

Archbishop Expresses Cautious Hope for Syria and Syrian-Armenians in Wake of Regime Overthrow

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN/ALEPPO — The incredibly swift end in December to the slow-churning, devastating, decade-long Syrian Civil War caught both Syrians and the rest of the world by surprise.

Ahmed al-Sharaa (nom de guerre Abu Mohammad al-Jolani), the leader of the rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Shams (HTS), an Al Qaeda offshoot, led the surprising and winning push, which took Aleppo in late November, before charging on the capital Damascus, resulting in the swift fleeing of dictator Bashar al-Assad and his family to Moscow.

In an interview on Friday, December 13, Archbishop Magar Ashkarian, the leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church



Archbishop Magar Ashkarian

in Aleppo, known there as the Armenian Orthodox Church, offered some thoughts about what the Armenian community there is facing now.

Ashkarian was appointed as Pontifical Legate to the Armenian Prelacy in Syria by Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia in October 2022. Before that, he held several other positions, including director of the Christian Education Department of the Catholicosate, Patriarchal vicar for the Armenian Prelacy in Tehran and a pastor in Greece.

The archbishop noted that the community was shocked by the regime overthrow, fearing anarchy at first. However, he added, many in the community now have been reassured by the HTS leadership and are hopeful.

“Generally speaking, the situation in Aleppo is somehow bearable. In the beginning it was unimaginably horrible and scary, because it [the end to the regime]

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The Karbi School's outdoor celebration of the independence of the Republic of Armenia

Tekeyan Cultural Association Of US and Canada Stands by Teachers in Armenia

By Gayane Muradyan

YEREVAN — As Victor Hugo has said, “He who opens the school door closes a prison.” In these anxious and insecure days ahead of the New Year, when it seems that there are dangerous situations spreading throughout the world, the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) family continues to warm the hearts of the staff of the four schools in Armenia named after Vahan Tekeyan with a New Year’s gift. This is a unique approach from the point of view of showing gratitude to teachers dedicated to Armenian education.

The Sponsor a Teacher program has a history of about three decades.

When talking about teachers, there is the desire to use the most beautiful, the most tender words, because each of them is dedicated to their noble mission. For years, Tekeyan members have visited the schools, participated in celebrations, and, if necessary, supported and cared for them.

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Vardanyan Legal Team Condemns Azerbaijan’s New Charges Threatening Life Imprisonment

YEREVAN — In an unprecedented escalation of its ongoing crackdown on dissent, Azerbaijanian prosecutors have unveiled a new and enormous array of 45 potential charges against Armenian humanitarian and political

prisoner Ruben Vardanyan, according to his legal team, in a statement on December 16. If convicted, Vardanyan faces the prospect of life imprisonment.

The new charges presented against Vardanyan fall under 20 different articles of Azerbaijan’s Criminal Code. Illustrating the extent to which the regime is desperate to justify its ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh and illegal imprisonment of its former leaders, the fabricated evidence is presented in more than 25,000 pages across 100 volumes, all written in Azeri.

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POW Ruben Vardanyan Ruben Vardanyan held by border Guards on Sep 27, 2023. (AFP Photo)

International Forum In Yerevan Looks At Risk Factors and Genocide Prevention

YEREVAN (JAM News) — For two days, on December 12 and 13, Armenian and international experts gathered in Yerevan to discuss genocide risk factors and ways to enhance mechanisms for early detection and prevention of such tragedies. The 5th Global Forum “Against the Crime of Genocide” brought together scholars researching crimes against humanity, leaders of international human rights organizations, activists, civil society representatives, and politicians.

A central theme of the forum was the idea that impunity leads to new genocides. Many speakers argued that some of today’s events might have been avoided if prevention mechanisms had been applied effectively. However, they emphasized that political will is essential to prosecute perpetrators, while international justice often faces significant resistance.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, speaking at the forum, noted that the international community tends to pay attention to genocides and other mass crimes only after they have already occurred: “We witnessed this in our region not only over 110 years ago in case of the Armenian Genocide but also literally last year when it seemed that the world could clearly see enough risk factors that could lead to irreversible consequences. Unfortunately, we were unable to prevent, and today we are witnessing the irreversible consequences. This is one of the examples where the response of international institutions was not proportional to the risk factors and the situation on the ground. And the most significant one of these risk factors, the spread of hatred, ultimately turned from hate speech into a crime.”



President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars Melanie O'Brien (Armenpress photo)

The President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars Melanie O'Brien, stated in Yerevan that discussions about genocides should not overlook what occurred during the 10-month blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh:

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Simonyan Meets with Indian President

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — A delegation led by Speaker of Parliament Alen Simonyan on December 16 met with President of India Droupadi Murmu during an official visit to India.

During the meeting both sides were pleased to note the high dynamics of development of bilateral relations and added that despite the broad cooperation there is still untapped potential in the ties, according to a readout issued by the Armenian parliament's press service.

Murmu thanked Simonyan for the official visit to India and expressed confidence that it will open a new chapter in bilateral relations.

Simonyan stressed that India is an important partner for Armenia.

New Ambassador Meets French President

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — During a solemn ceremony held on December 13 at the Élysée Palace, Arman Khachatryan, the ambassador of Armenia to France, presented his credentials to Emmanuel Macron, the President of the French Republic, according to a statement issued by the Embassy of Armenia in France.

Following the ceremony, Macron congratulated Khachatryan on his appointment and wished him success in advancing the privileged relations between the two countries.

Expressing gratitude for the warm wishes, Ambassador Khachatryan reaffirmed his commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation. He emphasized the Armenian government's desire to expand and strengthen the strategic partnership and multi-sectoral collaboration with friendly France.

Tourism Committee To Conduct Aggressive Campaign

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Tourism Committee of Armenia is set to start 2025 with a strategy of recording new achievements, the committee's newly appointed president Lusine Gevorgyan has said.

"I've already met with representatives of the medical sector, we discussed issues in the medical tourism and spa tourism sectors. We also met with representatives of guest homes and we discussed their winter season offers, particularly New Year holiday offers, so that our countrymen choose to spend their holidays here in Armenia," Gevorgyan said.

The law on tourism took effect September 1, and 28 related legislative acts must be adopted.

"Companies offering guest house services mostly complained about the inaccessibility of business loans," she said, adding that she has asked Minister of Economy Gevorg Papoyan to clarify the matter with banks and the tax authority.

"We have many objectives, first is the promotion of Armenia as a tourism destination all around the world. Next year I plan to contribute more money from our budget for this," she said.

Armenia Reopens Embassy in Syria

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia reopened its embassy in Damascus on Monday, December 16, one week after evacuating it amid the rebel offensive that toppled Syria's longtime President Bashar al-Assad.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said the embassy resumed its activities along with

soon. The consulate was shut down shortly before Syria's second largest city fell late last month to the rebels dominated by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Islamist militant group. Both diplomatic missions had functioned throughout the Syrian civil war.

In what was official Yerevan's first reaction to the regime change in Syria, the Foreign Ministry posted a separate statement on X saying: "We stand firmly by

Much of the work of the Armenian diplomatic missions in Syria is related to the country's ethnic Armenian community that had an estimated 80,000 members until the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. The once thriving community has been in limbo since the beginning of the lighting rebel offensive.

The plight of between 10,000 and 15,000 Syrian Armenians believed to remain in Aleppo has been of particular concern. Some of them managed to flee the city ahead of the rebel takeover. They have mostly returned home in recent days, according to Zarmig Boghigian, the editor of the local Armenian newspaper *Kantsasar*.

"The situation with security in the city is good, but people are concerned," Boghigian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "The economic situation is bad and uncertainty persists. Prices go up and down. So it's not clear what's going to happen."

She said that during their meetings with community leaders in Aleppo, Damascus and other cities, the new HTS-led authorities gave the Syrian Armenians security guarantees, telling them to "continue your lives as usual and reopen your churches." Armenian schools across the country reopened on Monday, Boghigian added.

A group of Syrian Armenians had been scheduled to fly to Armenia on a direct flight from Damascus on November 14. The flight was canceled because of the continued closure of Syria's airports. Boghigian said that community members willing to take refuge in Armenia are now free to do so via neighboring Lebanon.



A drone view shows people celebrating in Aleppo after rebel fighters ousted Syria's Bashar al-Assad, December 13, 2024.

its consular section that "returned to its normal regime."

"Appointments for citizens of Armenia have already been organized today," it said in a statement.

The ministry added that the Armenian consulate in Aleppo will also be reopened

the friendly Syrian people in this decisive moment for their history and support the inclusive and peaceful political transition process. , with strong belief that tolerance and national unity are the only way to stability and peace in Syria and the entire region."

FAST's Advance Research Grants Will Continue Operating under Administration of Higher Education and Science Committee

YEREVAN — On December 12, the Higher Education and Science Committee and the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST) signed a memorandum of cooperation, ensuring the continued advancement of six ongoing projects under FAST's Advance Research Grants, now to be led by the Committee.

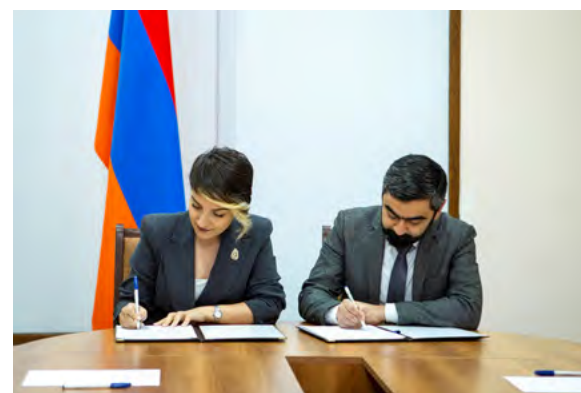
Launched in 2020, Advance united 88 researchers in Armenia led by international scientists from the United States, Germany, France, Belgium and Chile. The program has established research teams in innovative fields such as machine learning, computer vision, biotechnology, bioinformatics, mathematical analysis, and more.

The program laid the foundation for nine three-to-four-year research projects, two of which — "Machine Learning" and "Biotechnology" co-implemented and co-funded by Yerevan State University — successfully concluded their four-year journey this fall.

Over the past four years, the research teams have published 30 articles in top scientific journals with highest impact factors and organized over 25 credit-based and open courses, summer schools, and conferences in Armenia, engaging over 770 participants. Additionally, six local institutions have expanded their research lab capacities. All of this has laid the groundwork for effective cross-field collaborations, enhancing the quantity and quality of research outcomes while promoting the involvement and development of young scientists.

"The concept behind Advance addressed the critical challenges facing STI in Armenia. Advance seeks to bridge local and international research institutions, stimulate research in emerging and underexplored fields, and catalyze transformative change within the Armenian research ecosystem.

As a result, we came up with this research grant model. If the pilot phase proved successful, we planned to introduce it to our government partners as a holistic model for funding science. Fortunately, four years later, within its strategic changes, the Ministry



Suzanna Shamakhyan, left, and Sargis Hayotsyan sign the agreement.

not only increased its science funding but integrated the Advance model, fostering an environment that ensures the model's long-term sustainability and expansion. We are delighted to share our commitment to advancing science alongside our partners at the Ministry," said Suzanna Shamakhyan, executive director of FAST.

"Today, we are pleased to announce the launch of a new phase of collaboration with FAST. Through this partnership, the Higher Education and Science Committee will support the implementation and long-term sustainability of six innovative Advance projects. Given our shared commitment to rapidly advancing science and higher education in Armenia, we believe there are numerous opportunities for expanded bilateral and multilateral collaboration with the foundation. Current state policy emphasizes key reforms within higher education

and science, necessitating the active engagement of all stakeholders, including the FAST. This is particularly crucial given the Foundation's long-standing track record of successfully supporting the implementation of innovative projects," added Sargis Hayotsyan, Chairman of the Higher Education and Science Committee.

Six institutions, including Yerevan State University and the American University of Armenia, as well as L.A. Orbeli Institute of Physiology, the Institute of Molecular Biology, the Institute of Physical Research, and the Armenian Bioinformatics Institute, have been involved in the ADVANCE framework. As host organizations, they have created a platform for the implementation of

research projects and the organization of scientific events at both international and local levels.

Since its inception, FAST, with the generous support of its donors, has invested \$1,970,500, providing monthly grants for research work, supporting researcher participation in international conferences, procuring essential equipment and laboratory materials, covering article publication costs, and addressing all other expenses associated with team activities.

In turn, the Higher Education and Science Committee will provide the necessary funding for the implementation of the six ADVANCE projects from January 2025 to August 2027.

Moving forward, the foundation will continue to support efforts to disseminate the program's results and expand connections between research groups.



ARMENIA

Intl. Forum Looks at Risk Factors and Genocide Prevention

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“We are talking about the lack of food, medical care, and medication. These are fundamental characteristics of genocide. This is a crime of creating conditions for physical destruction. We saw some residents of Nagorno-Karabakh die of starvation. At the very least, we can clearly state that the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 was preceded by genocide.

The deportation of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh can be characterized as a crime against humanity. This would allow the International Criminal Court to examine the crime. Evidence-based arguments can be made, but I understand it will be challenging to find a way to hold anyone truly accountable.”

Former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno Ocampo, also participated in the forum. Speaking about the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century and the efforts to recognize this crime, he said:

“Armenians fight primarily for justice and the memory [of the victims]. It’s hard to say whether Turkey will ever acknowledge the fact of genocide. We don’t know. But we must involve Turkey in the discussion and explain. The younger generation

rejects this term.

O’Brien, warns that genocide is not limited to mass killings: “This term also encompasses crimes involving humiliation and deprivation of people. Genocide, as a crime against humanity, must be recognized, condemned, and prevented through international mechanisms. International courts must oversee this process. The crimes we are witnessing today could have been prevented in the past. But that did not happen. Now, we see these processes unfolding in Sudan, Myanmar, and Palestine. If the perpetrators had been held accountable, others might have thought twice before committing similar crimes.”

At the “Against the Crime of Genocide” forum, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk delivered a video address, emphasizing that the key to preventing genocides is the full adherence to international law by all governments and conflicting parties:

“These grave crimes do not arise out of nowhere. They are preceded by systematic discrimination, incitement to hatred, and practices of segregation based on racial, ethnic, religious, or other grounds.”

