

# Armenian-Azerbaijani Peace Process Hits a Pothole

Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev’s surprise rhetorical attack on Armenia is raising doubts that a peace deal between Baku and Yerevan can be reached anytime soon.

Both sides in recent months had given indications that the peace process was making progress and a settlement could be close at hand. But then Aliyev, in a January 7 interview with Azerbaijani journalists, scrambled expectations, launching a verbal broadside against Armenia and its leaders, characterizing the country as a “fascist state.” In all, Aliyev used the term fascist or fascism in connection with Armenia over 10

times during the interview.

“Fascism must be eradicated. It will either be eradicated by Armenia’s leadership or by us. There is no other way,” he stated.

Aliyev’s belligerent comments come at a sensitive time for Azerbaijan. Bilateral relations between Baku and its strongest ally in the region, Russia, have nosedived in recent weeks following the accidental shootdown by Russian air defenses of a civilian Azerbaijani airliner. Concurrently, Armenia of late has taken significant steps to improve its relations with the European Union and United States, bolstering the country’s security

position via arms sales and joint exercises.

Armenian officials have been on the strategic defensive since Baku inflicted a decisive defeat on the Armenian military in late 2023 to regain full control of the Nagorno-Karabakh territory. Since then, the two sides have engaged in stop-and-go negotiations on a peace treaty. Under the present circumstances, Aliyev’s January 7 remarks may reflect a sense of concern that Baku’s strategic advantage in its dealings with Armenia is eroding or could start to erode soon.

A hint of concern could be seen in Ali-

yev’s criticism of Western arms sales to Armenia. “We see that both Armenia itself and its new patrons do not share this goal [peace],” he said. “They are driven by ideas of revenge, and Armenia has become a source of threat to the region.”

During his prolonged attack on Armenia, Aliyev renewed a call for the opening of the so-called Zangezur corridor, a proposed land bridge across Armenian territory connecting Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhichevan exclave over which Baku would enjoy extraterritorial rights.

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## Iranian Security Chief Visits Armenia, Azerbaijan

**By Ruzana Stepanian**

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A top Iranian security official reportedly re-affirmed Iran’s support for Armenia’s position on transport links with Azerbaijan during talks with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held in Yerevan on Thursday, January 9.

Ali Akbar Ahmadian, the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, had arrived in the Armenian capital the previous night from Baku where he had met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The meeting took place the day after Aliyev renewed his threats to forcibly open a land corridor to Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave through Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering Iran. Official readouts of it did not mention the issue.



Ali Akbar Ahmadian, right, secretary of Iran’s National Security Council, at a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on January 9.

According to the Armenian government’s press office, Pashinyan and Ahmadian discussed, among other things, Yerevan’s “Crossroads of Peace” project designed to serve as a blueprint for opening the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to travel and commerce. The project says that Armenia and Azerbaijan should have full control of transport infrastructure inside each other’s territory.

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## Dangerous Fires Ravage Los Angeles County

**By Aram Arkun**  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — Terrible fires have ravaged several parts of Los Angeles County for a week, leading to the evacuation of nearly 100,000 people from their homes, the destruction of thousands of houses, and, as of Monday, January 13, 24 deaths. The prolonged lack of rainfall dried up vegetation, allowing easy combustion, while extremely powerful wind conditions spread embers from fires quickly and to relatively great distances. However, the immediate causes of the fires are still being investigated.



see FIRES, page 10 The Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School in Altadena, California

## Tekeyan Central Board Extends Condolences to Victims of the Terrible California Fires

Readers all no doubt are following the news of the terrible fires and winds in southern California this week. The Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) profoundly regrets the loss of life and of thousands of homes, including in heavily Armenian-populated areas like Pasadena and Altadena.

We are in touch with our local representatives and are pleased to let you know that the TCA Beshgeturian Center in Altadena has not been damaged by the fire. It is without



electricity in an evacuation zone, but the area is now protected from looting by the National Guard.

The homes of several TCA Central Board members in southern California were in evacuation zones, along with a number of Tekeyan members. We are happy to know that they are safe and their homes, at least through this Friday morning, remain unharmed.

The Central Board extends its condolences to the staff, students and families connected to the

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## Firefighter Helps Save Altadena Homes

**By Aram Arkun**  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — Armenians are not just among the victims to the fires in southern California. There are also Armenian firefighters who are among the saviors. One of them, 34-year-old Hrag Jivalagian, was working nearly continually in the Altadena-Pasadena areas since the start of what is called the Eaton Valley fires in that area on Tuesday, January 7. For more general information on the southern California fires, see other story on this page.

Jivalagian lives in Altadena and works in the fire department of the city of San Gabriel, which is two cities to the

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Hrag Jivalagian upon promotion to fire engineer in the San Gabriel Fire Department on August 6, 2020 (courtesy San Gabriel Fire Department Facebook site)

### WASHINGTON DC Armenia, US Sign cooperation Agreement



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### ATLANTA How Jimmy Carter Paved the Way For the Craft Beer Revolution







ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Ambassador: France's Support for Armenia Is Unconditional

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — France's support for Armenia is unconditional, complete and unwavering, French Ambassador to Armenia Olivier Decotignies said on January 13.

He said the support France provides has been presented more clearly by President Emmanuel Macron.

Decotignies reiterated France's commitment to peace in Armenia. "This is a commitment to lasting and just peace in the region, but also a commitment to support Armenia, to preserve its territorial integrity and inviolability," he said.

### Justice Ministry Plans To Draw Up New Constitution before 2026

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of Justice Srubhi Galyan said that the ministry intends to develop the text of a new Constitution before the 2026 parliamentary elections.

"Our objective is to have the text of the new Constitution until the elections, and we must work in that direction," Galyan said at a press conference on January 14 when asked on the constitutional reforms process.

She said that the current Constitution doesn't contain any obstacles for the peace process with Azerbaijan.

At the same time, she said that the plans to change the constitution have nothing to do with Azerbaijan's demands to do so. Galyan said that the issue of potential change to the Constitution was raised after the 2018 revolution.

The working group will work on the new text.

### Legal Expert Says Disputes Can't Hinder Peace Process

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Representative of Armenia for international legal affairs Yeghishe Kirakosyan said on January 10 that legal disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan cannot hinder the peace process.

"In my opinion, the point of legal disputes is to establish peace to some extent," he said when asked about Azerbaijan's proposal to exclude legal disputes from the process.

"When states initiate legal disputes, resolve differences in a civilized way, it also means prevention of war."

"I can confidently say that the ongoing dispute initiated by Armenia, for example, on the basis of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is being examined at the International Court of Justice, based also on the preamble to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, is aimed at preventing war because from the beginning, one of the goals of the convention itself was that the prevention and prohibition of promoting racism is aimed at strengthening peace and preventing war. In my opinion, it is very reasonable and logical," Kirakosyan added.

# Armenia, US Sign Cooperation Agreement

WASHINGTON (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Armenia-US Strategic Partnership Charter provides a robust framework and injects greater ambition into our cooperation, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said at a signing ceremony of the Charter at the US Department of State on January 14.

"It spans a wide array of fields including strengthening economic and energy ties, connectivity, deepening defense and security cooperation, reinforcing democratic institutions, promoting justice and the rule of law, fostering innovation and high technologies, and enhancing people-to-people contacts," he said.

"Our relations, based on shared values and mutual interests, have witnessed remarkable growth in recent years. They have matured to a point where upgrading them to a partnership is not only fitting but essential for navigating the complex geopolitical landscape," Mirzoyan stated. "We deeply value the unwavering US support for Armenia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Equally important is the US support for strengthening Armenia's democratic institutions and promoting economic resilience," he added.

"We appreciate the US's engagement in promoting a durable and lasting peace in the South Caucasus region. We believe that a stable and prosperous South Caucasus is in the interest of all regional actors and the broader international community. Armenia



Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan in Washington on January 14.

remains committed to a peace agenda and its implementation and to working closely with the US to achieve this shared objective," he added.

He added that Armenia intends to "join the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS," showing that the country is going to do its part to combat international terrorism.

"We also commence negotiations on a nuclear cooperation agreement with the US, commonly known as 123 Agreement. It will provide a framework for cooperation

in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and mark our commitment to peaceful nuclear development under the highest standards of safety, security, and non-proliferation," Minister Mirzoyan added.

