fact, taking such a step would send Ankara a much-needed message.

see RECOGNITION, page 20

# European Commission Highlights Georgia’s ‘Backsliding’

By Irakli Machaidze

As the dispute over Georgia’s parliamentary voting results plays out, an annual report issued by the European Commission is effectively writing off Tbilisi’s chances of joining the EU any time soon. The report states that the incumbent Georgian Dream’s policies run “counter to the values and principles” of the EU.

EU officials and international observers have cited widespread irregularities connected with the October 26 parliamentary elections. Some in Brussels have called for a thorough investigation but have thus far refrained from saying the outcome was rigged. Official results show Georgian Dream winning 54 percent of the vote and gaining 89 of the 150 seats in the legislature.

The EU Commission report on Georgia’s EU accession progress, issued October 30, was far less equivocal on Georgian Dream’s overall performance. The general message conveyed in the report is that Georgian Dream is taking the country in the wrong direction.

“Due to the course of action taken by the Georgian government, EU leaders stopped Georgia’s accession process. It remains on hold as long as Georgia continues to move away from the EU,” the EU’s ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, said at an October 30 news conference in Tbilisi to outline the report’s findings.

After granting Georgia EU candidacy status in 2023, Brussels conditioned the opening of accession talks on the Georgian government’s implementation of reforms. Georgian Dream has made halting progress in several spheres, including aligning economic frameworks with EU standards. But the report notes “backsliding” in key areas, including the judiciary, fundamental rights and foreign policy.

Georgian Dream’s adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, more commonly known as the ‘foreign agents’ law, “impacts freedom of expression and the ability of the media to operate freely,” according to the report.

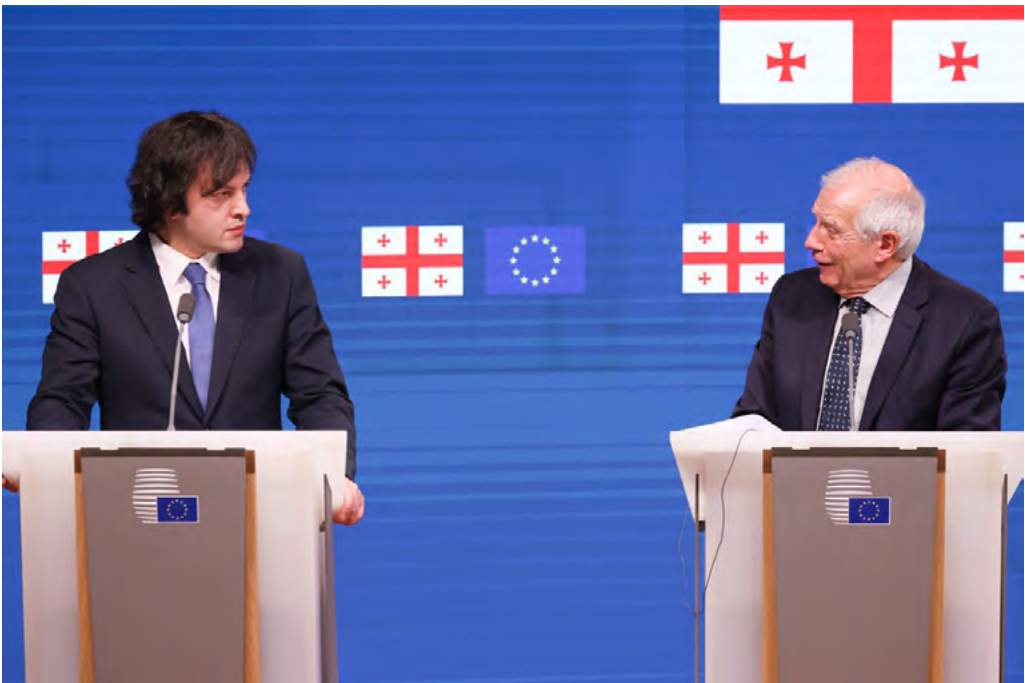
The commission also states that Tbilisi has made “no progress” over the past year in harmonizing its foreign, security and defense policy with Brussels, especially in the area of sanctions implementation against Russia, Belarus and Iran.

The report notes that Georgia is now experiencing “extreme polarization,” while blaming Georgian Dream for creating an “increasingly hostile environment” for those who question government policies.