Türk noted that there are obligations to prevent such violations, which “many countries today fail to fulfill.” He urged



Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan



Former Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan

of the convention and hold perpetrators accountable. He also called for strengthening prevention tools, including education and combating misinformation:

“Misinformation can contribute to incitement to hatred and actions aimed at genocide. We must respect and implement the rulings of the International Court of Justice regarding the application

ties will never happen again.

“Unfortunately, in a world plagued by division, distrust, and violence, the dark specter of genocide remains with us,” he said.

Guterres stressed that all governments must ratify and implement the provisions

of the convention. We must do everything possible to identify early warning signs and raise the alarm. The best way to honor the memory of genocide victims and survivors is to intensify efforts to prevent this horrific crime.”



Former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Luis Moreno Ocampo

is different. I believe we can address this issue with the younger generation.”

The Armenian Genocide refers to the mass killings in Ottoman Turkey in 1915. Before that, approximately 2.5 million Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire. As a result of killings and mass deportations, more than half of them perished. Armenia, some Western countries, and international organizations officially recognize those events as genocide. Turkey categorically

governments to cooperate in investigating international crimes and to support mechanisms of accountability, including the International Criminal Court.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres also addressed the forum participants, recalling the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted 76 years ago. He stated that this document serves as a guarantee to victims and survivors of genocide that such atrocities

Vardanyan Legal Team Condemns Azerbaijan’s New Charges Threatening Life Imprisonment

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The alleged evidence is conveniently hidden both from Vardanyan and public view based on claims the charges relate to the “national security of Azerbaijan.” The regime has, at the same time, refused to provide copies of the alleged evidence to Vardanyan and counsel, who are currently only allowed to review these materials without a proper translation and at limited times. Their ability to take notes is also restricted due to “national security,” further constraining Ruben and his counsel’s extremely limited ability to prepare the defense for the trial.

“These charges represent a flagrant violation of Azerbaijan’s obligations under international law,” said Vardanyan’s legal counsel, Jared Genser. “The laundry list of charges — a transparently brazen attempt to blame everything that the Azeri regime did in Nagorno-Karabakh on Ruben — in addition to Azerbaijan’s refusal to provide and make public all of the charges and so-called evidence against Ruben for review, reaffirms that the charges are politically motivated and that the regime knows no objective observer would conclude there is any credible evidence to support its allegations. This approach is clearly designed for Aliyev to justify holding a secret trial before a tribunal that will be neither independent nor impartial.”

Warning that the new charges signal an intensifying campaign by President Ilham Aliyev to silence dissenting voices, Vardanyan’s family are calling on democratic countries to show that such flagrant violations cannot be tolerated anymore and to ensure international organizations and media are present during the trial.

“The most recent charges against my father, are a travesty of justice and retribution for the failures of COP29 upon an innocent scapegoat,” said David Vardanyan. “Ruben Vardanyan was the State Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh for three months, where he sought to improve the livelihoods of its citizens through meaningful social programs. Sadly, he was rewarded with the threat of life imprisonment by one of the most corrupt regimes on earth. His arrest and these new fallacious charges are a symbol to all Armenians around the world that no one is safe. It has been over two years since our family has been able to see Ruben. We are afraid that we might not be able to see him again if the democratic world does not act to put an end to this non-sense.”

Vardanyan has been imprisoned in Baku in conditions violating international law. His trial — which has already been delayed on several occasions — is expected to fall far short of many international standards.



Yeghishe Kirakosyan, left, who represents Armenia in many international cases, next to Peter Prove



TCA of US and Canada Stands by Teachers in Armenia

TEACHERS, from page 1

I would like to present a description of the Armenian schools named after Vahan Tekeyan.

The 60-person teaching staff of the Vahan Tekeyan School in Gyumri was successfully certified according to the new requirements and standards introduced for teachers in Armenia. They teach 340 students in grades 5-12, in Armenian and Russian. Students at the Gyumri school have participated in Olympiads in various subjects and have become laureates. About 80 percent of graduates are successfully admitted to universities in Armenia.

Some 510 students study at the Vahan Tekeyan Basic School in Yerevan, taught by 45 teachers. The first building of the school was renovated by the government in 2024. The renovation of the second building of the school is planned for 2025.

The school administration takes care of organizing the time of the students. Students are involved in various clubs at the school, such as Young Naturalist, Chess, the Surrounding World and I, Armenian National Instruments and Folk Dances, as well as Karate.

Students successfully participate in intra-school Olympiads every year, winning high scores.

The Vahan Tekeyan School of Karbi has 80 teachers for 704 students.

With the support and guidance of teachers, students of the school actively participate in various international and local educational and sports events and competitions, always representing their native community, school and country with honor.

We would especially like to single out the names of the 10th grade students Arevik Hovhannisyan, Rita Baghdasaryan and Syuzanna Avetisyan, 11th grade student Mane Tonoyan, and 9th grade student Norayr Stepanyan, who have consistently won prizes in Olympiads on various subjects and international competitions. Students Masis Abrahamyan, Edward Grigoryan, Vardan Nanyan have won in international sports competitions, and Alisa Hovhannisyan, Anush Grigoryan and Mareta Hovhannisyan have distinguished themselves in the fields of music and art.

It is noteworthy that from the village of Karbi, unlike other rural communities in Armenia, there is no emigration. Therefore, the number of students at the school is increasing year by year, creating a shortage of classrooms. In the fall, we visited the school and witnessed that two



A celebration of the Armenian alphabet near the tomb of Mesrob Mashdoots in Oshagan, Armenia

classes were taking place in the same room. Classes were also held in the school's auditorium. The school cafeteria, unfortunately, is not functioning, though they need it.

I will probably meet with the governor of Aragatsotn Province next year to discuss the issue.

At the Vahan Tekeyan



The teachers of the Vahan Tekeyan School of Yerevan with their students

Secondary School in Stepavan, classes are organized in two shifts, where 502 students are taught by 52 teachers. The government has allocated laboratories for chemistry, physics, biology, and informatics, as a result of which the school has a

shortage of classrooms.

The school is well-organized and the teaching staff is professional, and therefore the number of students is growing. Students stay at the school after classes, use the laboratories and improve their theoretical knowledge in practical conditions. Roughly 70-80 percent of graduates continue their education at various universities.

The staff of the schools named after the great Western Armenian writer Vahan Tekeyan express their gratitude to the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, and to the benefactors who always highly appreciate and support the teacher.

It should be added that there is a need for male teachers in all schools in the Republic of Armenia, which it would be desirable to fill with volunteer teachers from the diaspora.

(Gayane Muradyan is the director of the Armenia Office of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada.)



The teachers of the Gyumri School



The Karbi School startup group at the Digitec Armat Olympiad pavilion



Karbi School children's dance group after its event

INTERNATIONAL

Before His Ouster, Syria’s Assad Told Iran that Turkey Was Aiding Rebels to Unseat Him

By **Parisa Hafezi**

DUBAI (Reuters) — In the final days leading to his ouster, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad complained to Iran’s foreign minister that Turkey was actively supporting Sunni rebels in their offensive to topple him, two Iranian officials told Reuters this week.

Five decades of rule by Assad’s family ended on Sunday, December 8, when he fled to Moscow, where the government granted him asylum. Iran had backed Assad in Syria’s long civil war and his overthrow was widely seen as a major blow to the Iran-led “Axis of Resistance,” a po-

litical and military alliance that opposes Israeli and U.S. influence in the Middle East.

As rebel forces from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly aligned to al Qaeda, seized major cities and advanced towards the capital, Assad met Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi in Damascus on Dec. 2.

At the meeting, Assad voiced anger over what he said was Turkey’s intensified efforts to unseat him, according to a senior Iranian official. Araqchi assured Assad of Iran’s continued support and promised to raise the issue with Ankara, the official said.

The next day, Araqchi met with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to express Tehran’s deep concerns over Ankara’s support for rebel advances.

“The meeting was tense. Iran expressed its unhappiness with Turkey’s alignment with U.S. and Israeli agendas and conveyed Assad’s concerns,” a second Iranian official said, referring to Ankara’s support for rebels and cooperation with Western and Israeli interests in targeting Iran’s allies in the region.

Fidan, the official said, blamed Assad for the crisis, asserting that his failure to engage in genuine peace talks and his years of oppressive rule were the root causes of the conflict.

A Turkish foreign ministry source familiar with Fidan’s talks said that those were not the exact remarks by Fidan, and added that Araqchi did not bring and convey any messages from Assad to Turkey, without elaborating.

Fidan told reporters in Doha on Sunday that the Assad regime had “had precious time” to address Syria’s existing problems, but did not, instead allowing “a slow decay and collapse of the regime.”

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that Assad’s toppling was the result of a plan by the United States and Israel.

He said that one of Syria’s neighbors also had a role and continues to do so. He did not name the country, but appeared to be referring to Turkey.

NATO member Turkey, which controls swathes of land in northern Syria after several cross-border incursions against the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, was a main backer of opposition groups aiming to topple Assad since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011.

Assad’s downfall stripped Iran and its ally the Lebanese group Hezbollah of a vital ally. Tehran’s ties to Damascus had allowed Iran to spread its influence through a land corridor from its western border via Iraq all the way to Lebanon to bring arms supplies to Hezbollah. Iran spent billions of dollars propping up Assad during the war and deployed its Revolutionary Guards to Syria to keep its ally in power.

Hezbollah also played a major part, sending fighters to support him, but had to bring them back to Lebanon over the last year to fight in a bruising war with Israel - a redeployment that weakened Syrian government lines.

Syrian Armenians Expect Aid From Yerevan

By **Ruzanna Stepanian**

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian community in Syria and the war-torn city of Aleppo in particular hopes to receive urgent economic assistance from Armenia, one of its representatives indicated on Wednesday, December 11.

The once-thriving community has been in limbo since Syrian rebels launched late last month a military offensive that led to the ouster of the country’s longtime President Bashar al-Assad.

An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Syrian Armenians still live in Aleppo. Even before capturing Damascus at the weekend, the rebels led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Islamist militant group assured them that it will protect and not discriminate against the Christian minority.

A spokeswoman for the Aleppo diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has long been representing the local community, said that while the security concerns of its members have seemingly been addressed for now, they are increasingly grappling with the economic fallout from the recent fighting. Maria Gabrielian said that because of the continuing chaos in the country, many of them have trouble reopening their small businesses or earning a liv-

ing otherwise.

Gabrielian told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service that the diocese has provided \$35 worth of one-off financial aid to every Armenian family in Aleppo. The money will support them for just a few days, she said.

“We would like you to ask the Armenian government in what ways they can assist Syrian Armenians so that we find out,” added Gabrielian.

The government evacuated Armenia’s consulate in Aleppo and embassy in Damascus as the rebel offensive progressed rapidly. It has announced no plans to reopen the diplomatic missions following the formation of a new, interim government of Syria.

“It’s not that the government could do something but it doesn’t,” said Zareh Sinanian, Armenia’s high commissioner for Diaspora affairs. “The situation was developing very quickly, it was fluid, and the government, like everyone else, didn’t even have a realistic chance to respond.”

Sinianian said that shortly before the fall of Damascus the government bought air tickets for 14 Syrian Armenian families that fled Aleppo and were scheduled to fly to Yerevan on December 14. He said the flight has not been canceled by a Syrian airline. operating it and may still go ahead as planned.

Armenia, India, Iran Hold More Talks on Transport Corridor

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia, India and Iran reaffirmed their commitment to a new transport corridor passing through their territories during a second round of trilateral negotiations held in New Delhi on December 12.

A joint statement on the “consultations” said senior diplomats from the three nations discussed “connectivity initiatives, engagement in multilateral fora, and regional developments.”

“They also explored ways to promote trade, tourism and cultural exchanges while strengthening people-to-people ties,” it said.

The parties further “emphasized the need for fostering close cooperation” under the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project initiated by Russia,

Iran and India in 2000. They “highlighted the role of [Iran’s] Chabahar Port in this regard,” added the statement.

India has built and operates two terminals at the Gulf of Oman port to bypass Pakistan in cargo traffic with Iran, Afghanistan and central Asian countries. The Armenian government suggested in 2021 that Indian companies use Chabahar for cargo shipments to not only Armenia but also neighboring Georgia, Russia and even Europe.

Armenia has long maintained a cordial relationship with Iran. It has deepened its ties with India in the last few years, notably through a series of contracts signed with Indian arms manufacturers. The three countries held their first trilateral talks on the mutual transport links in Yerevan in

April 2023.

Azerbaijan’s subsequent takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh raised more fears that it will also attack Armenia to open an extra-territorial land corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave passing through Syunik, the sole Armenian province bordering Iran. Tehran is strongly opposed to the so-called “Zangezur corridor” sought by Azerbaijan as well as Turkey.

In October 2023, the Armenian government contracted two Iranian companies to upgrade a 32-kilometer section of Syunik’s main highway leading to the Iranian border. Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrzad Bazrpash attended the signing of the \$215 million contract in Yerevan, underscoring its geopolitical significance for the Islamic Republic.

INTERNATIONAL

EU Announces Extra 1 Billion Euros in Refugee Funding for Turkey

ANKARA (AFP) — The EU is to give Turkey an extra one billion euros in funding to care for the Syrian refugees it is hosting, European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said on December 17.

“An additional one billion euros for 2024 is on its way,” she said at a joint news conference with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The funds would support the healthcare and education needs of refugees in Turkey and “contribute to migration and border management, including voluntary returns of Syrian refugees,” she said.

Turkey is hosting nearly three million refugees who fled across the border in search of safety after the war began in 2011.

Ankara is hoping the shift in power in Damascus will allow many of them to return home.

“As things evolve on the ground, we can adapt this one billion to the new needs that might occur in Syria,” she said.

Since 2012, the European Union has provided nearly 10 billion euros in funding to Turkey to support it with migration.

French FM Expresses Support for Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot has expressed support for Yerevan and urged the European Union to strengthen its relations with Armenia.