He concluded by saying that his country is eager to continue cooperation with the incoming US administration: "Let this Charter serve as a testament to the deepening strategic relations between Armenia and the United States and as a roadmap for a future filled with shared achievements."

## Pashinyan Accused of Bowing to Another Azeri Demand

By Shoghik Galstyan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A senior member of the main opposition Hayastan alliance on Monday, January 13, accused Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of bowing to yet another demand by Azerbaijan when he reacted to the Armenian government's stated readiness to help dissolve the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group.

The Minsk Group, created in 1992 to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, was for decades co-headed by the United States, Russia and France. It became essentially moribund after the three world powers stopped working together following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Azerbaijan has listed the group's formal dissolution among its preconditions for signing a peace deal with Armenia.

Until last week, Pashinyan linked that to the signing of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. He said Baku should also stop referring to much of modern-day Armenia's territory as "Western Azerbaijan."

Pashinyan clearly softened his stance on Thursday two days after Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev made fresh threats of military action against Armenia. His office told RFE/RL's Armenian Service at the weekend that Yerevan is now "considering the possibility of appealing to the OSCE regarding the dissolution of the Minsk Group." The office did not specify whether this could be done before or after the possible signing of the treaty.

Tsovinar Vartanian, a parliament deputy from Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, also did not answer this question when she spoke to journalists on Monday. She said

vaguely that "the decision will be made according to the situation" and that "there is no clarity at this moment."

Artur Khachatryan, a Hayastan parliamentarian, insisted, meanwhile, that Pashinyan has again bowed to Azerbaijani pressure and may well request the Minsk Group's dissolution before Baku and Yerevan finalize the bilateral treaty.

"I don't rule out that he might say, 'Well, we're getting close [to the deal] now; if that little thing is what is hampering us, then let's go for it,'" said Khachatryan.

The oppositionist argued that the Minsk Group was always tasked with facilitating a settlement on Karabakh.

"If Pashinyan says that the real Armenia has nothing to do with Karabakh, what business does he have poking his nose into issues that concern Artsakh?" he said.

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Aliyev also blasted perceived enemies in the West, singling out French President Emmanuel Macron and American billionaire philanthropist George Soros, long viewed as the chief architect of so-called "color" revolutions across Eurasia and as well as a favorite of conspiracy buffs. "The Soros era has ended in America," Aliyev stated, referring to the pending return to the presidency by Donald Trump. "The Biden administration, in fact, was largely governed by the Soros method of governance."

Aliyev spent much of 2024 feuding with US and European leaders. In a certain manner, Aliyev's aggressive comments during the interview can be seen as a plea for improved relations with the West, especially considering the rapid deterioration of relations with Russia. "Last year was full

of disappointments," Aliyev noted. "The European Union unequivocally took Armenia's side in the normalization process."

The Azerbaijani leader made a point of noting the EU is a big consumer of Baku's natural gas. EU leaders "should approach the situation with sobriety and recognize Azerbaijan as a reliable partner — one that has never acted against Europe or any European country. Azerbaijan has only responded in kind and will continue to do so: good for good and evil for evil, so to speak," Aliyev said.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan responded to Aliyev's provocative interview in measured tones, reaffirming his government's commitment to a peaceful settlement of bilateral differences. "We will remain committed to the strategy of peace and consistently continue the implementa-

tion of the peace agenda," Pashinyan stated. He also called for broad-based public dialogue to address derogatory stereotypes and perceptions that prevail in both states concerning citizens of the other. "The agenda of peace is about discussing, addressing these perceptions," he noted.

In addition, the Armenian Foreign Ministry defended the country's right to self-defense, with spokesperson Ani Badalyan stating, "Armenia acquires weapons and equipment solely to exercise its right to self-defense and to protect its citizens." She reiterated that Armenia harbors no aggressive intentions toward its neighbors. Azerbaijan's defense budget in 2025 is projected to be more than double that of Armenia's.

(This article originally appeared on the website [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on January 10.)





## ARMENIA

# Karabakh's Armenians Struggle to Cling to Their Identity

By Marut Vanyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media) — For decades, Donara Gasparyan baked Zhingyalov hats — a type of flatbread stuffed with finely diced herbs, which is a symbol of Nagorno-Karabakh culture and cuisine — and sold them on the Stepanakert market. After fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 following Azerbaijan's military takeover, she resumed her business in Yerevan. While she is happy with her income, the money is not what is important to her.

"We could not bring Nagorno-Karabakh with us, but let's try to keep the taste and smell of it. Herbs in Armenia don't have the same aroma as in Nagorno-Karabakh, but in any case, I do my best to bake deliciously," she tells OC Media.

Despite its small area, the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh have their own subcultures and specific dialects. Following the 2023 exodus, many former village mayors proposed that the Armenian government resettle their displaced residents in one area of Armenia, to allow them to preserve their traditions and dialects. In the end, however, Nagorno-Karabakh refugees ended up scattered across the country; if they even chose to remain in the first place.

This has affected the preservation of the Nagorno-Karabakh culture. Financial resources, which many refugees lack, further hinder the process. Even so, some are finding ways to preserve their identities, including with the help of the Armenian diaspora.

## 'Don't Bark Your Dog Language in My Armenia'

Tatevik Khachatryan and Mariam Sargsyan host a podcast in the Nagorno-Karabakh dialect, which aims to preserve not only the dialect, but also their



Children from the Dizak Art Cultural and Youth Centre dance in the courtyard of the Saint John the Baptist Church in Abovyan, Armenia (Photo Marut Vanyan/OC Media)

culture and identity more broadly.

The Nagorno-Karabakh dialect of Armenian differs significantly from the language spoken in Yerevan, to the extent that speakers of each have a hard time fully understanding each other. While literary Armenian was taught at schools in Nagorno-Karabakh, the primary language of its inhabitants in daily life was the dialect, which continues to be what most of the displaced population speaks.

"This is not just about preserving our dialect. It is also aimed at digitizing human stories, as Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians are much more honest and free while speaking their own dialect," Khachatryan tells OC Media.

But one podcast, she says, is not enough to preserve their cultural heritage.

"Today, our dialect is preserved at the cost of our enthusiasm, and it is unclear how long this can last" Khachatryan says.

"Personally, I communicate with my son in the Nagorno-Karabakh dialect, but I no-

tice that words from the Yerevan jargon are being added to his vocabulary," she adds.

In addition, the response to the podcast in Armenian society has not always been positive.

Khachatryan notes that they often receive negative and insulting comments underneath their posts on social media, such as "Don't bark your dog language in my Armenia" or "Go to your father Putin, maybe he'll give you a place to live."

There is a reputation that Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians are more pro-Russian than those within Armenia, and that the level of Russian influence was higher. From the perspective of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, many felt no personal allegiance to Russian President Vladimir Putin or the Kremlin, but rather that there was no alternative source of protection.

"I won't even talk about the sexual insults," Khachatryan says. "My dad's name is Garik Khachatryan and Mariam's dad's name is Yuri Sargsyan, and Putin is not our dad."

"Armenia is our country too," Sargsyan says. "We hold the same blue passport as every other Armenian citizen, we pay taxes like everyone else. Many simply don't realize what it's like to lose a home, and I don't wish other compatriots to suffer our fate."

## 'We Did not Come to Armenia Empty-handed'

Following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, Azerbaijan gained control over the town of Hadrut and the surrounding area, with the ethnic Armenians living there becoming refugees much sooner than the rest of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. This has allowed them more time to integrate and adapt in Armenia.

In 2021, the Dizak Art Cultural and Youth Centre was opened in Yerevan by members of the Hadrut community, followed by the creation of a civil society organization under the same name. The group organizes various cultural events — from book presentations to summer camps — focused around Nagorno-Karabakh's heritage, including traditional dance, music, games, and embroidery.

Until 2023, the Nagorno-Karabakh government provided financial support to cultural organizations, but following the 2023 exodus and the dissolution of the government, cultural centers like the Dizak

Art Cultural and Youth Centre have been forced to rely on small grants and the support of benefactors.

For many such organizations and businesses, much of that support has come from the Armenian diaspora, who have been successful in preserving the Armenian language and culture abroad for centuries.

For example, after receiving financial support from the New York-based Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Vadim and Kristina Balayan were able to reopen their Art Café in downtown Yerevan. The café has since become a gathering place for other Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, hosting a variety of cultural events, from fairs to baking workshops.