Another area of particular concern outlined in the report was gender and minority rights. It stressed that the legal definition

of rape in Georgia does not conform with EU standards. “Gaps in prevention and response to gender-based violence remain,” the report says. It also states members of Georgia’s LGBTQ community are living

by its praise for Moldova’s and Ukraine’s progress towards accession. A statement on the adoption of the EU’s 2024 Enlargement Package notes accession talks with Moldova and Ukraine opened in June, signaling



Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze (left) and European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell talk at the joint press conference after the EU-Georgia Association Council in February 2024, where Tbilisi and Brussels “agreed to speed up our work” towards Georgia’s accession. EU leaders have since stopped Georgia’s accession process. (Photo: European Council)

## Armenian Ambassador Alleged Azerbaijani Counterpart Threatened To Kill Him in Brussels Bust up

THREAT, from page 1

talks as part of the United Nations-organized COP29 conference.

Sadiqov drew criticism from the European Union last year over a social media post where he appeared to threaten a delegation of MEPs visiting Armenia alongside Balyan with being shot.

“The Istiglal IST-14.5 anti-materiel sniper rifle produced in Azerbaijan has the effective firing range of about 3,000 meters,” he wrote underneath a post that showed the European politicians posing along the tense frontier. “Guys, keep clear of Azerbaijani state border.”

in a “hostile and stigmatizing atmosphere” that is a direct outcome of “legislative activities and the continued prevalence of homophobic hate speech.”

Regarding the just-concluded elections in Georgia, the Commission report echoes the preliminary findings of international election monitors, saying that a variety of factors, including recent amendments to the election code and the use of intimidation to influence voters, “negatively impacted public trust in the process.”

The commission’s negative assessment of Georgia is brought into sharper focus

Brussels’ “important recognition” of both countries’ “determination to pursue reforms.”

“This year, Georgia has gone backwards while other candidate countries have advanced,” said Herczynski, the EU envoy. “Georgia’s next government should reverse course, recommit to democratic principles and values if it wants to bring the country closer to the EU.”

(Irakli Machaidze is a Eurasianet editorial fellow in New York. This column originally appeared on the [eurasianet.org](https://eurasianet.org) website on November 1.)

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## Time for Israel to Do What’s Right: Recognize Armenian Genocide, Establish Embassy in Yerevan

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And yet Jerusalem should get over this and deliver a much-needed message of a value-driven foreign policy by recognizing the Armenian genocide and opening an embassy in Yerevan.

Israel’s military support to Azerbaijan alongside Turkey and Pakistan while all Western countries refrained from doing so — some of which contributed to the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 — has cast a shadow over Israel’s moral standing. A balanced move would be to open an embassy in Armenia and recognize the genocide, both of which can reaffirm Israel’s commitment to historical justice without jeopardizing strategic alliances.

Moreover, when Israel criticizes Armenia for recognizing a Palestinian state, it would do well to remember that Azerbaijan itself recognized Palestinian statehood back in 1992. Israel has managed its relations with Baku without making the Palestinian issue a point of contention, so it should not apply a double standard when it comes to Yerevan.

From a logistical and cost perspective, opening an embassy in Yerevan is a relatively low-investment decision and the symbolic importance of establishing formal diplomatic ties there far outweighs the costs. The move would also pave the way for stronger economic collaboration, particularly in Armenia’s growing high-

tech sector, where Israel excels and can offer valuable support. As a young democracy, Armenia has much to learn from Israel’s experience in building a resilient, innovation-driven economy.

There is also an enduring historical connection between the two peoples. The Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem’s Old City stands as a testament to the deep-rooted relationship between Armenians and Jews. Both peoples have weathered the storms of history, surviving existential threats and preserving their cultures and identities. Recognizing the Armenian genocide would be a profound gesture of solidarity between two ancient peoples who understand the horrors of persecution and displacement.

Ultimately, Israel has an opportunity to recalibrate its foreign policy in the South Caucasus. By recognizing the Armenian genocide and opening an embassy in Yerevan, Israel can demonstrate that it stands for justice, historical memory and the principles it was founded upon. Doing so would require little sacrifice in terms of realpolitik, while delivering a critical message to Turkey and reaffirming Israel’s moral leadership on the global stage.

Let’s do the right thing in 5785 — both for Israel itself and for the broader region.

(Nadav Tamir is a former Israeli diplomat and adviser to President Shimon Peres, and the executive director of JStreet Israel. This article first appeared in [Ynetnews.com](https://ynetnews.com) on October 31, 2024.)