“I will call on the European Union to develop its relations with this country, to which France is deeply committed, so that we can provide Armenia with the support it rightfully expects,” the French Foreign Minister stated during a briefing with journalists this week.

Swiss National Council Adopts Motion Calling For Nagorno Karabakh Peace Forum

BERN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Swiss National Council, the lower house of the Parliament, on December 17 voted 96 to 80 with 16 abstentions to adopt a motion calling on the Federal Council to organize an international peace forum on Nagorno Karabakh next year.

A majority in Parliament is of the opinion that Switzerland should facilitate an open dialogue between Azerbaijan and representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.

“It should be conducted under international supervision. The aim is to “negotiate the safe and collective return of the Armenian population historically resident there,” the lawmakers say.

The motion now goes to the Council of States, the upper house of Parliament. The national government will be tasked with organizing the conference if the Council of States approves the proposal.

Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis opposed the motion.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Artists in Germany Unite around Parajanov Anniversary

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — This is a first for the Armenian art scene in Germany, and a noteworthy one. Unified efforts have brought into being a remarkable exhibit of artworks, on display in three venues, thus far. The occasion is the 100th birthday of renowned film director Sergei Parajanov, who was born on January 9, 1924 and died on July 20, 1990. Although several organizations of Armenians in Germany regularly host “Armenian Culture Days” in their regions, this commemorative exhibit represents perhaps the first such joint effort by several Armenian clubs and societies, who issued the call to compatriots living in Germany to take part.

Anahid Babayan, from the Armenian Cultural Society in Leipzig, organized the call that led to the first show in the Leipzig



A view of the exhibit at InteriorDasein city center on August 30, with 25 artists presenting their works at the atelier of Eduard Panosian. Then the show opened in Halle an der Saale, hosted by the Ararat Culture in Halle-Hoffe Association. Now, it continues at InteriorDasein in Berlin,

with the exhibit featuring paintings, drawings, prints, collages and montages, photographs, and AI-created pictures. The works represent a dialogue with Parajanov’s prolific oeuvre, developing themes in its manifold forms and genres.

The current venue, InteriorDasein, is a project room in Berlin that functions as a unique meeting place for artists from the diaspora. It was established in 2008 by Archi Harutyun Galentz, a third-generation artist living and working in the German capital. The exhibit opened on November 11 and continues until January 9, 2025, the date of the film maker’s birth. It may continue to travel next year.

An Artist for Many Nations

Almost all the artists are living in Germany; although Armenia was the birthplace of the majority, Syria, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Iran, and Argentina are also represented. Thus, they share something other than art with Parajanov, representing more than one nation.

It was Parajanov himself who defined his multiple national identities when he said, “Everybody knows that I have three motherlands:” Armenia, because he was the son of Armenian parents, Georgia, because his birthplace was the capital city Tbilisi, and Ukraine, because he studied and made his first films in Kiev.

Parajanov, as briefly sketched in Galentz’s announcement of the initiative, was one of the most significant film directors of the Soviet Union and his work earned recognition from the start. His first film, “Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors,” won the Gold Medal at the Thessaloniki film festival in 1965, the

year of its premiere, and received prizes in France and England. In the Soviet Union it reached cult status. Galentz stressed that Parajanov’s international fame rested not only on his cinematic productions, but also on his achievements as an artist, and his victimization as a Soviet prisoner. Prominent Italian film maker Federico Fellini campaigned for his release internationally.

In Armenia, Galentz recalled, Parajanov was more than honored: one of his famous films, “The Color of Pomegranates” (1969), is considered an icon still today. And in 1988, the state museum in Yerevan bearing his name was established to preserve and present his life and works.

Parajanov and Berlin

The connection between Galentz’s project room and Parajanov goes back several years, when in 2018-2019 the Potsdam Film Museum dedicated a major exhibit to the artist. InteriorDasein, which has an integrated workshop for artistic workmanship in wood, supported the exhibit by providing a special frame with museum glass, built by Galentz for a textile work of Parajanov’s. Following the exhibit, he organized the safe return of the work to the museum in the Armenian capital. Galentz remained in close contact with the museum’s director, the late Zaven Sargsyan, and is particularly happy, as he writes, to be able to present in this centennial exhibit several items from a work of photographic documentation done by Sargsyan and donated in Berlin to the atelier’s collection.

The participants in the wandering exhibit, whose biographies Anahid Babayan has also assembled in a PDF catalogue, include Silvina der Meguerditchian (Berlin), Sam Grigoryan (Berlin), Ararat Haydeyan (Saathain), Hasmik Hovsepyan-Haydeyan (Kleinkmehlen), Gagik Kurginian (Berlin), Archi Galentz (Berlin), Stepan Gantralyan (Berlin), Rosanna Eisenmenger-Kara-

petyan (Berlin), Anahit Mkrtchyan (Oranienburg), VAZO (Vazgen Pahlavuni Tadevosyan) (Die, France), and many more.

As part of the celebration, InteriorDasein hosted an evening of music on Sunday, December 1, featuring Ukrainian singer Roksana Vikaluk, who is also a composer and plays several instruments. Inspired by Parajanov’s masterpiece, *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*, she presented vocal improvisations of Ukrainian folk songs and shared stories of her family in relation to Parajanov. She related how her mother had talked about the 1965 premiere of Parajanov’s first film in Kiev, and described her later personal meeting with the artist.

A Year of Tributes

Throughout the year now drawing to a close, the Parajanov centennial has been celebrated widely in various forms. To mention a few: international press coverage (Sergei Parajanov at 100: The Triumph of Imagination and Beauty - The Armenian Mirror-Spectator); with special honors granted, like the National Legend of Ukraine State Award (Zelensky Honors Parajanov with National Legend of Ukraine State Award - The Armenian Mirror-Spectator); at festivities, at the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum in Milan, Italy (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/10/01/parajanov-100-a-grand-celebration-of-sergei-parajanovs-legacy-at-milans-bagatti-valsecchi-museum/>); with an exhibition at the European Parliament, and a flurry of activities, including special film showings and conferences in Russia, the United States, Greece, and France. In Armenia, the centennial festivities include an international conference titled “PARAJANOV-100: A Journey Through Time and Culture” organized by the Sergei Parajanov Museum in Yerevan.

(Photro courtesy of Archi Galentz)

Archbishop Expresses Cautious Hope for Syria and Syrian-Armenians in Wake of Regime Overthrow

SYRIA, from page 1

happened suddenly and unexpectedly,” he noted, adding the community worried it was “without protection and support [since] the army and governmental officers had abandoned their posts and left the city and within hours at night the opposition took the city under their control. Naturally some fled and those who remained were in great fear, because of the previous bitter experiences that they lived [through] years ago,” Ashkarian said. “But after few days we as community leaders, all 11 archbishops and bishops of the various Christian denominations, have met with the members of the group that overthrew the government, and they assured us that we should not worry about safety issues or assurance of our people. Presently the situation is much better, but the dominant uncertainty makes it difficult. We must all be patient because for this kind of situation to be brought back to its normal state or to be clear needs time, endurance and patience, specially when there is no 100-percent guarantee yet. But as Christians, we always hope and believe that the Lord is with us and know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

HTS, which supports an Islamic fundamentalist agenda, seems to be reassuring minority groups that they will enjoy the same sort of backing from them as the previous regime.

“They assured us that as Christian we should continue our daily lives as we used to without any worries and exercise our liturgies and church life in a normal manner,” Ashkarian said. “So we go to our churches, we celebrate Holy Masses, vespers and other ceremonies and live our faith freely.

Although we hear from here and there that some minor disturbances are happening, but those are personal things and we should not generalize, and immediately if needed are being taken care of.”

He stressed the post-coup situation is still evolving and “the final image of the coming government” has yet to come into view. He noted, “We worry, of course, and patiently wait, hoping for a better future.”

While he welcomed the assurances, Aleppo and the rest of Syrian citizens, including Armenians, continue to face many challenges, “concerning healthcare, hospitalization, medicine, salary issues, social and everyday life struggle, economic and others things such as electricity, water and internet connection and communication difficulties.”

Again, he added, the new regime has assured the Armenian minority that “very soon we will see improvement regarding many of the above-mentioned aspects.”

It is not entirely clear how many Armenians remain in Aleppo, the country’s second largest city, which for decades had been mostly Armenian. According to figures from Armenia’s Ministry of Diaspora from 2010, there were 100,000 Armenians in the city at that time.

Archbishop Ashkarian said he could not offer exact figures now because he did not have the data from the Armenian Catholic and Armenian Evangelical churches. “Before the war we used to count more than around 80,000 Armenians in Aleppo alone, but unfortunately at present time we are in between 17,000 to 20,000,” he added.

As in many other Middle Eastern countries, Armenians enjoyed government pro-

tection in Syria.

“Well, we have always been law-abiding citizens. During the Assad regime, the rights of the people including the minorities as citizens, regardless their religious and ethnic differences, were safely preserved under the constitution of the country. At present time, as I said previously, because of the uncertainty and the precedent bitter experience, they are not fully convinced of the current situation and they fear and worry, of course. But we hope that gradually the situation and the pressing atmosphere will change and the coming days will bring much more good news and hopefully the Christians as citizens will continue to enjoy their full rights as it was previously,” the archbishop explained.

He also expressed hope that many who had fled the civil war will return to Aleppo.

He continued, “Christians have always been if not the most but one of the most important elements of Syrian history, society and reality, that always played a pivotal role in its development, renaissance and construction, on every level,” Ashkarian noted. “I am confident by the grace of God and through His promises given to His children, truth and justice will prevail and the peace that we anxiously long for will be established. Time will reveal the truth and when things change towards better life, I am sure not only many, but thousands will return back to their homes.”

Asked what the Aleppo community needs from the diaspora, Archbishop Ashkarian pointed to both the spiritual and physical planes.

“We need your prayers — nonstop prayers — and financial support in this

critical time of need,” he said, adding that Western powers can “start by practically [offering] support to the Christians by playing a pivotal role in regard of constructive diplomacy and policy, by helping to end the violence and corruption, taking away all the sanctions and helping the people to benefit from the country’s natural resources and richness.”

This is not the first time the archbishop has asked for the removal of sanctions as a way to help the country; he first did so in February 2024, saying that they have caused much suffering.

Ashkarian added that the Armenian Church will continue to help flock members. “We will continue to teach, protect and lead [our] children towards truth, justice and right, and will stand with [our] people supporting and providing them in their spiritual, physical and social needs,” he said.

He then made his plea for peace.

“I pray and wish that God Almighty pours upon us abundantly his divine and heavenly grace, blessings and goods and give the world leaders the wisdom to work and strive for real peace and justice, in order to make the world a better place for everyone to live in with love, respect and understanding. With much gratitude and Christian love I greet you all and wish you all, although early, but with joyful heart Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,” he concluded.

Many groups are raising money for Syrian Armenians, including the AGBU, the Armenian Missionary Association of America, the International Rescue Committee and the Armenian Relief Society:



Community News

Serge D. Buchakjian Appointed New CEO/Executive Director of AMAA

PARAMUS, N.J. — The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) announce this month the appointment of Serge D. Buchakjian as its new CEO/executive director, effective February 1, 2025.

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Buchakjian spent his early years attending the Armenian Evangelical College before earning a Bachelor's Degree in business administration from Haigazian University. Following the onset of Lebanon's civil war in 1975, he emigrated to the United States, where he pursued further education at Northeastern University in Boston, earning a Master of Business Administration in 1978. Additionally, Buchakjian has completed executive education programs at Harvard University, Oxford and Northwestern University, and is certified as a Six Sigma Green Belt and Black Belt.



Serge D. Buchakjian

Buchakjian brings to AMAA over 35 years of experience in the international aerospace and defense industry. Most recently, he served as President of BASCO International LLC, a strategic consulting and business advisory firm. Previously, he held senior leadership roles, including Vice President and General Manager of the International Solutions Business Segment at L3 Technologies, and Senior Vice President and General Manager of International Programs at Oshkosh Defense, where he was also a corporate officer. His earlier tenure includes executive positions at Honeywell International Inc. (formerly AlliedSignal), where he spent four years in London overseeing operations across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and served on their board of directors. He also held global leadership roles at Smiths Industries Aerospace (now GE) and Lear Siegler Inc., with responsibilities spanning worldwide operations.

Beyond his corporate career, Buchakjian has actively contributed to numerous NGOs and professional organizations, such as the National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA), the Association of the US Army (AUSA), and the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA). He has also served on committees with the US-India Business Council, the US-U.A.E. Business Council, and the Business Council for International Understanding.

see AMAA, page 8



Ani Bukujian performing at AUA event hosted by David Balabanian,

Over \$500,000 Raised for AUA at San Francisco Event Hosted by David Balabanian

SAN FRANCISCO — On November 23, American University of Armenia (AUA) Pillar and steadfast supporter of the University David Balabanian hosted an exclusive gathering at his home in San Francisco, for the benefit of AUA.

Balabanian and his guests raised more than \$500,000 through various contributions, ranging from naming of AUA facilities and establishing named endowed scholarship funds, to joining the 200 ChangeMakers of AUA campaign and supporting specific University initiatives.

Balabanian, a longtime host of numerous events for the University, brought together a small group of AUA supporters who established legacy gifts in an effort to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of the University. Leading by example, Balabanian himself made a generous contribution by establishing the David and Christine Balabanian Endowed Scholarship Fund, to support AUA students annually, in perpetuity, empowering generations of young scholars to access quality higher education and build successful careers in Armenia.

Now retired, Balabanian had a distinguished career as a renowned attorney spanning many decades. He graduated as valedictorian from Cashmere High School in 1956 and went to earn his undergraduate and law degrees from Harvard University, in addition to an advanced degree from Oxford University, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar. Balabanian also served as president of the Bar Association of San Francisco and chair of the California State Bar Conference of Delegates. As a proud Armenian, he was the first president of the Armenian Bar Association, fighting tirelessly to advance and defend Armenian causes through his legal expertise.

With his late wife, Christine, who passed away in 2021, Balabanian was also involved in many Armenian organizations, including AUA, which the couple started supporting in the early years of the University's establishment. They later became AUA Pillars, a campaign that brought together an exclusive group of 100 visionaries who made major contributions and continue to stay actively engaged with AUA and its students. "AUA's role in the life of the Republic of Armenia merits the support of all who wish the country well," they said at the time. "We are happy to join them."