"One tries to motivate, to inspire others," Vadim Balayan tells OC Media, adding that he was personally inspired by seeing Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians come to the café.

Foreign embassies in Armenia have also implemented a number of successful proj-

ects for Nagorno-Karabakh refugees.

Yet, as Armine Hayrapetyan, the former director of the State Service for the Preservation of the Historical Environment of Nagorno-Karabakh, points out, while civil society groups and embassies are showing support, what is missing is a 'state approach.'

"Naturally, we didn't come to Armenia empty-handed. We brought our culture, traditions, cuisine, our potential with us,"



Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia say their last goodbyes to the Dadivank Monastery (Photo Marut Vanyan/OC Media)

Hayrapetyan tells OC Media. "But neither is that potential used, nor are cultural issues properly discussed."

"I have heard that these NGOs have asked UNESCO to send a mission to Nagorno-Karabakh, I have heard that they have organized fundraisers for the preservation of cultural centers, but again, this issue needs to be addressed at the state level. Frankly, it is not felt that the authorities of Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh are concerned about this problem," he adds.

Hayrapetyan highlighted that while it was nice to hear about financial support from abroad — citing the recent example of the US Embassy providing \$74,000 to preserve rare 13th century manuscripts and archival documents from ancient Armenian monasteries in Nagorno-Karabakh — the issue was about more than just money.

"There is a political subtext. The entire Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh is under the control of Azerbaijan. Any church can be considered an 'illegal structure' and demolished, as happened with Saint Ascension in Lachin," Hayrapetyan says.

She also highlighted that people often associate culture with cultural monuments, which are two different things.

"If it were possible for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to live compactly in one settlement, they would automatically speak their dialect and would be able to preserve their traditions, but then we need to think about how to preserve the monuments remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh."

"Preserving culture, traditions, and compact living are good ideas, but the 'separation' of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians from the broader Armenian society could strengthen the barrier between the two. This is really a very sensitive issue and one should think twice before taking any action," Hayrapetyan says.

## 'People Who Have Seen the War Do Not Want to Live in a Border Town'

In October, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that it was the government's policy to do "everything possible to ensure that all our brothers and sisters forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh remain in the Republic of Armenia." Yet over the past year, thousands of Nagorno-Kara-

bakh Armenians have left, citing social difficulties in the country.

Despite the promise of support, rumblings of discontent from Nagorno-Karabakh refugees often persist online and behind closed doors, with some going so far as to suggest the government was deliberately sabotaging attempts to build distinct communities within Armenia.

Some suspect the government fears a return to power of the "Karabakh Clan" — a

name given to former Armenian presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, both of whom are from Nagorno-Karabakh, and their supporters.

From the beginning of the refugee crisis, Armenian government initiatives have focused on resettling Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in provinces near the border, such as in Syunik Province, where the dialects are similar and there were cultural similarities.

For example, many Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians settled in the border town of Goris, but today, only around 1,300 of them remain. The number of jobs in Goris is barely enough for the locals, and there are few flats available to rent. Schools, sports activities, universities — everything is in Armenia's capital, Yerevan.

"Our students also went to Yerevan for university," a local taxi driver in Goris tells OC Media. "Goris is a nice, clean, and quiet place to live, but people who saw the war don't want to live in a border town, that's why they have left."

For Kristine Sarukhanyan, the difficult social situation and the realization that the government support program for refugees was not enough to live on led her to move to Krasnodar, Russia.

Sarukhanyan was a beneficiary of the 40+10 thousand programme — which provides refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh 40,000 drams (\$100) per month for housing and another 10,000 drams (\$25) for utilities. "We couldn't find a job. This financial support from the Armenian government was coming late or not at all, and how do I explain this to the landlord who is demanding that we pay on time," Sarukhanyan tells OC Media.

She has found a number of other Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in Krasnodar, as well as Armenians from Armenia who prefer to live in Russia. Yet while there are many similarities to life in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is not the same.

"One thing is clear for all Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, and I think they will agree with me that it was a wonderful place, just a paradise. We are in Nagorno-Karabakh every day with our family, soul, and heart, and we all dream to return to our home, our homeland, nothing more," Sarukhanyan says.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## Pashinyan Briefs EU's Costa on Peace Process

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had a telephone conversation with Antonio Costa, President of the European Council, on January 14.

Pashinyan congratulated Costa on his election, wished him success, and commended the current state of Armenia-EU cooperation.

Pashinyan briefed him on the current state of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and emphasized that the government of Armenia will not deviate from the peace agenda.

## Erdogan Says Turkey Will always Stand by Azerbaijan

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has declared that Turkey will continue to stand by Azerbaijan at all times.

Erdogan made the remarks in a phone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on January 9.

Erdogan initiated the phone call, the Azerbaijani presidential press service said in a statement, according to Interfax.

Aliyev said, for his part, that the Azerbaijani-Turkish alliance is based on the “one nation, two states” principle and the sides provide mutual support.

## Dozens Injured as Trams Collide in Strasbourg

STRASBOURG, France (CNN) — Two trams collided in Strasbourg in eastern France on Saturday, January 11, causing dozens of injuries, though none critical, authorities said.

The accident took place in a tunnel leading to the station near the city's central train station.

An additional 100 people, though uninjured, were assessed for shock, said René Cellier, director of the Bas-Rhin Fire and Rescue Service.

The exact cause of the collision was unclear but local media reported that one of the trams was reversing at the time.

Mayor Jeanne Barseghian, who visited the site, described the incident as a “brutal collision” and expressed her gratitude to emergency responders.

“I am at the station with the injured and rescuers. Thank you for your mobilization,” she said on X. She urged the public not to obstruct rescue operations.

Images shared on social media showed two severely damaged tram cars, one of which had derailed in the tunnel.

Strasbourg, the first major French city to reinstate tram services in 1994, had not experienced a significant tram accident until now, according to French media. Authorities launched an investigation to determine what caused the collision.

Cleanup operations continued Saturday evening, and residents were advised to avoid the area around the train station.

## Economy Minister: ‘Armenia Won’t Swap EAEU For Another Bloc; It Seeks Independence’

YEREVAN (JAM News) — “We are not considering replacing the Eurasian Economic Union [a Russia-led economic bloc] with any other union under any circumstances. We want to be independent. Independence means relying on everyone to some extent, rather than just one entity, and ensuring that everyone depends on you in some way,” Armenia's Minister of Economy Gevorg Papoyan stated on January 13.

Last week, Armenia's government approved a draft law titled “On Initiating Armenia's Accession Process to the European Union.” Russia quickly responded, with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk stating that Moscow views the discussion of Armenia's EU membership process as “the beginning of its exit from the Eurasian Economic Union.”

Papoyan's statement can be seen as a response to Russian authorities. However, according to local experts, Armenia's economy could face significant challenges if it leaves the EAEU, particularly regarding access to energy resources.

The initiative to hold a “Evrakhve” (Euroreferendum) was proposed by four extra-parliamentary forces united under the “Platform of Democratic Forces.” They believe Armenia should swiftly exit Russian-led integration structures and begin the process of joining the European Union. To bring the initiative to parliament, its proponents launched a signature campaign, gathering support from 60,000 citizens.

“In my view, there is neither a reason to be overly enthusiastic nor a cause for concern. With this step, we emphasize the availability of tools to exercise Armenia's sovereign rights and affirm that we pursue an independent foreign policy based on our national interests,” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated.

As Minister of Economy Gevorg Papoyan stated during his press conference, Armenia must produce and export competitive products to various countries worldwide: “There's no need to replace. We must maintain, increase, and complement trade volumes with the EAEU.”

The minister emphasized that Armenia is diversifying its economy. This is evident from the fact that the UAE has now become the country's largest trading partner, meaning Russia is no longer in the top spot. However, Russia remains one of Armenia's key partners, alongside China and the European Union.

Papoyan explained that Armenia currently faces challenges with the EU. Previously, the country was classified as a low-income nation and enjoyed certain privileges, such as exemptions or reduced customs duties. Now, Armenia is considered a middle-income country and no longer benefits from these advantages. According to him, this creates issues, particularly for the export of textiles and aluminum foil.

“The government is working to support these sectors to ensure their competitiveness and prevent the loss of established markets in European countries,” the minister added.