Following Balabanian's welcoming remarks at his exclusive event, AUA co-founder and President Emeritus Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian expressed gratitude to the select group of AUA supporters in attendance, highlighting the importance of continuing to invest in the University, despite the ongoing challenges in Armenia. Chairman of the AUA Board of Trustees, Dr. Lawrence Pitts, noted, "It's just remarkable how much the Diaspora supports Armenia, and a subset of those supporters believe that education is an indicator as to how the country will progress," further adding that AUA students, even before graduation, are highly sought after by employers in Armenia.

Guests were then treated to a beautiful musical performance by violinist Ani Bukujian, who performed a medley of solo pieces. A graduate of the Juilliard School and the San Francisco Conservatory, Bukujian is currently a principal second violinist for the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra.

AUA Vice President of Development Gaiane Khachatrian also addressed the guests, thanking them for establishing their respective legacy gifts that would carry forth ripples of positive impact for generations to come.



Guests at AUA event hosted by David Balabanian, November 2024

Armenian Caucus Leadership Announced

WASHINGTON — Representatives Frank Pallone, Jr (D-NJ), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), David Valadao (R-CA), and Brad Sherman (D-CA), will serve as the new Armenian Caucus Leadership for the 119th Congress, reported the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly).

Pallone, Bilirakis, and Valadao will return to their roles, while Sherman will be succeeding Senator-elect Adam Schiff (D-CA). In a call with Sherman, Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny conveyed that he looked forward to working with the Congressman in his new role.

"I am honored to serve as the Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus," said Rep. Sherman. "For nearly three decades, I have dedicated myself to strengthening the ties between the United States and Armenia, combatting anti-Armenian hate, and advocating for the Armenian American community. As Vice Chair, I look forward to building on this legacy, working with my colleagues towards a future of democracy, security, and prosperity for Armenia and its people."

"We congratulate Reps. Pallone, Bilirakis, Valadao, along with Rep. Sherman, for serving as the new Armenian Caucus Leadership for the 119th Congress," said Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan. "They have all showed vital support for the Armenian people, and universal human rights, and successfully helped pass a number of pro-Armenian resolutions. We will continue our important work together in the year ahead."

Sherman has

been a longtime supporter of Armenian issues, and a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Congressional Armenian Caucus, helping strengthen U.S.-Armenia relations. Rep. Sherman pushed for Armenian Genocide reaffirmation in the U.S. with each Administration, and has repeatedly called for an increase in U.S. assistance to Armenia and Artsakh. During the 118th Congress, he has cosponsored the Armenian Genocide Education Act, and cosponsored resolutions urging the release of Armenian POWs and condemning Azerbaijan for atrocities committed against the Armenian people, and demonstrated support for cutting military aid to Azerbaijan, urging the U.S. to block F-16 sales to Turkey, and urging U.S. funding for Artsakh demining, among other key issues.



Frank Pallone, Jr (D-NJ),



Brad Sherman (D-CA)



COMMUNITY NEWS

Glendale's ServiceTitan Sees Shares Pop in Nasdaq Debut

By Laurence Darmiento

GLENDALÉ (*Los Angeles Times*) — Glendale's blue-collar software firm ServiceTitan saw its shares close up 42 percent after debuting Thursday, December 12, on the Nasdaq in its initial public offering.

The provider of business management software for plumbers and other contractors priced its IPO of 8.8 million shares at \$71, raising gross proceeds of \$625 million. The shares, which had hit \$105 in early afternoon trading, closed at \$101. The company has the potential to raise more capital if underwriters exercise a 30-day option to sell an additional 1.32 million shares.

The shares, which trade under the ticker symbol TTAN, were initially priced at \$52 to \$57 before being upped earlier this week to a range of \$65 to \$67, indicating demand had picked up for the offering. At its \$71 debut price, the company had a market value of \$6.42 billion, lower than the \$7.6 billion valuation it had after a November 2022 funding round. However, with the surge in its stock price, the company's market cap hit \$9.1 billion at the close of trading.

"I was a bit surprised. I don't think even

the underwriters were expecting this," said Riley Mullin, an analyst with Renaissance Capital, who noted the closing price was almost double the low end of the IPO's first pricing range, making the company "richly valued."

He said ServiceTitan benefited from a big interest in software and tech stocks, including artificial intelligence, as well as investor excitement over the incoming Trump administration.

There have been only a handful of software IPOs this year, with ServiceTitan the largest since data management company Rubrik went public in April. However, there are signs the market is recovering after being battered by inflation and the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes.

ServiceTitan counts about 8,000 contracting firms as customers, providing a soup-to-nuts software package that can manage booking appointments, generating estimates and processing invoices as well as payroll and dispatching workers. Clients range in size from family-owned contractors to large national franchises totaling more than 100,000 technicians. The firms pay a subscription fee for its services.

More than \$300 million of the IPO's proceeds will go to retiring all of ServiceTi-

tan's nonconvertible preferred stock, a type of stock that typically pays holders a consistent dividend but cannot be converted into common stock. The company, which wants to expand the number of trades and markets it serves, will use the remainder for general corporate purposes and possible acquisitions.

ServiceTitan was founded in 2007 by two college friends from Glendale, Ara Mahdessian, 39, and Vahe Kuzoyan, 41, whose fathers worked as contractors. They both moved to L.A. as young children in the 1980s — Mahdessian from Iran and Kuzoyan from Armenia.

At an opening bell ceremony, Kuzoyan, the company's president, called the trading debut "a very special day for ServiceTitan, but more importantly it's an incredible milestone for this very special industry."

The event also turned into a celebration of the founders' parents, who rang the opening bell. "Our parents came to this country with no language, no money, and it was through this industry they were able to achieve the American dream," Kuzoyan said.

ServiceTitan employed 2,870 workers as of July 31 at its Glendale headquarters

and offices elsewhere in the U.S. and internationally. Competitors include BuildOps, Housecall Pro, Jobber and other companies that charge subscriptions for their web-based business management software.

The company previously raised about \$1.4 billion from venture firms, including Iconiq Growth, Bessemer Venture Partners and Battery Ventures. The company had filed confidential paperwork for an \$18-billion IPO in 2022, according to Business Insider, but didn't proceed when the market froze up.

ServiceTitan reported revenue of \$614 million in the fiscal year that ended Jan. 31, up nearly a third from a year earlier, and an operating loss of \$195 million, 28% less than in fiscal 2023. It had about \$147 million in cash and equivalents on hand as of Jan. 31 and was carrying \$175 million in long-term net debt.

The company's share structure will ensure that control remains with the co-founders. They are retaining all of ServiceTitan's Class B shares, which are entitled to 10 votes each when shareholders make decisions about the company's leadership.

Lead underwriters on the IPO are Goldman Sachs Group, Morgan Stanley, Wells Fargo and Citigroup.

OBITUARY

George Washington Haroutunian Founding Member of TCA US and Canada

STONEHAM, Mass. — George Washington Haroutunian of Stoneham passed away peacefully on December 8, at the age of 95.

George was born in Chelsea, on February 22, 1929, to the late John and Rose (Dermenjian) Haroutunian.

George grew up in Chelsea and graduated from Chelsea high school and later received an associate's degree in criminal law. After a short period of time, George enlisted in the United States Army and served overseas during the Korean Conflict. George became part of the Special Forces/Army Airborne, completing 44 tactical jumps during his time.

When George returned from overseas, he later became a full-time member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, stationed at Logan Airport in East Boston as the ranking Master Sergeant, personal equipment officer of the 102nd Fighter Wing, Air Combat Command. After a total of 33 years of service to his country, George retired and became an officer with the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles and, once again, sought retirement from that position after several years of recognized employment.

George was a devoted and active member of Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge for his entire life. He served as both Parish Council chairman and Diocesan delegate. He was a vital part of parish life and active in many different parish organizations, most notably the Men's Club and Church Choir. George was honored as Parishioner of the Year for all his service to the church in 2000.

Additionally, George was past commander of the AMVETS Post 41 in Watertown.

He was a member of Mt. Vernon-Galilean AF&AM Masonic Lodge in Melrose. He was active in the Knights of Vartan, Ararat Lodge #1 and was Past Sbarabed of Haik Lodge #37 in 1981.

He served as a member of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) East Coast



District Committee and was an ardent supporter of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*. He used to help his father John to distribute the paper in Chelsea when he was 6 years old.

George was one of the founding board members of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada in 1969.

George was the longtime, devoted companion of the late Kathleen "Shirley" Spencer who passed away in 2022. He was brother of the late Nerses Haroutunian and Jack Haroutunian. He was uncle to the late Richard Haroutunian. George is survived by his godson and first cousin Charles Dermenjian and his wife Joyce of Belmont and first cousin Diana (Dermenjian) Ekizian and her husband Karnig. He is also survived by his cousin Rosemarie Cannistraro as well as many additional cousins in the Haroutunian family. He leaves behind an entire community of lifelong friends who will miss his presence dearly.

Funeral services were held at Holy Trinity Armenian Church, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge, on Wednesday, December 18, with interment at Lindenwood Cemetery in Stoneham. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in George's memory to Holy Trinity Armenian Church.

Serge D. Buchakjian Appointed New CEO/ Executive Director of AMAA

AMAA, from page 7

A dedicated member of the Armenian community, Buchakjian has participated in several Armenian organizations, including the Armenian Society of Fellows (ASOF), the board of Haigazian University, AMAA's Europe Committee, and the Armenian Presbyterian Church, where he has served as a Ruling Elder and Trustee.

Fluent in multiple languages and with residency experience spanning the US, the Middle East, and Europe, Buchakjian will be based at the AMAA headquarters in Paramus, NJ. He is married to Anita (née Philiposian), and together they have two children, Nina and Mark.

"My acquaintance with Mr. Buchakjian goes back to our high school days at the Armenian Evangelical College in Beirut, Lebanon. Like many of us, the civil war in Lebanon uprooted him, and he ended up on the East Coast of the United States, where he completed his education and earned his M.B.A.," said Dr. Nazareth Darakjian, president of the AMAA Board. "Mr. Buchakjian comes to the AMAA with extensive experience in the corporate world, where he honed his skills as an effective leader, capable innovator, and manager. He is a very bright individual but also kind and considerate. Mr. Buchakjian is a man of strong Christian faith and a patriot with firm bonds to his ancestral fatherland of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. I firmly believe that Mr. Buchakjian will enable the AMAA to pursue its mission and elevate the organization to new heights."

Gary R. Phillips, incoming President of the AMAA Board, added: "Serge's extensive experience in international leadership and his deep commitment to the values and mission of the AMAA make him uniquely qualified to lead the organization into a new chapter of impactful service."

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COMMUNITY NEWS

FAST Advance Armenia Gala Raises Funds for AI Education

LOS ANGELES — The Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST) hosted its 3rd Annual Advance Armenia Gala on December 6 at the Landmark in Mission Hills, uniting more than 300 guests from the Armenian community, including entrepreneurs, industry leaders, academics, philanthropists and global visionaries based in the United States around its flagship initiative, the Generation AI High School Project.

Launched in 2023 in collaboration with Armenia’s Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, Generation AI is a

Following the success of FAST’s Gala in Paris, the Los Angeles event further strengthened the momentum, securing additional funding to support 185 more Generation AI students in their three-year educational journey. The Gevorgyants Family, Sarkis and Nune Sepetjians and the Vahe Fattal Foundation have, with their donations, have ensured the implementation of the project over the next three years in three high schools in Armenia. A special tribute was made to honor Sonia Akian, with the Generation AI initiative at Martuni High School After T. Abrahamyan, named

legacy of leadership in California’s educational systems, and Elizabeth Zoryan, a healthcare advocate and community activist, the gala was driven by the vision of advancing AI education across Armenia. The event drew notable supporters, including Araksya Karapetyan, Emmy Award-winning anchor at FOX11’s “Good Day L.A.”] and Grandmaster Levon Aronian.

One of the key parts of the event was a fireside chat featuring Dr. Noubar Afeyan, co-founder of FAST, founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering, and co-founder and chairman of Moderna, alongside Nina Achadjian, a partner at Index Ventures, who works with innovative companies like ServiceTitan, Gong, Vizcom and Intercom. Both speakers emphasized the transformative potential of AI in Armenia, highlighting the numerous opportunities it presents for the country’s future and expressing confidence in Armenia’s chance to become a key player in the global tech world.

Dr. Armen Orujyan, FAST’s outgoing CEO, who will soon transition to the Board

of Trustees, reflected on his seven-year journey with the foundation and highlighted the strength of the community that has gathered around FAST’s vision, while Suzanna Shamakhyan, the incoming Executive Director of FAST, summarized the first 1.5 years of the program and plans for the future: “The program is now active in seven regions and 15 high schools, impacting 540 students. Seventy percent of those students entered the program with a knowledge gap. After just one academic year, half of these students doubled their results. Not only did they close the gap, but many also succeeded in 10th grade — an impressive outcome in such a short time. This shows that when you provide good education to Armenian kids, they know what to do with it. That’s what we are trying to scale and build in all of *marzes* of Armenia.”

The Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST) was founded in 2017 with the aim of creating a favorable ecosystem to promote technological innovation and scientific advancement in Armenia.



Nina Achadjian and Dr. Noubar Afeyan

three-year program that provides a free, comprehensive curriculum in Advanced Math, Python, and AI fundamentals to high school students, nurturing the next generation of innovators and creators nationwide.

in her memory, recognizing the Zaven P. Akian family’s legacy and commitment to education.

Co-chaired by Alice Petrossian, an education management professional with a

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Tekeyan Cultural Association

Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

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

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

☐ \$240

☐ \$480

☐ \$700

☐ other_____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Email_____

Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association

Memo: Sponsor a Teacher

Mail your check to:

TCA Sponsor a Teacher

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Your donation is tax deductible.



Merry Christmas

and Happy New Year



Best Wishes for 2025
Heratch Doumanian
CHICAGO, IL

Hye Boys say Genatz!
Guy Simonian
WEST HARTFORD, CT

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Roxanne Etmekjian and Nerses Joubanian
NEWTON, MA

Happy New Year and Merry Xmas
Mr. and Mrs. Herman Hintiryan
WEST BLOOMFIELD, MI

Merry Xmas and Happy New Year
Dr. Jacques Gulekjian
FORT LEE, NJ

Merry Christmas and a Happy, Peaceful New Year
Avedis and Houry Boyamian
WINCHESTER, MA

Make Armenia Great Again
Ara Cherchian
MILWAUKEE, WI

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year for All...
Nishan and Margrit Atinizian
WINCHESTER, MA

We look in the *Mirror* and we see by and large very happy and well informed readers thanks to the *Spectator* and we pray to God to continue the wealth of information provided by this Armenian newspaper for almost a century and hopefully will continue for at least another century.
Ernest M. Barsamian MD and Sonig Kradjian
BOCA RATON, FL

Merry Christmas and a Healthy Great New Year. Butchings to All...
Ara and Pamela Gechijian and Family
LINCOLN, MA

We hope the New Year brings good health, prosperity and success to all of our relatives and friends.
Kevork and Silva Keushkerian
PASADENA, CA

Merry Christmas
Ruth and Wil Swisher
Newington, CT

**Thank you for everything you do for our community and much more!
Fondly and with gratitude,**
Jirair and Ani Hovsepan
BELMONT, MA

Happy Holidays and New Year!
Dorothy Piranian
BOSTON, MA

Happy, Healthy and Peaceful Holidays to all our Family and Friends! May the New Year bring a Brighter Tomorrow to Armenia, Artsakh and the World!! Inshallah...
Annie Totah
POTOMAC, MD

Happy Holidays to all our friends in Detroit
Johnny and Christina Sahagian
BURBANK, CA

May the joys of Christmas bring peace around the world and a Happy, Healthy New Year for all!
Dr. Gary and Marianne Zamanigian
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI

You are an Inspiration
John and Joanne Pehlivanian
BAY HEAD, NJ

Merry Christmas and Peace in the New Year
Harry and Janice Mazadoorian
KENSINGTON, CT

I look forward every week to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*! Thank you!
Richard Mikaelian, DDS
NEW YORK, NY

On behalf of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, I would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! We appreciate all that you do for the AMAA and the community at large!
Nazareth Darakjian, MD
President, Board of Directors of the AMAA
PARAMUS, NJ



Christmas Donations

Norehad Charitable Foundation, Bay Village, OH \$2,000
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Lisa, Joseph and Shakeh Dagdigian, Harvard, MA \$50
Dorothy Piranian, Boston, MA \$20





Arts & Culture

An Abstract Journey With Gérard Paraghmanian

By Michelle Ormsby

TORONTO (*Toronto Guardian*) — Known for his prolific talent, Armenian French artist Gérard Paraghmanian, has become a name synonymous with boundless talent for his mastery of artistic creations. Paraghmanian adds to his impressive collection of artwork, *Abstract: An Artist's Journey II*. “*Abstract: An Artist's Journey II*” is filled with breathtaking works – unique mixes of solo, diptych and triptych compositions reflecting Paraghmanian’s journey as an artist. This work is heavily influenced by Paraghmanian’s travels and his response to the turmoil he sees ravaging many parts of the world.

Abstract art is an expressive medium which conveys imagery through the use of texture, composition, colors and patterns, comparable to imagery which reflects an accurate depiction of visual reality. Abstract art fosters abstract thought by encouraging the observers to pay attention to the details and subtleties of the artwork. This modality arguably frees the mind from the constraints of visual reality, stimulating and activating new or underutilized cognitive and emotional processes.

Paraghmanian expertly evokes the emotions of audiences with this compelling work of art. The complementary coupling of texture and color fosters introspective thoughts and feelings. The compositions are enthralling; the imagery expertly reflects the texture, emphasizing the intricacy of the included pieces. “*Abstract: An Artist's Journey II*” moves audiences into another facet of Paraghmanian’s creativity. Many of the works presented elicit complex responses. In particular, the “*Beaux Arts I*” and “*Beaux Arts II*” are captivating. These works depict strong, beautiful, feminine characters – with beguiling eyes. There is an unquantifiable element Paraghmanian depicts in the eyes of these pieces. Art lovers will experience a host of inexplicable emotions while enjoying the “*Beaux Arts*” portraits. “*Abstract: An Artist's Journey II*” demonstrates Paraghmanian’s capacity to capture a boundless range of depth through abstract imagery and intricate portraits. This work of art speaks to the vast talent reflected in many of the pieces in Paraghmanian’s prodigious portfolio.

Beyond the exquisite contemplative pieces, Paraghmanian regales audiences with tales of painting as a child in France and emigrating with his parents to Quebec at an early age, wherein his talents flourished. His affinity to self-express through illustration is one of Paraghmanian’s earliest memories. His desire to bring life to his words felt like a dream as Paraghmanian grew into a young man. Dissuaded by the impracticality of being an artist, Paraghmanian found himself

see ABSTRACT, page 17



Karen Ouzounian and Lembit Beecher (EbruYildiz photo)

Karen Ouzounian and Lembit Beecher’s Armenian Ode: *Dear Mountains*

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On Friday, November 22, and Saturday, November 23, 2024, Cantori New York opened its 40th season with a thought provoking and technically accomplished commissioned world premiere of *Dear Mountains*, co-composed by the renowned cellist Karen Ouzounian and Lembit Beecher.

Conducted by Mark Shapiro the piece featured performances by Ouzounian on cello, oud expert Ara Dinkjian and Philip Mayer on percussion, with mezzo-soprano Gabrielle Barkidjija lending her mellifluous voice to the proceedings. Cantori New York ranks among the most highly-regarded choruses in North America, having received four ASCAP/Chorus America Awards for Adventurous Programming and has collaborated with distinguished performers such as Kathleen Chalfant and the Cassatt String Quartet and recorded on leading labels, including Newport Classics and PGM, to name just two.

The first half of the evening featured a fascinating mix of works by other composers. Audience members were privy to two versions of *Vox in Rama*, one by Mikolaj Ziuelenski and the other by George Kirbye (both late 16th century, early 17th century) which were set to the heart rending text from Matthew 2:18 where Rachel, Job’s wife, laments the loss of her offspring: “A voice is heard in Ramah/ of weeping and lamentation./Rachel is weeping for her children,/and will not be comforted because/they are no more.” This was accompanied by *Exaudi* (2004), composed by the late Canadian composer Jocelyn Morlock, who passed away in 2023, a tender piece performed on the cello by Ouzounian.

The centerpiece for the part of the evening however was Aaron Copeland’s 1947 *In the Beginning* based on the *Book of Genesis*. Copland broke with tradition when he composed the piece, choosing to use the King James prose version of the text rather than the original Hebrew text. While Genesis I is generally old hat, Copland’s subtle harmonic and rhythmic shifts keeps the listener’s ear finely attuned to its unique melody. Each section comes back like a wave covering the previous one and subtly moves the next one forward.

Though husband-and-wife team Ouzounian and Beecher have collaborated before, *Dear Mountains* marks the first piece the two have written together. The 35-minute new work for choir, distilled over a century of Ouzounian’s family’s history, stretching back to the Armenian Highlands now in Turkey, to Beirut and then the United States. Many Armenians will recognize this unfortunate pattern where each generation found itself having to emigrate from one country to the next, forcibly or by “choice.” Ouzounian and Beecher have pulled off something remarkable, melding together Armenian folk songs and liturgy with contemporary but imagined Armenian dances (*Imagined Anatolian Dance Nr. 2 Tamzara*; *Imagined Anatolian Dance Nr. 1 (6/8)*, *Imagined Anatolian Dance Nr. 3 Curcuna*) based on inherited melodies and rhythms.

Those not familiar with contemporary opera or choral work may be surprised by *Dear Mountains* for its use of transcribed conversations and biographical and other data used as lyrics, rather than the traditional texts written specifically for a

see ODE, page 13

UCLA Announces Release of Documentary on Armenian Genocide Looted Art and Restitution

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) within the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA and the Armenian Film Foundation present the release of a documentary titled, “What’s Next: Armenian Genocide Restitution in the Post-Recognition Era.”

Following President Biden’s recognition of the Armenian genocide in 2021, legal scholars and experts have considered what’s next for Armenian genocide restitution. The documentary, directed and produced by filmmaker Carla Garapedian, follows the proceedings of a conference that took place at UCLA on March 25, 2023 and explored Armenian genocide cultural restitution in depth.

The film explores questions such as: what are the possibilities of creating an Armenian genocide reparation movement post-recognition? What opportunities does the American legal system offer for reparation? And



Carla Garapedian

can the Holocaust restitution movement serve as a model for the Armenian genocide?

The documentary features figures including Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat, Dr. Taner Akçam, Dr. Heghnar Watenpaugh, Prof. Michael Bazylar, journalist Andrew Curry, and Professor Mayo Moran, as well as those who legally specialize in international human rights, such as attorneys Kathryn Lee Boyd and Karnig Kerkonian.

Due to the informational aspects of the documentary, it is available to screen exclusively in educational settings. If you are interested in hosting a screening, contact AGRP Program Coordinator Nanor Hartounian at nhartounian@international.ucla.edu.

For more details on the documentary and related AGRP activities, visit the Armenian Genocide Looted Art Research Project (AGLARP) webpage at bit.ly/AGLARP.

The Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) was established within The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA in early 2022. Led by Dr. Taner Akçam, the AGRP engages in research and scholarly activities pertaining to the study of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire during the early 20th century.

The Armenian Film Foundation was established in 1979 in Thousand Oaks, California, as a non-profit, educational and cultural organization dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Armenian heritage in multimedia formats.



ARTS & CULTURE

Sienna and Jace Armenian Children’s Books Come to Life on YouTube

LOS ANGELES — The “Sienna and Jace Armenian Children’s Stories” book series is making its animated debut on YouTube, bringing its heartfelt tales and rich cultural themes to life for a new audience. The inaugural video, “Sienna and Jace Celebrate Armenian Christmas,” premieres in just two days, on December 13, 2024, marking an exciting milestone for Armenian storytelling.

The animated YouTube series is based on the popular children’s books featuring Sienna and Jace, a brother and sister duo whose adventures are infused with Armenian traditions, values, and lessons (Books: Amazon.com/author/SteveBoy). Written to preserve and celebrate Armenian heritage, the stories are now being adapted into vibrant, engaging videos, perfect for children and families alike.

The first episode, “Sienna and Jace Celebrate Armenian Christmas,” offers a delightful exploration of the unique



customs and joy surrounding Armenian Christmas. Through the siblings’ eyes, viewers will discover the traditions, foods, and significance of this special celebration, brought to life with captivating animations and storytelling.

“We wanted to create something that not only entertains but also instills pride in Armenian culture and identity,” said author Steve Boyadzhyan. “This new YouTube channel allows us to connect with Armenian families worldwide and

share these stories in a fresh, dynamic way.”

The series can be helpful for diaspora families seeking to nurture cultural connections among younger generations. With its universal themes of love, family, and adventure, the channel also welcomes viewers from all backgrounds to experience the beauty of Armenian traditions.

The Sienna and Jace Armenian Children’s Stories YouTube channel is available with the premiere of “Sienna and Jace Celebrate Armenian Christmas” on December 13.

The Sienna and Jace Armenian Children’s Stories series was inspired by a desire to celebrate Armenian heritage and share it with the world. The books have been praised for their engaging storytelling, vibrant illustrations, and cultural authenticity, making them a favorite among families and educators alike.

Armenian Ode: Dear Mountains

ODE, from page 12

performance, or more traditional liturgical sources. Drawing from archival sources, documentary recordings and personal memories the piece “imagines moments of music-making and listening occurring across the Armenian diaspora (in Beirut, Toronto, Fresno, Boston, and New York) over the last century in the wake of the Genocide, juxtaposing these scenes with a story often retold by Ouzounian’s grandmother. Exploring the fuzzy lines between documentary, memory, and imagination, the piece reflects on the fragmented ways in which diasporic communities can understand the past, simultaneously holding the worlds of the past and present, of grief and joy together in rebuilding their communities and futures.” (Performance Notes)

These pieces include a 1917 recording of an Anatolian Armenian song *Eghin Havasi*, recorded by Kemany Minas and Harry Hasekian in New York City for Columbia Records and transcribed for this performance by Ouzounian and Beecher. In the 1993 issue of *Ararat Magazine*, Ouzounian and Beecher discovered a post-Genocide description of Armenian immigrants gathering in Van Cortlandt Park in the 1920s where the participants danced to this recording in public!

As Beecher explains: “One of the movements, *Listening to Eghin Havasi in Van Cortlandt Park, New York (1920s)*, becomes an evocation of this scene. These days, the two of us take the 1 train up from Northern Manhattan and run in Van Cortlandt Park from time to time; we love its wide-open grassy expanses and wild trails, an escape from urban New York City. Imagining this recording being played in those same spaces 100 years ago feels sharply poignant.”

Dear Mountains is also an ethnographic and ethnomusicological treasure, drawing as it does from 1939 field recordings by Sidney Robertson Cowell’s made for the Library of Congress of Armenian musicians in Fresno. There are also superb recollections of the delicate Armenian choral tradition developed in Lebanon by Genocide refugees.

Particularly touching was the voice of Komitas on an old crackly vinyl recording towards the end of *Dear Mountains*, singing *Hov Arek Sarer Jan* (Make Wind, Dear Mountains).

Ouzounian states: “Orphanhood and exile are present throughout *Dear Mountains*. Like the clouds in Komitas’ *Hov Arek Sarer Jan*, Armenian communities...remain forever tied to a homeland and the mountains they many never return to.”

Also noteworthy, *Drinking Coffee with Sirvart Margarossian Hamboyan in Toronto* (2024). In a few lines this piece embodies almost all the themes brought up elsewhere: exile, death, rebirth, survival, caring for others, the power of Armenian mothers, the fate of orphans from the Armenian Genocide: “Mihran! In Karantina,/ In Beirut/That’s where I grew up./Two orphan boys from Gesaria, they lived with us./My mom would cook, I would bring them food./When did she learn to make bureg, without having a mother?/My mom was Koharig Shirinian./From Akshekir/ Konya/Fearless/So clever/From her hand everything would come.”