Following the Armenian government's approval of a “Euroreferendum,” Moscow reacted strongly to the decision. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk and Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated that Armenia's potential EU membership is a sovereign right of the country.

However, both emphasized that Arme-

nia is already a member of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and therefore, it cannot simultaneously belong to two different organizations.

“Membership in the EAEU provides this country and its population with significant benefits. What EU membership might bring is hard to say at this stage. Hypothetically speaking, it's simply impossible to be part of two different organizations. The EAEU has one customs space, a unified zone for the free movement of goods, services, people, and capital, while the EU operates under completely different norms,” Peskov stated.

He added that the EU's position on Armenia's potential membership needs further clarification. Peskov referenced Turkey as an example, noting how it has “maintained its orientation toward EU membership for decades but has not been met with much reciprocity.”

Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk warned that if Armenia leaves the EAEU, the country will face higher prices for energy and food, while exports could drop by 70-80 percent:

“This means ordinary people will lose income and jobs while paying more for basic necessities. In return, they will likely gain visa-free travel, while Armenia faces depopulation. It's becoming increasingly evident that EAEU membership is a privilege.”

Overchuk concluded by comparing Armenia's EU aspirations to buying a ticket on the “Titanic,” urging consideration of the EU's “economic and social challenges.”

Economist Agasi Tavadyan believes that Armenia is economically too dependent on Russia. He argues that this dependence has increased since the change of power in 2018, during the leadership of the current prime minister and his team.

Specifically, exports to Russia have grown approximately sixfold, and capital inflows increased 4.5 times in 2022 alone:

“Statistics say one thing, while politicians' statements say another. Before 2018, one-third of our exports went to the EAEU, another third to the European Union, and the remaining third to other countries. Now, exports to the EAEU account for nearly 50 percent, while exports to the EU have dropped to just 3.6 percent. Under these conditions, it's unrealistic to talk about reducing dependence on Russia.”

According to Tavadyan, 80-90 percent of Armenia's agricultural products and brandy are exported to Russia, duty-free under the EAEU agreement. He highlights that if Armenia leaves the EAEU, it will have to export the same goods to Russia while paying customs duties, making it economically disadvantageous.

The economist also points out that exporting to the EU comes with challenges such as increased transportation costs, market saturation, stringent standards, and the need for competitiveness:

“Moreover, if we aim to access the EU market, we would have to transport goods through Armenia's closed border with Turkey, as political issues have arisen between the EU and Georgia. This raises the additional issue of reopening the Armenian-Turkish border.”

Tavadyan believes that Armenia would face significant challenges if it exited the EAEU, particularly higher energy prices. He stresses the importance of increasing energy independence, reminding that “nearly 40 percent of Armenia's electricity is currently produced using Russian gas.”

According to the economist, positive changes can be expected if Armenia develops its nuclear and solar energy sectors.



## ERRATA

An incorrect photo accompanied the caption “The representative of the Governor of Damascus Maher Marwan congratulates Bishop Armash Nalbandian at the Armenian Diocese on the occasion of Christmas (photo courtesy Bishop Armash Nalbandian Facebook page)” on page 6 of last week's issue. The correct photo for this caption appears above.





INTERNATIONAL

# ANCA Launches Grassroots Campaign to Block US Financing of Boeing Cargo Jet Sales to Azerbaijan

WASHINGTON — The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) has launched a nationwide grassroots campaign urging the U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM) to reject a proposed \$100 million financial guarantee for the sale of Boeing cargo aircraft to Azerbaijan’s Silk Way Airlines. This financing would enable the Aliyev regime’s procurement of dual-use aircraft, facilitating the illegal flow of arms into Azerbaijan — a country widely condemned for its genocidal policies against the Armenian population of Artsakh and ongoing aggression against the Republic of Armenia.

On January 10, EXIM Bank announced that it received Boeing’s application for fi-

nal commitment for a loan exceeding \$100 million. Public comments on this proposal will be accepted until February 7, 2025, and presented to the EXIM Board of Directors for consideration before any final decision.

The ANCA’s campaign, [anca.org/exim](http://anca.org/exim), empowers individuals across the country to voice their opposition to this transaction. The ANCA argues that approval of this financing would:

- Violate U.S. Export Control Laws: The sale contravenes regulations on dual-use items under the Export Administration Regulations and the International Traffic in Arms Regulations.
- Undermine Regional Peace: Providing military advantage to Azerbaijan jeopardiz-

es the sovereignty and security of Armenia and Artsakh.

- Contradict U.S. Sanctions and Policies: Azerbaijan’s record of human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing, and unlawful detention of POWs calls for sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, not U.S. financial backing.
- Facilitate Genocidal Intent: Azerbaijan has used its arsenal to ethnically cleanse Artsakh’s Armenian population, with documented evidence of Silk Way Airlines’ role in illegal arms transfers.
- Silk Way Airlines, closely tied to the Aliyev regime, has been implicated in numerous investigations, including by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting

Project (OCCRP), for transporting illicit arms used in Azerbaijan’s assaults on Artsakh. These acts, documented by Freedom House and other watchdog organizations, demonstrate Azerbaijan’s intent to systematically erase Armenian heritage and presence in the region.

## Russia Cautious About New US-Armenian Agreement

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Russia on January 14 reacted cautiously to the impending signing of a US-Armenian agreement on “strategic partnership” while warning of further damage to its relations with Armenia.

“It is the absolute sovereign right of our Armenian friends to develop relations in all directions,” said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. “We continue to proceed from the main thing: we have our own bilateral relations with Armenia, we value these relations, and we intend to develop them further.”

Speaking to journalists hours before the scheduled signing of the agreement in Washington, Peskov said at the same time that the United States “has never played a particularly stabilizing role in the South Caucasus” and keeps “trying in every way to pull more and more countries.” into its wake.

“The main thing is not what you signed or how you signed it, but what stems from it,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told a separate news conference in Moscow. “We also used the term ‘strategic partnership’ in a number of agreements with Western countries, but they never required one or another participant to act against a third party.”

Lavrov claimed that Yerevan will come under US pressure to take such action against Moscow and, in particular, join Western sanctions imposed on Russia since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Armenian entrepreneurs have taken advantage of those sanctions by re-exporting goods to and from Russia. This has been the main driving force behind robust economic growth registered in Armenia for the last three years.

Russian-Armenian trade has skyrocketed since 2022 despite a deepening rift between the two long-time allies. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s administration has been seeking to reorient Armenia towards the West in response to what it sees as Russia’s failure to honor security commitments to the South Caucasus country.

Pashinyan froze the country’s membership in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) a year ago. His government officially announced last week plans to join the European Union, prompting stern warnings from Moscow.

Lavrov repeated those warnings, saying that accession to the EU is “incompatible” with Armenia’s continued membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a Russian-led trade bloc that gives it tariff-free access to Russia’s vast market.

Still, the top Russian diplomat spoke of a continuing “dialogue” with Yerevan. He revealed that Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan has accepted an official invitation to visit Moscow.

“I hope that the visit will take place soon,” added Lavrov.

## Aliyev’s Cousin Arrested in Greece on Drug Charges

By Aytan Farhadova

On December 30, Greek police arrested Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s first cousin, DJ Izzatkhanim Javadova, during an drug raid at a party held in a luxury villa near Athens.

According to Meydan TV, police announced that 45 packages of cocaine, ecstasy, crystal meth, other drugs, and a safe containing around €45,000 (\$46,000) were found in the “bedroom” of the party’s “organiser,” Javadova.

According to local Greek media, a total of 10 people were arrested at the party, including two police officers and a judicial police officer who had been tasked with “guarding” the party.

Javadova, 44, was expected to apologise on January 3 to an investigator and prosecutor, along with four other co-defendants. On January 2, five of those accused of drug possession were released without conditions after providing apologies.

The daughter of the late Azerbaijani MP Jalal Aliyev — the brother of the former President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, and the uncle of the present President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev — Javadova was raised in Russia. In 2015, she began playing music under the stage name Mikaela, her daughter’s name, at parties in Ibiza, Greece, and Thailand.



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s first cousin DJ Izzatkhanim Javadova during a performance in Ibiza in 2015. Photo via social media.

Azerbaijani authorities have not yet commented on the case.

**Connections to the Azerbaijani Laundromat**

In 2021, British authorities tied Javadova and her husband Suleyman Javadov to the Azerbaijani Laundromat, a general-purpose financial vehicle used by the Azerbaijani elite to make money abroad.

According to an investigation by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) released that same year, the Javadov couple were suspected of receiving almost £14 million (\$17 million) from the proceeds of “corruption, theft, or embezzlement.”

The report highlighted that while previous investigations had shown that many high-level Azerbaijanis used the Laundromat, Javadova “was the first member of the ruling Aliyev family known to have done so.”

Though not high-profile figures in Azerbaijan, both Izzatkhanim Javadova and Suleyman Javadov have family ties to Azerbaijani politicians — Suleyman Javadov’s father was a Deputy Energy Minister from 2014 until 2020. Accordingly, Suleyman Javadov should have been recognised as a “politically exposed person,” or PEP, which should have subjected him to extra scrutiny under anti-money laundering regulations.

According to the OCCRP, however, Javadov told the UK bank Coutts when opening an account that he “was not related to the Deputy Minister of Energy, and that he was simply a namesake.”

The National Crime Agency later secured a settlement agreement with Suleyman Javadov to forfeit £4 million (\$5 million) they suspected to be “the proceeds of a crime.” The couple claimed that they were unaware the forfeited money had passed through the Azerbaijani Laundromat before entering their accounts.

(This story originally appeared on the website OC-Media on January 2.)

## Iranian Security Chief Visits Armenia, Azerbaijan

SECURITY, from page 1

“Ali Akbar Ahmadian noted that Iran supports the implementation of the project based on the principles enshrined in it,” the office said in a statement.

Baku insists on an extraterritorial corridor that would exempt people and cargo transported to and from Nakhichevan through Syunik from Armenian border checks. Tehran is strongly opposed to the so-called “Zangezur corridor.” It has repeatedly warned against attempts to strip it of transport links or the common border with Armenia.

The Iranian Mehr news agency reported that during a separate meeting with his Armenian opposite number, Armen Grigoryan, held earlier on Thursday Ahmadian reaffirmed his country’s opposition to “any geopolitical changes in the region.” He said he also stated that “nothing can undermine or change” Armenian-Iranian relations.

The Iranian official traveled to Baku

and Yerevan amid what many in Armenia see as a growing threat of an Azerbaijani invasion aimed at opening the corridor.

“All the indications are that Azerbaijan is preparing for war,” said Sergei Melkonian, an analyst with the APRI Armenia think-tank.

“Iran is trying to use all means at its disposal to prevent that attack and avoid the dilemma of intervening or not intervening,” Melkonian told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

He suggested that Tehran is hamstrung by a lack of a bilateral defense agreement with Yerevan. The Armenian government “lacks the political will to cooperate with Iran in the military field,” he said.

Pashinyan was cited by his press office as telling Ahmadian that Armenia and Iran have common “natural interests” and that his government remains committed to deepening bilateral ties “in all directions.”





## INTERNATIONAL

# Will EU Monitors Stay in Armenia? Examining Their Role in Stability and Regional Tensions

By Ani Grigoryan

As the European Union Monitoring Mission in Armenia (EUMA) approaches its two-year mandate expiration in February 2025, its presence has become deeply intertwined with the daily life of border communities while garnering broad support across Armenia's political and civil society spectrum. The mission, which began with a short-term deployment in October 2022 and transformed into a long-term presence in February 2023, has emerged as a stabilizing factor in Armenia's border regions with Azerbaijan, despite facing opposition from neighboring states and becoming a focal point of regional diplomatic tensions.

The EUMA has established a significant presence across Armenia-Azerbaijan border regions, operating from six strategically located field offices in Yeghegnadzor, Jermuk, Martuni, Kapan, Goris and Ijevan. The mission's scope expanded considerably in late 2023 when the EU Council increased the number of observers from 100 to 209, reflecting the growing commitment to regional stability and the need for comprehensive monitoring coverage.

On December 12, the mission marked a significant milestone, announcing the completion of the 4,000th patrol since its establishment in February 2023. These patrols, covering approximately 3,800 kilometers weekly, have become a regular feature of life in border areas, where teams conduct daily monitoring activities from their field offices.

Daniel Ioannisyanyan, a representative of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, highlights the mission's tangible impact on security: "Over the past two years of the mission's operation, we've witnessed a fundamental decrease in ceasefire violations. The mission's ability to provide impartial information about troop movements and effectively counter disinformation has proven invaluable. Most importantly, we've seen a significant reduction in border incidents since the mission's deployment."

## Community Engagement and Local Impact

The EUMA has developed a comprehensive approach to community engagement that extends beyond its primary monitoring role. The mission conducts regular "human security missions," where observers visit various settlements, engage with local residents through interpreters, visit

educational institutions, and participate in community events. These interactions have become particularly valuable in remote areas where international presence is rare. Nerkin Hand village in the Syunik region, which faces unique security challenges due to its location, serves as a striking example. Surrounded on three sides by Azerbaijani forces, the village was initially inaccessible to EU observers due to the presence of Russian troops. Following the Russian withdrawal, the mission's regular presence has brought changes to community life.

Khachatur Baghdasaryan, the head of Nerkin Hand, tells Caucasus Watch that the observers' regular visits have had a positive effect on the village. "EU observers' presence noticeably restrains Azerbaijani soldiers' behavior," Baghdasaryan explains. "Our residents have developed a strong belief that the observers' presence helps prevent provocations from the opposing side." The impact extends beyond security considerations. The regular presence of international observers has helped combat the isolation many border communities experience, with residents reporting increased confidence in maintaining their daily activities, from agricultural work to children's education.

## Operational Framework and Daily Activities

The EUMA operates as an entirely civilian, unarmed mission, functioning as an impartial actor in the region. Its deployment followed a successful pilot phase of the EU Monitoring Capacity (EUMCAP) along the Armenian side of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border from October 20 to December 19, 2022. The mission was established in response to an official request from Armenian authorities, reflecting the country's growing orientation toward European security structures.

The mission's observers engage in a wide range of activities beyond traditional monitoring. They regularly conduct meetings with local residents through interpreters, visit educational institutions, and engage with civil society representatives. The observers document local concerns, monitor security situations, and provide regular reports to Brussels about developments in the border regions.

The mission's reporting mechanism has contributed to a more accurate understanding of the situation on the ground, playing a crucial role in the EU's high-level efforts

to normalize Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. The observers provide reliable, first-hand information about developments in the border regions, helping to counter disinformation and offer an objective assessment of security situations. This information flow has proven particularly valuable in times of tension, allowing for rapid verification of claims and prevention of escalation based on misinformation.

## Political Support and Civil Society Perspective

The mission enjoys broad support across Armenia's political spectrum, including from opposition parties traditionally seen as having pro-Russian foreign policy orientations. Elinar Vardanyan, an opposition MP from the "Armenia" faction and member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on European Integration, expresses concern about the delay in extending the mission's mandate: "It's more than strange that there's still no decision on extending the mandate, and I understand that Azerbaijan's dissatisfaction is one of the main reasons, and our authorities seem reluctant to act against it."

The MP emphasizes the mission's deterrent role: "While we all understand that this isn't a mission to prevent possible attacks, it provides an opportunity to use it as a deterrent mechanism in case of possible Azerbaijani aggression. The mission has been quite active in Armenia for two years, and there should be a decision to extend its term."

Civil society representatives have also voiced strong support for the mission. Daniel Ioannisyanyan notes that while local residents often have high expectations of the EU observers, the mission's presence has been instrumental in maintaining regional stability. "What we observe from Yerevan — that the border has become more peaceful since the observers' deployment — the local population feels even more acutely," he elaborates.

## Expert Analysis and Mission Effectiveness

In an exclusive interview with Caucasus Watch, Benyamin Poghosyan, Senior Research Fellow at APRI Armenia, provides a nuanced assessment of the mission's achievements and limitations. "If we analyze these two years of the monitoring mission, it can be evaluated as an initiative with limited success - not because it could have achieved more but didn't, but because the mission's tasks, capabilities, and possibilities were inherently limited from the start," he explains.