Ouzounian is a world-class cellist — combined with Ara Dinkjian’s oud, and the accomplished singing at hand, the entire production was an unusual delight to the ear. “Dear Mountains” is dear indeed: a superb addition to the American and Armenian musical repertoires. Let’s hope that other producers pick the piece up and present it to even larger audiences in the future.

Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter

Valentine's SOIREE

A fun night out

Marina Margarian Armenuhi Hovakimian

Piano Violin

Dining, Wine and Music

February 1, Saturday, at the Baikar Center

8 p.m., 755 Mt. Auburn St. Watertown, Mass., use Norseman Ave. entrance

\$75/person, RSVP: Sossy Yogurtian 617 281-1647 or syogurtian@comcast.net

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ARTS & CULTURE

Armenian *Khachkar* Blessing at John Carroll University

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS, Ohio — On November 15, the Cleveland Armenian community and John Carroll University came together to celebrate the blessing and dedication of a handcrafted Armenian *khachkar* on the university’s campus. This cross-stone, brought from Armenia, now stands as a testament to the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of the Armenian people, inspiring generations to come.

The ceremony began with remarks from Dr. Ed Peck, Vice President for Mission and Identity at John Carroll University, followed by reflections from Ara Bagdasarian, whose efforts were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition.

Fr. Hratch Sargsyan of St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church presided over the blessing ceremony, joined by Deacon Serop Demirjian and Father Bernie McAniff, SJ, of John Carroll University. Their collaborative prayers highlighted the *khachkar*’s significance as both a sacred symbol and a cultural treasure.

The Armenian Church thanked the following for making this project a reality: Ara Bagdasarian, whose vision and leadership were the driving force behind this initiative; Raz Pounardjian, for his invaluable contributions throughout the process; Deacon Serop Demirjian, for ensuring the successful transportation and installation of the *khachkar*; the Cleveland Armenian community for their unwavering support and dedication; and John Carroll University, and especially Dr. Ed Peck for their partnership and warm hospitality in hosting this symbol of Armenian heritage.

The event concluded with a group photo and a reception inside, where attendees gathered to celebrate this remarkable achievement. This *khachkar* now stands proudly as a beacon of Armenian culture and faith, bridging the past with the present and serving as a symbol of unity and resilience.



From left, Deacon Serop Demirjian, Fr. Hratch Sargsyan, and Father Bernie McAniff, SJ (photo Dan Hanson)



Group photo of the members of the Cleveland Armenian community and John Carroll University (photo Dan Hanson)



Dr. Ed Peck (photo Dan Hanson)



Ara Bagdasarian (photo Dan Hanson)



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Art's Pistachio Biscotti with Cinnamon, Nutmeg and Cloves

“There is a common misconception that biscotti originated in the Tuscan region of Italy, when in reality it was created a few centuries earlier in Rome. The word biscotto is derived from the Latin ‘bis’ for ‘twice’ and ‘coctum’ or ‘baked’ which would soon be adapted to ‘cotto’ meaning ‘cooked.’ Tuscan biscotti were flavored with almonds from the plentiful almond groves of Prato. There, the cookies were — and still are — known as cantucci. Cantucci di Prato can be found in the window of every pasticceria in Tuscany.”

“Biscotti dates back to ancient Rome, where soldiers and travelers relied on these twice-baked biscuits for sustenance during long journeys. The cookies’ dry texture made them durable and long-lasting, ideal for times when fresh food was scarce. The first round in the oven was used to cook the dough, and the second round dried and preserved the biscotti, providing an extraordinarily long shelf life for nourishment during the Roman Legions’ extended conquests. Pliny the Elder, an author, philosopher, and naval commander used to boast that biscotti would be edible for centuries.”

Everything Biscotti says: “The history of biscotti in the United States can be traced back to Christopher Columbus, who needed a viable food source that could resist moisture and mold on overseas journeys. As biscotti moved from dietary staple to delectable dessert it was natural for American bakers to include nuts, dried fruits and extracted flavorings to add sweetness.”

“Modern recipes include adding baking powder and spices to the flour. The nuts are then added to allow them to be coated, with the skins being left partic-

ularly when using almonds and hazelnuts. Separately, eggs are beaten together and then any wet flavoring (e.g., almond extract or liquor), before being added to the dry ingredients. Following twice baking (once in long slab form, secondly in cut sliced form), the biscotti may be dipped in a glaze, such as chocolate.”

NPR writes, “Today, biscotti come in an endless array of flavors. Classics such as almond, anise and hazelnut contend with flashier up-and-comers such as gingerbread, maple walnut and mint chocolate chip. There are also savory biscotti made with various cheeses and herbs that are lovely when paired with a charcuterie plate, an assortment of olives and cheeses, or even a bowl of soup. Despite their centuries-old heritage, there is no one perfect way to make biscotti. Some recipes call for eggs only, which is the traditional method, while others swear by butter or oil. The choice is yours; just keep in mind that those made with butter or oil will have both a softer texture and a shorter shelf life.”

“Most European countries have adopted their own version of biscotti. The British have rusks; the French, biscotte and croquets de carcassonne; Germans, zwieback; Greeks, biskota and paxemadia; Jews, mandelbrot; and Russians, sukhari. While biscotti today is often enjoyed with a coffee or espresso, many Italians (and other enthusiasts) still find the sweet wine pairing the ultimate ending to a meal or a perfect treat to while away the afternoon at a cafe.”

This version is from *The Art of Armenian & Middle Eastern Cooking*:

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 cup butter at room temperature
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup shelled pistachio nuts (or choice of nuts)
- 1 egg white, beaten

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg until well mixed. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat the butter and sugar together in a separate large bowl until light and fluffy; beat in the eggs, one at a time. Mix in the vanilla extract. Stir in the flour mixture just until incorporated, and mix in the pistachio nuts.

Divide the dough in half. With floured hands, shape each half into a log about 9 inches long, and place on the prepared baking sheet. Brush the logs with beaten egg white.

Bake in the preheated oven until the logs are golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool until easy to handle. Reduce oven heat to 325°F. Remove parchment paper from baking sheet.

Using a serrated knife with a light sawing motion, cut the logs apart into 1/2-inch (or 1 inch) thick cookies. Place the cookies onto the baking sheet, and return to oven. Bake until the cookies are lightly toasted, about 10-15 minutes; remove from oven, turn the cookies over, and toast the other sides for an additional 10 minutes. Do not burn. Allow to cool on wire racks.

THE ART TEAM is proud to launch our newly revitalized Facebook page. We have redesigned it with all of you in mind. We encourage everyone to visit and explore the ART page. Since 2010, we have been expanding our resources to deliver the most updated and relevant information for the Armenian & Middle Eastern Cooking, culture and history. We will continue to do so with the same level of dedication and expertise.

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeastern-cooking>

To stay connected, please follow on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.

References:

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Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Awards Grant to Arpi Publishing

LOS ANGELES — The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has awarded a \$15,000 grant to Arpi Publishing toward the publication of two Armenian-language young-adult novels. The grant was made specifically to fund the publication of Karenn Chutjian Presti’s newest work, titled *Odor Aran*, as well as a volume by another author, to be determined by the publisher.

“We are delighted to receive the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation,” said Arpi Krikorian, founder and CEO

of the non-profit Arpi Publishing. “The foundation’s grant is critically important for what we’re trying to achieve, equally in terms of financial and moral support.”

Krikorian said that the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation grant will significantly contribute to Arpi Publishing’s goal of releasing its first collection of books. Generous support for this goal was provided last year by Brandon and Sonia Pierce and Kevon and Alexia Kevonian, who were also the first to donate funds to help start Arpi Publishing.

“Arpi Publishing was launched with the aim of establishing a catalyst for change,” Krikorian said, “namely a publishing house that could provide authors and book illustrators with the necessary funding and support to create original works of literature in Western Armenian, written for children and young adults.”

Dr. Hagop Gulludjian, holder of the Kachigian Lectureship in Armenian Language and Culture at UCLA and a member of the Arpi Publishing board, said, “To meet its publishing targets this year, and in

order to be able to fulfill its full potential in the long term, Arpi Publishing needs community support. Every tax-deductible donation goes toward the publication of a new book. And with each school and community organization buying copies of the published books, our shared vision of a dynamic and ever-evolving literature, written in Western Armenian, is certain to come one step closer to being the new norm.”

For more information about Arpi Publishing, visit arpipublishing.com.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

NAASR Announces Winners of Aronian Prize for Books on Armenian Studies

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) this week announced the 2024 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prizes for Excellence in Armenian Studies, jointly awarded to Dr. Sebouh D. Aslanian for *Early Modernity and Mobility: Port Cities and Printers Across the Armenian Diaspora* (Yale University Press, 2023) and Dr. Talar Chahinian for *Stateless: The Politics of the Armenian Language in Exile* (Syracuse University Press, 2023); and to Deanna Cachoian-Schanz for *A Book, Untitled* (Awst Press, 2023), a translation of Shushan Avagyan’s Գիրք-անվերնագիրս (2006). The 2024 awards are for books with a 2023 publication date.

Aslanian holds the Richard G. Hovannisian Chair in Modern Armenian History at UCLA. *Early Modernity and Mobility* explores the disparate yet connected histories of Armenian printing establishments in early modern Europe and Asia. Drawing on extensive archival research, Aslanian explores why certain books were published at certain times, how books were sold across the diaspora, who read them, and how the printed word helped fashion a new collective identity for early modern Armenians. In examining the Armenian print tradition Aslanian tells a larger story about the making of the diaspora itself.

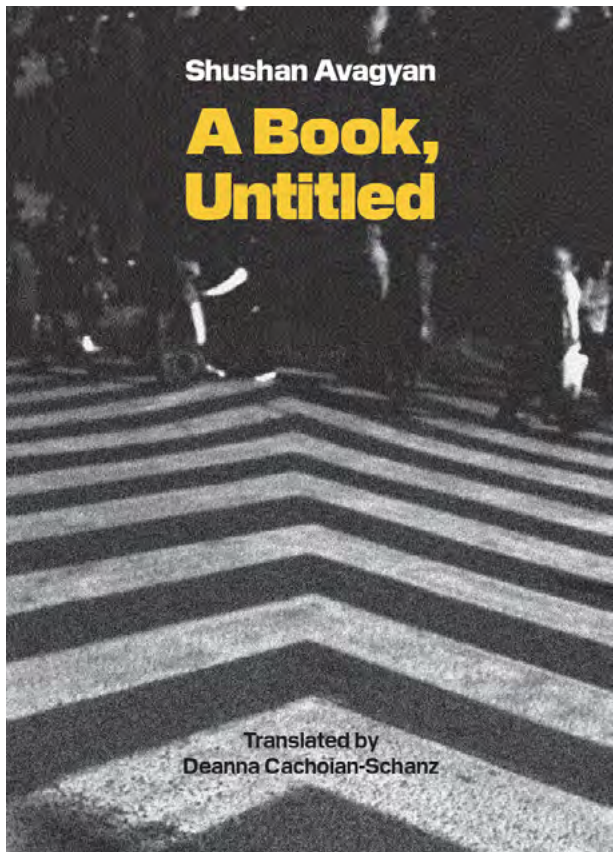
By email, Aslanian wrote “to express my sincere gratitude to the committee of the Sona Aronian Prize for choosing my book as its co-recipient for the 2023 academic year. It is a great honor and pleasure for me to have my work recognized for such a distinguished prize, in memory of the late Dr. Aronian.”

Chahinian is a lecturer in the Armenian Studies Program and Visiting Faculty in Comparative Literature at UC Irvine. *Stateless* offers a rich exploration of Western Armenian literary history in the wake of the 1915 genocide that led to the dispersion of Armenians across Europe, North America, the Middle East, and beyond. Chahinian highlights two specific time periods—post WW I Paris and Post WW II Beirut—to trace the ways in which literature developed in each diaspora.

Chahinian wrote, “I’m thrilled to learn that my book is one of the recipients of the 2024 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies. I’m grateful to NAASR for this recognition and for their continuous commitment to support and promote Armenian Studies scholarship. This award is especially meaningful personally, as its namesake is a reminder of our field’s pioneers and the path that they paved through interdisciplinarity.

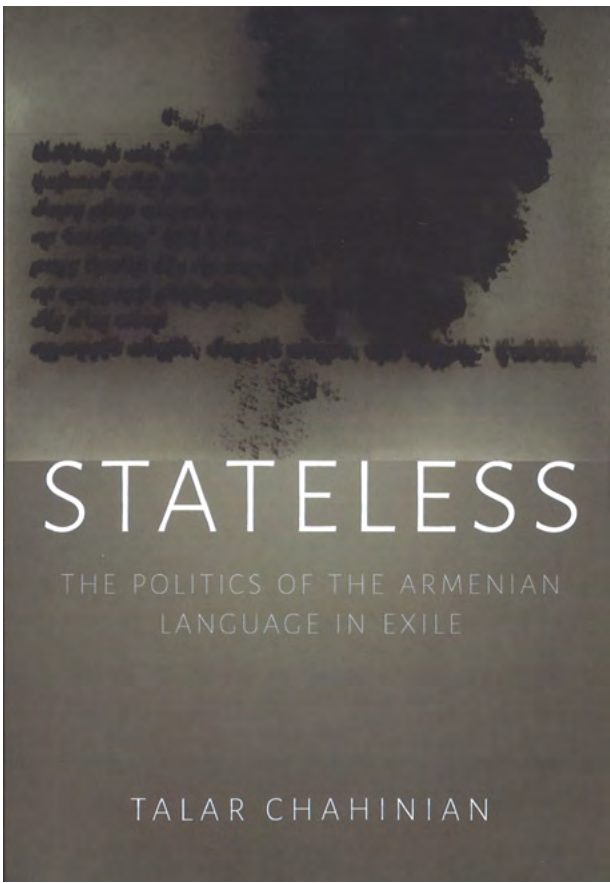
It’s an honor to share this award with Dr. Aslanian, whose groundbreaking research is a testament to the field’s ongoing reinventions.”