According to Poghosyan, the mission serves two primary purposes: "It acts as one of the political deterrence factors against escalation by Azerbaijan, and it fits into the EU's desire to have a more intensive position in the negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan." The expert emphasizes that the mission's establishment coincided with a period of intensive negotiations in Brussels. "Let's not forget the intensive negotiations on the Brussels platform in 2022 - April, May, and August. Even Azerbaijan's September 2022 aggression against Armenia didn't significantly derail this Brussels platform. Moreover, we had the famous Prague Declaration in October 2022."

Poghosyan anticipates an extension of the mission's mandate for another two years, assuming no extraordinary developments occur. However, he adds that the longer-term future of the mission could depend on developments in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict by 2025. "If the United States succeeds in reaching certain agreements with Russia and freezing the conflict in Ukraine, Russia might have more resources to focus on other regions, including the South Caucasus."

Poghosyan also provides insight into the broader regional dynamics affecting the mission's work. He argues that the situation has become more complex with Azerbaijan's recent positioning of the EU mission as an obstacle to peace. "Azerbaijan's leadership doesn't need a peace treaty. Moreover, a peace treaty could be harmful to them, as family power legitimization relies heavily on nationalism, external enemy narratives, and anti-Armenian sentiment," he explains.

The expert further elaborates that Azerbaijan has set multiple preconditions for peace, including constitutional changes, withdrawal of international court claims, termination of the EU mission, request to dissolve the OSCE Minsk Group, and provision of an extraterritorial corridor. "Even if Armenia were to fulfill all five preconditions, I'm almost certain that Azerbaijan would bring forward several other preconditions the next day," Poghosyan concludes.

## Challenges and Responses

The mission has faced serious accusations from both Azerbaijan and Russia. In early October, the Azerbaijan defense ministry-aligned "Caliber" media outlet published footage of European observers conducting a patrol with binoculars, claiming they were "spying on Azerbaijani territory using special equipment together with Armenian military personnel." The EU mission immediately dismissed these accusations as groundless, stating they conduct regular patrols following standard procedures.

Azerbaijan escalated its concerns to a NATO level, with Chief of General Staff Karim Valiyev telling NATO's Director General Janusz Adamczak in October 2024 that the EU mission's deployment was "aggravating the situation." Meanwhile, Russia's opposition, as Poghosyan tells Caucasus Watch, stems from Armenia's decision to "reject CSTO observers and accept European observers at a time when the EU and its member states are effectively in a de facto war with Russia."

## Looking Ahead: The 2025 Decision

The EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia has undeniably contributed to enhanced stability and security in Armenia's border regions while fostering deeper connections between local communities and the international community. Its efforts in reducing ceasefire violations and countering disinformation have been widely recognized and appreciated.

Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has informed Caucasus Watch that it considers the extension of the EU monitoring mission's mandate and its future activities important while positively assessing its nearly two years of activity. However, the mission operates within clear limitations, both in its mandate and the broader geopolitical landscape. While its presence acts as a deterrent against aggression, it cannot prevent escalations or address the underlying causes of conflict. Moreover, regional dynamics, including opposition from Azerbaijan and Russia, present ongoing challenges to its effectiveness.

As the mission approaches its mandate renewal in February 2025, its future will depend not only on Armenia's support but also on the EU's strategic interests and the evolving geopolitical context. Extending the EUMA's presence would reinforce its role as a stabilizing actor in the South Caucasus, but its long-term success hinges on a coordinated approach to addressing the deeper issues driving regional tensions.

(Ani Grigoryan is the founder and editor of CivilNetCheck - a fact checking department at CivilNet online TV. This commentary originally appeared on [www.caucasuswatch.de](http://www.caucasuswatch.de) on January 13.)

## AGBU Donates \$100,000 to Red Cross, World Central Kitchen

LOS ANGELES — The uncontained wildfires that escalated the week of January 6 have thrust tens of thousands of residents of the Greater Los Angeles area into a state of crisis. The destruction is of a magnitude among the worst in the history of the state of California — home to the largest Armenian population in the United States and second largest in the worldwide Diaspora. Many such families have been tragically impacted along with their neighbors, relatives, and local community members. The nation and the world watch in shock and dismay as the blazing fire rips through communities, leaving unfathomable devastation in its wake. Vast swaths of property, including homes, businesses, vehicles, schools, and public infrastructures are destroyed beyond recognition.

Beginning with a \$100,000 donation split evenly between the American Red Cross and World Central Kitchen, AGBU leadership and its global membership are standing in solidarity with the people of Los Angeles and Armenian families who have suffered tremendous loss and are now

facing an uncertain future.

In a statement on behalf of the organization, AGBU President Sam Simonian expressed the sentiments of concern and compassion felt by Armenians worldwide: "It is in times like these that we unite in common purpose and take the bold actions necessary to help ease the burdens and hardships that many of our people in LA are experiencing right now. Their world has been disrupted; the fear and anxiety in what is a very unstable situation are running high. Therefore, AGBU is mobilizing efforts in coordination with those on the ground to aid our fellow Armenians. We have already committed \$50,000 to the American Red Cross and \$50,000 to World Central Kitchen respectively to support their urgent frontline relief operations, now underway. At the same time, the AGBU Central Board is working closely with the AGBU Western Region leadership and its numerous volunteer committees to provide humanitarian aid to those in need. Further information will be announced in the days to come."





# Community News

## St. John Celebrates Christmas Twice

By David Lührssen

MILWAUKEE — St. John the Baptist Armenian Church was active throughout the holiday season in 2024-25. On December 22, a celebration of Western Christmas was added after *Badarak* [Liturgy] with the congregation singing familiar carols such as *Silent Night* and *We Three Kings*, interspersed with reading of the Christmas story. Santa (Mark Strong) visited the Culture Hall during lunch, bringing presents for the children.

On January 5, Armenian Christmas was observed with the traditional Blessing of the Water service conducted by Rev. Guregh Hambardzumyan and St. John's former pastor, Rev. Nareg Keutelian. Arthur Spice