Cachoian-Schanz is a translator and interdisciplinary scholar, soon-to-defend her PhD in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania. She first translated *A Book, Untitled* during her MA years at Università Ca’ Foscari in Venice, Italy. Avagyan’s experimental novel stages an imagined encounter between two early twentieth-century feminist writers, Shushanik Kurghinian and Zabel Yesayan, which is juxtaposed by contemporary conversations between the novel’s un-



known narrator—an archivist and translator referred to as the “typist/writer”—and her friend Lara. As the two sift through censored documents, unpublished works, and unfinished drafts, they piece together the fragments left by their predecessors in the wake of the Tsarist, Stalinist, and then Armenian nationalist regimes.

Upon being informed of the prize, Cachoian-Schanz



wrote that the translation “is the result of overcoming many obstacles. The first was to convince a publisher that contemporary Armenian literature has something unique to share on a global literary stage (and for me, there is no more suitable voice than that of Shushan Avagyan to occupy a place on it). The second (and perhaps the most onerous) was the gatekeeping I encountered at the beginning of my studies in Armenian literary history, when I was told that there were no Armenian women of literary merit to either study or translate.”

Cachoian-Schanz further remarked that the resulting “collaboration between this author and translator, who worked both meticulously and ռսութնաստիքով — with loving, studious care — for the book but also, for one another during this translation” stands both as a model for kinship and mentorship as well as a challenge to “erasing or rendering insignificant the voices of women, queer people, and other minoritized subjects in the contemporary Armenian reality.” “To this end,” she continued, “I am heartened and grateful that NAASR has found *Book* a worthy endeavor to be awarded this year’s Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies for a Work in Translation.”

NAASR’s Aronian Book Prizes were established in 2014 by the late Dr. Aronian and Dr. Geoffrey Gibbs, to be awarded annually to outstanding scholarly works in the English language in the field of Armenian Studies and translations from Armenian into English.

Authors or publishers wishing to submit books for consideration for future Aronian Prizes may contact NAASR Director of Academic Affairs Marc A. Mamigonian at marc@naasr.org.

AGBU Fresno Presents Lecture on Armenian Colophons by Dr. David Zakarian

FRESNO — What do flies, curses and a 60-pound manuscript have to do with Armenian colophons? These were just some of the fascinating elements explored by Dr. David Zakarian, the newly appointed Haig and Isabel Berberian Endowed Chair of Armenian Studies at Fresno State, in his talk titled “Colophons: Treasures of Armenian Manuscripts,” on Sunday, November 10. Held at the St. Paul Haig Berberian Hall and co-sponsored by the St. Paul Armenian Church, the lecture captivated the audience with deep insights into the significance of Armenian colophons.

Colophons, or *hishatakaran* in Armenian, are a distinctive feature of Armenian manuscripts that serve as both a space for personal memory and a means to commemorate individuals. This function of commemoration is what sets Armenian colophons apart from all others. During the lecture, Dr. Zakarian guided the audience through the key components of a colophon: the doxology, the date and place of production, names of sponsors and authorities, the scribe’s name, historical details, as well as



From left, Barlow Der Mugerdechian, Marine Vardanyan Peters, David Zakarian, Karoun Boyadjian, Linda Shekerjian, Zohrab Atarian, Sylva Guluzian

curses, blessings, and a final plea for remembrance directed at God.

Zakarian brought these components to life with examples from manuscripts he has studied, demonstrating how medieval Armenians used these texts to express their unrelenting faith. Throughout the lecture,

the passionate devotion of these communities was evident in the words of the colophons.

An interesting aspect that Zakarian highlighted was the presence of female scribes and sponsors in Armenian manuscripts. While examples are limited, there is evi-

dence that women played a role in the creation of manuscripts. One notable example is the female scribe of the *Book of Sermons* by St. Grigor Tatevatsi, who is not only credited as the scribe but is also believed to have contributed as an illuminator. Another significant example of the role women played in the preservation and creation of Armenian manuscripts is the story of the Homilies of Mush, the largest Armenian manuscript in the world. During the Armenian Genocide, the manuscript was saved by two Armenian refugee women, who divided the book into two parts to protect it. Their actions were crucial in preserving this invaluable cultural and religious artifact.

Other topics that piqued the audience’s interest included the strongly worded curses found in colophons, directed at anyone who dared move or harm the manuscripts and, perhaps one of the most relatable insights, notes of frustration about the incessant nuisance of flies, reminding the audience that even in medieval times, these small pests were a common source of irritation.



ARTS & CULTURE

An Abstract Journey with Gérard Paraghamian

ABSTRACT, from page 12
at a crossroads. When faced with this juncture – life as a musician or one as an artist, he chose his art. On the Waterfront... Toronto was the painting that changed Paraghamian’s journey into the world of professional artistry. This piece became a trademark style, synonymous with Paraghamian. Many of his works, including those reflected in An Artist’s Journey use similar styles of composition.

Artiste extraordinaire, Paraghamian, has a keen eye for detail. There is something to be said about how his works render audiences contemplative. “Abstract: An Artist’s Journey II” allows aficionados to see another side of this prolific artist. Many may remember, “An Artist’s Journey,” which reflects works similar to Paraghamian’s trademark piece, “On the Waterfront... Toronto.” “Abstract: An Artist’s Journey II” differs in that it showcases works which may be unfamiliar to Paraghamian’s audience.

“Abstract: An Artist’s Journey II” was crafted with the support of the George and Helen Vari Foundation. The Vari’s Foundation supports many philanthropic initiatives, especially in education, in honor of the humanitarian efforts of the late power couple. The Vari’s received many prestigious accolades — George was a member of the Queen’s Privy Council, while Helen, was a member of the Order of Canada and received the Queen Elizabeth II Golden and Diamond Jubilee awards. Paraghamian found this book to be an avenue of expression in response to the plight of the world at the moment.

Despite notoriety for his influence in the art world, Paraghamian has long



worked as a musician. GéGé serves as Paraghamian’s stage name and he boasts several albums including, “Pour Toujours” and “Retrospective.” The art and music collections found in The Art of Gérard Paraghamian offer audiences a

glimpse into Paraghamian’s creative ventures throughout his impactful career. Art lovers will relish seeing Paraghamian’s growth as an artist through the years. Listen to Paraghamian’s beautiful arrangement, *Captured Melody*, while you

explore his journey as an artist. This will transform your experience in unexpected, immersive ways.

(This article originally appeared in the *Toronto Guardian* in October 2024.)



Works by Gérard Paraghamian



CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- JANUARY 29** — Gift Planning for an Enduring Legacy: Wednesday, 5 to 6 p.m. Virtual presentation by Ken Dolbashian, noted expert in charitable gift planning. Program of the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. For details and to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar
- FEBRUARY 1** — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter Valentine’s Soiree: dining, wine and music. Pianist Marina Margarian, violinist Armenuhi Hovakimyan, 8 p.m. Baikar Center, 755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, \$75/person, RSVP: Sossy Yogurtian 617 281-1647 or syogurtian@comcast.net
- FEBRUARY 24** — UNDER THE SNOW MOON. Monday, 4 p.m., virtually, to keep connected. Program of the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. For details and to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar
- MARCH 15** — Global Arts Live, in collaboration with The Friends of Armenian Culture Society presents: The Naghash Ensemble - First Boston Appearance! With its eye on the 21st century, the Naghash Ensemble combines the earthy spirituality of Armenian folk song, new classical music, and medieval polyphonic vocal music. 8 PM, Berklee Performance Center - 136 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston. Tickets: \$30, \$38, \$48, \$58 www.globalarts-live.org/content/event_page/10301
- APRIL 10** — LET’S PARTY FOR THE PARK! Thursday, 7-9 p.m. Abigail Adams Ballroom, InterContinental Hotel, Boston. Benefit to raise funds to Care for & Maintain Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway. Advance Reservations only. For reservations, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support
- SEPTEMBER 20** — CELEBRATE ARMENIA! Culture, Heritage & Traditions. Saturday, 12noon-8pm. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Program of the KAMURJNER (“Bridges”) Cultural Connections and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. Rain Date: September 27. Details forthcoming.

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

COMMENTARY

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Dramatic Turn of Events in Syria: Is the South Caucasus Next?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent days, dramatic events have been unfolding in Syria. The unexpected collapse of over five decades of al-Assad family rule in Syria within a single day — similar to the situation in Afghanistan — led to the outright disappearance of the Syrian army, signaling the shift in the region's geopolitical landscape.

Bashar al-Assad's government was primarily reliant on Russian and Iranian support, the latter even establishing military bases in Syria to exert influence in the Middle East. However, this situation did not last long. The Syrian opposition, supported by Turkey, was unwilling to reconcile with the status quo. At a time when Russia's resources were insufficient to pursue its interests on multiple fronts, including Ukraine, and when Iran, together with its ally Hezbollah, found itself in a challenging situation due to an indirect conflict with Israel, favorable conditions emerged for the forces supported by Turkey to take power in Syria. The Assad family found political asylum in Moscow after a 13-year civil war and almost six decades of family rule.

These events are crucial for the future of the Middle East, but we must also consider their potential impact on Armenia and the South Caucasus, especially as the same parties are involved in both regions. Turkey has broad geopolitical aspirations. One of its ambitions is to establish the so-called "Zangezur Corridor," which is a transport route connecting Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhchivan (Nakhijevan) through Armenia's Syunik Province. This project has a huge potential to increase Turkey's influence not only in the South Caucasus but also in the Central Asia and Middle East and to weaken Iran's positions by limiting Iran's connection to Europe. With its growing influence in Syria and Russia's and Iran's diminishing presence there, Turkey is on its way to achieving many of its regional goals.

This shift in the Middle East aligns with long-standing American interests in Syria. US interests in Syria have long been driven by certain strategic objectives, particularly by countering rival powers like Russia and Iran. In this context we can observe the following picture. For years Russia, the United States' primary global competitor, was involved in Syria with a military presence to support Assad. But now, Russia's focus on the war in Ukraine and its subsequent military withdrawals from Syria, reflected American interests, putting it in a more favorable position.

Iran, which is another key US adversary, had also been deeply involved in supporting Assad but reduced its engagement due to its confrontation with Israel.

Assad, whose government was viewed as an enemy regime by the Americans, has left the Syrian scene. The vacuum left by

Russia's and Iran's withdrawal has opened the door for another actor — Turkey, a strategic ally of the U.S. (albeit a problematic one, but still an ally), which has significantly expanded its sphere of influence in Syria. Notably, it was through the combined efforts of Russia, Iran, and Turkey in the Syrian conflict that US influence in this conflict previously had been minimized. Israel, America's number one strategic ally, has also had clear interests in Syria throughout the conflict. With the fall of Assad government, Israel is likely to increase its influence in Syria. At present, the most influential forces in Syria are the US's strategic allies: Israel, Turkey (with all its proxies), and the Kurds — another key partner of the US in the region.

While the situation is still volatile and not completely under control, the exit of global players such as Russia and Iran from the conflict with the US-aligned actors now playing a crucial role in Syria is a significant shift in the region. The central question is whether Turkey is content with the current status quo. This depends on opportunities for expansion and how much Russia and Iran will allow Ankara to boost its influence in the South Caucasus. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for assessing Turkey's ability to maintain its expanding influence in the region.

Additionally, it is essential to evaluate the stability of the situation in Syria and the resources it will require from Turkey. Will Turkey have enough resources to expand its influence into other regions? A significant factor to consider is that Turkey's successes are closely tied to the weakening of Iran and Russia's positions. Both countries have always viewed their interests in Syria as critical and considered the struggle over them non-negotiable. However, they have been unable to enforce these "red lines," leading to a withdrawal from Syria.

A similar concern for Iran involves the corridor issue in Syunik, and it's uncertain whether Iran will make concessions here as well. Notably, Iran and Russia have already made concessions to Turkey over the Artsakh issue, resulting in Russia's withdrawal from Artsakh and Azerbaijani/Turkish control over the border areas previously held by Armenians. This sequence suggests that the weakening of Russia and Iran began with Artsakh, spread to Syria, and could extend to Syunik or the so called Zangezur corridor. And if Moscow and Tehran could not maintain their influence in Syria, they may find it equally challenging in the South Caucasus region.

(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.)

Syrians Must Be Allowed to Shape Their Own Future

By Lara Setrakian

This is a time of immense hope for Syrians. Many are celebrating and will continue to rejoice at the fall of Bashar Assad.

They are entitled to their euphoria, along with a deep sense of relief. Hundreds of thousands of people died either fighting Assad's rule or fighting to defend it, with people on both sides irreparably scarred by one man's addiction to power. Millions of good people lost their homes or were forced to live in exile, separated from their families and afraid to return. When the prison gates were opened at Sednaya and thousands of Syrians stepped out into the sunlight — many having long been brutalized and presumed dead — it was symbolic of the country's new life.

But there are also scores of Syrians, even outside the fading circle of regime loyalists, who are worried about what comes next. On the battlefield, the Syrian civil war was won by an array of militant groups, dominated by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. This group is a coalition of factions that range from conservative to ultraconservative. HTS was formed a decade ago as Jabhat Al-Nusra, one of the many militias that were popping up across northern Syria. They were startup organizations in the dozens, all competing to prove their credentials. Syrians would

joke about the rookie fighters growing out their beards to look more authentic in their brigade formation videos — effectively fundamentalist commercials that were uploaded to YouTube in the hope of attracting funds from conservative patrons abroad.

Among these groups, Jabhat Al-Nusra was always one of the strongest. And yet, if anyone had suggested back then that it would go on to topple the 50-year-old Assad regime, it would have drawn a chuckle. But we are not witnessing the same revolution that started in 2011. The twists, turns and evolutions have matured the players on the ground. HTS softened its tone and disavowed its original ties to Al-Qaeda. But it is still rooted in an authoritarian model. It has transitioned to supporting a de facto regional government in Idlib, with multiple revenue streams and an ability to lead a coalition of militant factions to create a larger fighting force. Already a bastion of social conservatism, Idlib was reshaped according to its vision; children there are now taught a sharply Islamist curriculum in gender-segregated schools.