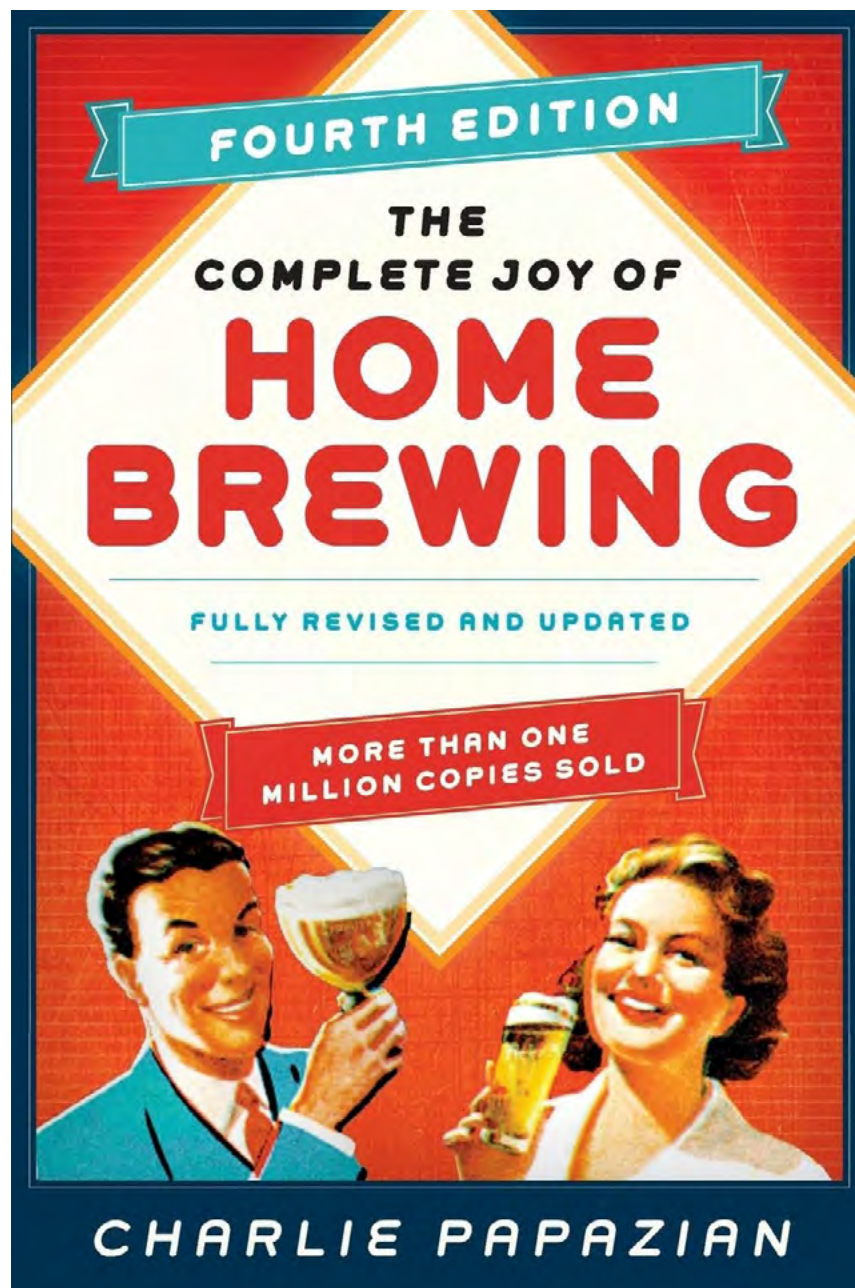
Rev. Guregh Hambardzumyan

was godfather of the cross and helped dispense the holy water to worshippers. In his Christmas sermon, Hambardzumyan explored the idea of the creator of the universe making himself known to humanity by becoming one of us. He used a story about an ancient Persian king who visited his kingdom in disguise as a metaphor for Jesus' entry into our world. The birth of Jesus and the beginning of his spiritual mission on Earth, which began with his baptism as commemorated in the Blessing of the Water, gave humanity a clearer picture of God, his love for us and our responsibility to each other. The community gathered afterward for a lavish potluck Christmas lunch provided by members and friends.

The holidays continued for one more week at St. John with a first for the Milwaukee Armenian Community, a celebration of New Year based on the Julian calendar, in the Culture Hall following *Badarak* [Liturgy] on January 12. New Year's Eve based on Julian Calendar continues to be observed in Jerusalem and some parts of the former Soviet Union countries.



Rev. Guregh Hambardzumyan with Rev. Nareg Keutelian with Arthur Spice, the godfather of the cross



## How Jimmy Carter Paved the Way for the Craft Beer Revolution

ATLANTA (GPB) — On Part of former President Jimmy Carter's legacy can likely be found at any number of craft breweries throughout the country. In 1978, Carter signed a bill that ended the prohibition on homebrewing. As states gradually followed suit — Georgia legalized the hobby in the 1990s — homebrewing grew in popularity and helped create new generations of craft beer entrepreneurs. Charlie Papazian, the author of *The Complete Joy of Homebrewing*, spoke with GPB's Peter Biello on January 3.

**Peter Biello:** Before Carter signed the legislation lifting the federal prohibition on homebrewing, what was it like for Homebrewers who were trying to learn the craft?

**Charlie Papazian:** Well, the fact that homebrewing was illegal really didn't stop the beer enthusiasts at the time. We knew that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had a lot more important things to do. And then, you know, they've come out and indicated that they weren't interested in prosecuting homebrewers who were making beer for their own personal use.

**Peter Biello:** As far as I understand it, they actually came to one of the classes that you were teaching, right? You had a ATF agent show up?

**Charlie Papazian:** Well, allegedly, yes.

**Peter Biello:** You never got confirmation of that?

**Charlie Papazian:** Well, I was teaching homebrew classes here in Boulder, Colo., in the 1970s. And I got a warning that somebody suspicious had registered for my class. And this guy showed up with dark slack pants, a white shirt and a black necktie. And he probably was the only person dressed like that for miles around. And he came to the class. I knew he was going to be coming. And I just gave my ordinary spiel that, you know, the ATF, the government has better things to do than arrest homebrewers, just — you make homebrew, make it for your own personal use and definitely don't sell it. And then I went on with teaching the glass and he rolled up his sleeves and learned how to make beer in the two classes that he showed up in.

**Peter Biello:** What was your reaction when Carter signed the bill lifting the prohibition on homebrewing?

**Charlie Papazian:** I was really happy that it happened. But I'll tell you, a lot of my homebrewing students that had taken my class, they said, "Oh, nuts. Now see BEER, page 13

## Transforming The Treatment Of Autoimmune Disorders, Cancer And More

By Jonny Hart

PHILADELPHIA (Temple University) — Mark Feitelson and Alla Arzumanyan are developing drugs that use molecules harvested from the human body to safely and effectively treat a long list of diseases.

Tucked away in a biology lab on the fourth floor of Temple University's Bio-Life Building, a pair of researchers are developing a revolutionary treatment that could be as profound as the discovery of insulin more than a century ago.

"If someone is diagnosed with diabetes, what do you do? You give them insulin," said Alla Arzumanyan, associate professor of research in the Department of Biology. "The idea behind our company is these patients can't make these metabolites, so what can we do? Give it to them in the form of a drug."

Arzumanyan co-founded SFA Therapeutics Inc. in 2017 alongside Mark Feitelson, professor of biology, and Ira Spector, a drug developer with more than 30 years of experience.

Metabolites are small molecules produced during metabolism that play crucial roles in maintaining the body's normal functions. The researchers are developing a set of metabolites that, when given to patients in drug form, can treat many diseases that do not presently have safe and effective drugs, including more than 40 autoimmune disorders, certain types of cancers and other illnesses like fatty liver.

"This is potentially a game-changer," Spector said. "Because instead of treating symptoms, we may have something that changes the course of disease."

### Theory Sparked More Than a Decade Ago

In 2013, Feitelson and Arzumanyan came across a scientific article that discussed using gut metabolites as a treatment in mice for colitis, a disease affecting the colon.

"I thought, well that's really interesting that these gut metabolites work in the colon," said Feitelson, who had been studying chronic liver disease for 30 years. "The question then became can you extend this concept of using gut metabolites to regulate the immune system in other parts of the body?"

He applied the concept to a study of liver disease he was conducting in his lab and found that the gut metabolites successfully treated inflammation in the liver, and they also slowed down the progression of liver disease to liver cancer.

Then Arzumanyan had a breakthrough: The same concept could be used to treat psoriasis, an autoimmune disease affecting the skin.

"Someone very close to me had severe psoriasis, so I had studied the see TRANSFORMATION, page 9





OBITUARY

# Sarkis Bedevian

## Jerusalem-Born Pillar of Community

Sarkis Bedevian passed away on January 6, 2025. He was 89.

He was born in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem on September 4, 1936. From an early age, he accompanied his mother, Baidzar, an orphaned survivor of the Armenian Genocide, to church every Sunday. Baidzar ensured that the Armenian Church became the center of his life. Sarkis grew up attending Soorp Tarkmanchatz (Holy Translators) School. His father, Mgrditch, had ancestral roots in the Old City dating back to the Crusades.

With the support and deep love of his family, Sarkis left his birthplace at the age of 22 and immigrated to the United States. The Armenian Church looked after their Jerusalem boy. Through the introduction of Arsham Kradjian, he was able to expedite his visa as a foreign student despite the limited quota system at the time. He enrolled in New York University's School of Commerce, majoring in Accounting and Finance. To fund his education, Sarkis worked as a waiter during the summers in the Catskills.

His first friends in America were Father Vatche Hovsepian — who later became Archbishop Vatche, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church in America — and Deacon Antranig, who later became Rev. Carnig Hallajian. At an Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) gathering, Sarkis met

his future bride, Ruth Alice Shahbazian. Their first date was a visit to the Shahbazian family summer home in Belmar, NJ. On that weekend, Sarkis invited Ruth to attend St. Mary Armenian Church in Elberon (later rebuilt and renamed St. Stepanos). They were married on October 20, 1962.

Sarkis lived by his priorities — faith, family, and church. He worked diligently as an accountant to provide for his family. When he was told he would never advance in his company because of his “foreign” accent, he decided to start his own accounting practice. With God’s blessing, his talents flourished. And with the unwavering support of his devoted wife, who stayed home to care for their three children, Sarkis was able to grow the business successfully to provide far beyond his family’s needs.

His friends trusted him, and he expanded his expertise into real estate investment. Sarkis generously shared his success with his extended family and the Armenian Church, which was the center of his heart.