HTS does not control all of Syria, but it has proven that it can control strategic arteries and swaths of Syrian territory. That, alongside taking credit for Assad's fall, has given the organization an ability to dictate outcomes and policies in a future govern-

ment.

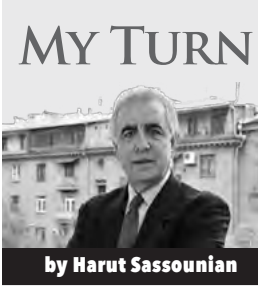
There are reasons to be hopeful and see promising ingredients for building a future state — an opportunity only made possible by Assad's exit. The state bureaucracy, outside of the military and intelligence services, could be strong enough to continue to operate. Talented Syrian technocrats could be persuaded to stay or to return. A generation of Syrians who have lived and studied abroad since the start of the war could bring their skills back home. They simply need to be convinced that the country that is being shaped by HTS, an avowed champion of political Islam, will be one that has space for them to flourish. Its early statements have assured women of their freedoms and encouraged Syrians abroad to return. Now, the Syrian people need to forge a national consensus — an economic-political pact that can unite the country and create momentum.

Syrians have shown over the past 13 years that they have the pragmatism and adaptability to build in a time of chaos. New institutions like the White Helmets and Local Coordination Committees grew from civil society initiatives to deliver humanitarian relief, conduct search and rescue operations and manage trash collections in areas with no formal government.

see SETRAKIAN, page 20



COMMENTARY



Assad Naively Trusted Erdogan Until he Got Stabbed in the Back

by Harut Sassounian

For many years up until the Syrian civil war of 2011, Syria and Turkey enjoyed very close relations. In a series of reciprocal visits, President Bashar al-Assad made a historic trip to Ankara in 2004, the first Syrian President to do so. Then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Damascus to sign a free trade agreement. In 2007, Erdogan and Assad attended the opening ceremony of the Aleppo International Stadium. Trade flourished with visa-free travel. In 2008, Erdogan and his wife hosted the Syrian first couple for a vacation in the Turkish Resort town of Bodrum. In 2009, the two countries held joint military maneuvers along their mutual border. I was told that President Assad, to appease his “Turkish ally,” even banned Armenian Genocide books from bookstores in Syria.

In 2008, during this period of a cozy relationship between the two countries, the Catholicos of Cilicia Aram I met in Damascus with President Assad. The Catholicos informed me later that President Assad told him Armenians were making a big mistake by being anti-Turkey and constantly talking about the Armenian Genocide. Assad said that Armenians should forget the past and establish good relations with Turkey, which he described as a powerful and important country. He suggested that Armenia’s economy would benefit greatly from trading with Turkey.

As the descendant of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and a lifelong activist for justice to the victims of that mass crime, I was very upset to hear President Assad’s terrible advice to Aram I. Keeping that conversation in mind, when I had a chance to travel to Damascus in early June 2009, I asked a mutual Armenian friend who was close to President Assad to arrange a meeting for me with the president.

After I arrived in Damascus, my friend called the Presidential Palace to confirm the meeting. The President’s Chief of Staff told my friend to come to the Palace alone in order to talk about the requested appointment. An hour later, my friend returned from the Palace and told me in a dejected voice that the meeting will not take place because the Chief of Staff had checked my name in Google search and discovered that I had written hundreds of critical articles about Turkey and the Armenian Genocide. Therefore, he told my friend that it would not be possible for an anti-Turkey man like me to meet with President Assad because of the friendly relations between Syria

and Turkey.

Naturally, I was very disappointed. The reason I wanted to meet with President Assad was to tell him that not only his advice to Armenians was wrong, but he himself was making a big mistake by trusting President Erdogan. I wanted to tell President Assad that Armenians know all too well the deceptive nature of Turkish leaders given the genocide Armenians had suffered. I wanted to warn President Assad that the day would come when his “good friend” Erdogan, will betray him and stab him in the back.

I could not have known in 2009 that two years later a major civil war would take place in Syria with the full backing of Erdogan. I was not sure that even if I had the chance to meet with President Assad and warned him, he would have listened to me. But regardless, I wanted to give him a piece of my mind.

I subsequently heard that President Assad had also told other Armenians he had met with that they should be friends with Turks and Turkey. Assad particularly criticized Armenians for burning the Turkish flag on April 24.

Subsequent to my visit to Damascus, President Assad visited Armenia on June 17-18, 2009 and offered to President Serzh Sargsyan to mediate between Armenia and Turkey, because of Syria’s “close relationships” with both countries. However, President Assad did not pay a protocol visit to the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan which all foreign leaders do, to lay a wreath. This was yet another example of President Assad’s excessive sensitivity not to upset Turkey. Assad also explained that, in deference to Turkey, Syria cannot recognize the Armenian Genocide.

In a Facebook post last week, Samvel Farmanyan, a former Member of Parliament and Press Secretary to President Sargsyan in 2009, reported that when President Assad excitedly spoke about his “excellent relations” with Erdogan, President Sargsyan had replied: “You don’t know Turks well. The time will come and we will judge by the result.” This is similar to the message I wanted to convey to President Assad in Damascus.

More interestingly, in March 2014, following several years of attacks on Syria orchestrated by Turkey, when Farmanyan led a parliamentary delegation to Syria and met with President Assad, he asked Farmanyan to transmit to President Sargsyan the following message: “I remember very well our private conversation in Yerevan [with President Sargsyan].” Assad then added: “President Sargsyan was right. We did not know Turks well.”

Naira Karapetyan, another member of the Parliamentary delegation that went to Syria in 2014, confirmed the accuracy of Farmanyan’s report about President Assad acknowledging that he was wrong to have trusted Erdogan.

Of course, it was too late by 2014 for President Assad to realize that he should not have trusted Erdogan. That big mistake was one of the key reasons for his eventual downfall.

Could Aliyev Collapse like Assad?

By Michael Rubin
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The Assad family, father and son, dominated Syria for more than a half century. The last 13 years in Syria were chaotic, but diplomats from both the moderate Arab camp and Europe believed that since Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian army had won the civil war after recapturing much of northwestern Syria in 2016, that rapprochement was just a matter of time. Beginning in 2023, the Arab League resumed its invitations to Bashar after more than a decade. Arab diplomats told me that Brett McGurk, President Joe Biden’s chief National Security Council aide for the Middle East, had quietly met with Assad intermediaries in Muscat, Oman to discuss rapprochement with Washington.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham’s rapid-fire, weeklong march through Syria showed how naïve such outreach was. Assad projected an image of strength but internally, his regime was riven with rot. While analysts did not predict Assad’s downfall, in hindsight, reasons for his rapid collapse are apparent. Assad used conscription to staff his army. Men between 18-42 had to serve at least 18 months in the army. It was a tolerable evil when army salaries sufficed to feed their families but with the Syrian pound losing 99.7 percent of its value since the war’s outbreak, time away from family was untenable. Syrian troops either went absent without leave or stole and sold whatever they could get their hands on to subsidize their absence. Even with violence declining and the conflict frozen, few saw any reason to put their lives on the line for a family who lived siphoned away Syrian wealth and resources and lived as billionaires

while their own people barely subsisted.

Syria is not Azerbaijan. For one, Azerbaijan has faced no civil war, though it did lose far more conscripts in President Ilham Aliyev’s anti-Armenian jihad in Nagorno-Karabakh than Aliyev or Azerbaijan’s tightly controlled media are willing to acknowledge. But, like Assad, Aliyev comes from a family whose corruption and nepotism chafe even the elite, let alone ordinary people. While the Aliyevs horde luxury vehicles, watches, jewelry and cash much as the Assads did, ordinary Azerbaijanis like their Syrian counterparts live in poverty. Perhaps Syrians had an excuse: the command economy prevented much foreign direct

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investment and, aside from some small oil fields in the east, Syria had few natural resources. Agriculture thrived and kept many Syrians afloat, but did not provide enough to become wealthy.

On paper, Azerbaijanis should enjoy among the highest living standards on earth. Azerbaijani oil brings in billions of dollars annually, while the population hovers around ten million. In the first 11 months of 2022, for example, Azerbaijan earned \$33.6 billion in oil revenue. While dividing that among the population would only earn each citizen a few thousand dollars, had Azerbaijan invested its funds in a sovereign wealth fund like Abu Dhabi, Qatar, or Norway have, then they could expand that multifold through shrewd investments. Instead, the Aliyevs pocketed and squirreled away their

cash, and so many Azerbaijanis live without even adequate fuel or electricity. The corruption is so severe that, despite Azerbaijan’s resources, per capita income is actually higher in both Georgia and resource-poor, landlocked, and blockaded Armenia.

An accident of history allowed Bashar to succeed his father; for decades, the heir-designee was Basil who died prematurely when he sped his car into a barrier on a foggy morning in January 1994. Aliyev will face similar difficulty with his next generation; his son is rumored to be autistic and reported substance abuse and addiction have tarred his daughters. The reason for his increasingly autocratic control and smothering of additional freedoms is that Ilham himself realizes how tenuous his family’s power would be if the terror with which he rules ever abated.

There are important differences: Assad belonged to a minority sect; Aliyev does not. Syria is largely Sunni; Azerbaijan is overwhelmingly Shi’ite and historically more secular in outlook. Turkey supported Assad’s opposition but it props up Aliyev.

Still, Aliyev should not sit pretty. Few predicted the Syrian uprising until it occurred. Other former Soviet states — Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, for example — suffered sudden uprisings that shook their leadership to the core. Assad’s Kremlin support ultimately meant little with Russian President Vladimir Putin so distracted in Ukraine. Does Aliyev truly believe Russia would come to his aid when it did not Assad’s?

The most important factor is the loyalty of his people; Aliyev kids himself if he believes Washington think tanks whispering sweet nothings in exchange for access or other reward substitute for respect.

Every democrat awakes knowing when his rule might end; every dictator awakes knowing today could be his last. Aliyev promotes a façade of strength and unity; he should be wary, however, as the reverberations of the Assad example could impact Azerbaijan far more than other countries. Today’s beacon of stability can easily become the subject of tomorrow’s eulogy. It may not be likely, but it is more possible than Aliyev will admit.

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



Syrians Must Be Allowed to Shape Their Own Future

SETRAKIAN, from page 18
Hybrid charitable foundations backed by the Syrian diaspora have provided medical care, while others like Jusoor, Karam Foundation and Syrian Youth Empowerment built educational programs that have resulted in broad, diverse networks of Syrian professionals. What started out as emergency response mechanisms over more than a decade of war have developed into a blueprint for finding consensus and a common vision for the country.

Having done all this, Syrians are well aware that the near-term risks are acute as the country finds its new form. The US dollar and, more frequently, the Turkish lira have become commonly used currency.

Plans for transitional justice have been years in the making, but now that the moment of transition has come, it will test the limits of accountability for decades of regime crimes, corruption and abuse. There may be demands for a special tribunal, but in the meantime Syrians will have to hold back any impulses toward personal retribution.

Syrians have shown over the past 13 years that they have the pragmatism and adaptability to build in a time of chaos.

Syrians will also have to fix a country plagued by socioeconomic depression, mass displacement and drug abuse entwined with the captagon trade. There will have to be detailed plans for demobilization, giving tens of thousands of Syrian militants an alternative job pathway, if not integrating them into the formal state structure. Above all, in terms of physical danger, they will need to manage the risk of militant infighting. There is no shortage of warlords who have drawn power and wealth from the conditions of chaos. There are militant groups in the south and north of Syria with enough heft to challenge HTS, should their interests collide. If outside powers decide to back competing groups, they will risk fueling an ongoing proxy war at the expense of Syrians who have already suffered enough.

For decades, the Syrian Arab Republic was brutally controlled; now, the challenge is to make sure it does not spiral out of control. There is some hope that HTS will pursue the path of accommodation and balance. Syrians should be given the chance to forge that balance and shape their own future, with all the challenges it holds.

(Lara Setrakian is a journalist and President of the Applied Policy Research Institute (APRI). She is also the Co-Founder of News Deeply and its inaugural platform, Syria Deeply. Previously Lara was based in the Middle East as a reporter for ABC News and Bloomberg Television. This analysis originally appeared on the site <https://arab.news> on December 9.)

Pashinyan Clarifies Border Policies, Defends Soviet-Era Maps, and Calls for Tax Reforms

YEREVAN (Caucasus Watch) — On December 12, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed public criticism and clarified key government policies through social media posts and statements during a government session.

Pashinyan dismissed accusations that his public engagements were election-related, emphasizing that his visits to settlements were part of routine governance. He highlighted his practice of regularly visiting communities, engaging with citizens, and responding to their concerns through social media, live Q&A sessions, and press conferences. Pashinyan asserted that such transparency and accountability are fundamental principles of democracy.

Regarding Armenia's border demarcation, Pashinyan defended the use of Soviet-era maps as a foundation for defining state boundaries, describing it as a vital security measure. He warned that rejecting these maps could undermine Armenia's statehood and independence, as the country's recognition as a sovereign state is



rooted in its Soviet-era territorial borders. Specifically addressing concerns in the village of Kirants, Pashinyan confirmed that the border was determined in line with Armenia's internationally recognized territory. He noted that while law enforcement was investigating issues with problematic cadastral certificates in Kirants, no illegalities had been discovered during their review.

The prime minister also weighed in on

public discourse surrounding taxes, criticizing a long-standing narrative that has encouraged non-payment of taxes in Armenia. He urged citizens to view the state as a collective institution, not an adversary, and called for a shift in mindset. While acknowledging inefficiencies in the government's use of the budget, Pashinyan likened these to unavoidable instances of waste in household spending.

He argued that those who discourage tax compliance hinder Armenia's development as a fully functioning state, instead relegating it to the status of a "province" or "outpost."

To foster constructive dialogue, Pashinyan invited citizens to submit their criticisms and accusations on a dedicated social media post titled "Shooting Wall." He promised to address content-based feedback while ignoring insults and offensive remarks. In a bid to streamline the discussion, he asked his supporters to refrain from commenting on the post, enabling him to focus on responding to critiques.