Sarkis affectionately called his wife “Ruthie,” and together they raised their children — Peter, Debby and Peggy — at St. Leon Armenian Church in Fair Lawn, NJ. Sarkis fulfilled many roles in church life, serving as superintendent of Sunday School, Treasurer of the Parish Council, and co-chairman of the Building Fund for the St. Leon Armenian Church Community Center. His dedication extended beyond



his home parish to the Eastern Diocesan Council, the Armenian Church Endowment Fund, and the Board of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary.

Though Sarkis’ family was spread across the globe, he remained deeply connected to his parents, sister, brother, nephews, nieces, cousins, and the Shahbazian family into which he had married. He made numerous trips over the years to Toronto, California, and Jerusalem, ensuring his presence at family celebrations.

In October 1985, Sarkis and Ruth made their first pilgrimage to Armenia, then under Soviet rule. During this trip, their friendship with Father Karekin Nersissian blossomed. At the time, Father Karekin was the Primate of the Araratian Diocese and had been assigned to host and assist international guests celebrating the anniversary of Vasken Vehapar’s elevation to Catholicos. After the passing of Karekin I in 1999, Father Karekin became Karekin II Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

With the collapse of the USSR and the rebirth of an independent Armenia, Sarkis and Ruth returned to their ancestral homeland many times, devoting themselves to its restoration. Together, they gave gener-

ously of their time, talent, and treasure, beginning with the sponsorship of a building for a school in Gyumri. They were committed to restoring Armenia’s Christian roots and supported the Vaskenian Seminary. In 2001, they approached His Holiness for his blessing to build a church, youth center, and dining hall for the elderly in Vanadzor. St. Gregory of Narek was consecrated in 2005.

Almost 20 years later, on what would be his final trip to Armenia, Sarkis found immense joy in witnessing the children creating artwork in their classrooms and the faithful lighting candles in the church he helped establish. During that same trip, he reunited with his godson — now grown, a graduate of the American University of Armenia, and with a family of his own. He witnessed the ordination of Bishop Mesrob Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church in America. He prayed for Artsakh and took Holy Communion at Echmiadzin. For the last time, Sarkis looked out upon Republic Square from his favorite spot on the seventh floor of the Marriott Hotel and walked Amiryan Street. He sat out in front of the hotel and savored his “happy place” with his grandson, daughter, nephew, grand-nephew, best friend and everyone who stopped by to say hello.

During his lifetime, the catholicos honored Sarkis with numerous distinctions, including the St. Nersess Shnorhali Medal, the St. Gregory the Illuminator Medal, the Knight of Holy Echmiadzin Medal, and the Holy Echmiadzin Medal—the highest pontifical medal bestowed. In 2008, he was deeply honored to serve as Godfather at the Blessing of Holy Muron. Sarkis also founded the Friends of Holy See of Echmiadzin (FOHE), where he recruited and mentored a younger generation to carry on the vital work to ensure its future.

Sarkis’ counsel was sought by many. His heart was big enough to embrace not only his family and church but also his homeland of Armenia and his adopted home of  
see BEDEVIAN, page 8

# Judy Adams

## Veteran Groundbreaking DJ, Composer

DETROIT — Judy Adams was the brightest of lights in Detroit’s early music scene, a pioneering and groundbreaking woman and classically-trained composer and on-air radio personality whose fusion of jazz, classical and rock genres as a musical host both delighted and instructed devoted listeners for decades. She was 75.

Born in Detroit in 1949, she was first exposed to music when her late parents, Albert and Ruth, took her and her younger sister Janet to Detroit-area symphonic per-

formances. That early exposure kindled a love of all things musical that lasted for an entire lifetime.

Graduating from Oakland University with a degree in harpsichord composition, she quickly embraced the medium of radio and soon became the musical voice of Detroit’s NPR and Wayne State University station, WDET, for more than three decades. Her “Morphogenesis” show on WDET — later “The Judy Adams Show” — was the first of its kind to embrace an eclectic mix of different musical styles, a brilliant amalgamation of on-air auditory



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delights that many have since imitated but none have remotely surpassed. A snippet of Bach might be followed by an exotic outtake of the Byrds’ *Eight Miles High*, and Judy’s easy-to-listen-to on-air patter would provide helpful information about the pieces she played that eager listeners coveted. She would even throw in segments on cooking recipes from time to time on her show to provide for an absolutely unique listening experience.

When WDET changed formats and she moved on from her program manager position there, she occupied similar positions as an on-air host and performer in other venues: WRCJ; CJAM; the Music Hall; the Dirty Dog Jazz Cafe; the electronic festival in downtown Detroit, and the Detroit International Jazz Festival. Her hordes of followers — a vibrant community yet today — went with Judy wherever she did.

A proud Armenian-American, Judy also served as a host on WDET of the Heritage of Armenian Culture Radio program.

As importantly, Judy was a loving and doting mother, sister, wife and in-law. She and her late husband Larry (a great harmonica player in his own right) raised their son Anthony in a household filled with music, and Anthony and his wife Sarah’s first son is named Miles in honor of the brilliant jazz musician Miles Davis.

Judy is survived by her son, Anthony, daughter-in-law, Sarah, and their sons, Miles and Roman; her sister, Janet Ankers, and brother-in-law, Norman; her in-laws, Steve and Carol Tarnowsky and their sons, Mark and Scott; and her faithful feline companion, Chanel.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Transforming the Treatment of Autoimmune Disorders, Cancer and More

TRANSFORMATION, from page 7  
pathogenesis of psoriasis to an extent,” she said. “There was an a-ha moment where it clicked in my mind. If you merge the mechanisms that cause psoriasis with the mechanisms affected by the gut metabolites, you realize there is great potential that the metabolites can treat this disease.”

But the researchers were only scratching the surface of what was possible. Feitelson met Spector at a social event in 2015, where they discussed the research that Feitelson and Arzumanyan had been conducting. Thanks to Spector’s career in drug development, he recognized the potential for their approach to be applied to a wide range of autoimmune disorders and other illnesses.

“There are 300 million patients with autoimmune diseases. Now, imagine that there’s a potential link between them,” said Spector. “Twenty-five percent of patients have multiple autoimmune diseases. We think there is a set of metabolites that they can’t make in their body that we can make and provide for them as a drug.”

It’s a simple but elegant idea, and while the team has been testing it with success in humans with psoriasis, they have much larger ambitions for its application.

“What’s exciting is this is not a one-shot intervention against psoriasis or even a one-shot intervention against autoimmune diseases,” Spector continued. “This is a platform technology that enables us to target specific diseases and make drugs highly selective to the mechanisms associated with that disease.”

“If we can create a functional cure, then we have done something that no one’s been able to do in this field. And the drugs you see on TV that only treat symptoms will become obsolete, because we’ll have a drug that alters the course of disease.”



Mark Feitelson and Alla Arzumanyan (Photo by Joseph V. Labolito)

## Drugs Evolved by Humans, for Humans

The researchers are excited about much more than just the number of illnesses their treatment platform can target. Many current drugs for autoimmune disorders cause unwanted side effects because they use compounds not found in the human body. The SFA Therapeutics team is taking a different, more natural approach.

“We’re using molecules that have evolved with humans over a millennium of time. We don’t have to optimize them; evolution already has,” Feitelson said. “Because they come from our own bodies, at therapeutic doses we don’t have to worry about side effects, because these

molecules belong in us as opposed to so many of the drugs on the market that were created from artificial sources. And normal cells are not affected by these treatments, so there is no toxicity.”

Arzumanyan explained that most drugs used to treat autoimmune diseases are immunosuppressive, meaning they suppress specific mechanisms significantly enough to cause side effects. But the drugs her team is developing are considered immunomodulatory, meaning they adjust those mechanisms back to their normal levels.

Current systemic drugs to treat psoriasis are immunosuppressive and are only recommended for about 20 percent of adult patients with severe cases. SFA Therapeutics’ treatment is safe enough to be used in the other 80 percent of adult patients and children with more moderate cases.

Another breakthrough came when the researchers found that patients taking their treatment for long enough periods could sometimes regain the ability to make these metabolites themselves.

“For the psoriasis drugs you see advertised on television, when you withdraw

those drugs, the patients flare up and often have a worse disease than before,” Spector said. “We designed our clinical trial to include a one-month pause from treatment. Not only did our patients not flare up, but a number of them continued to improve. And when we put them back on the drug they improved even more.”

That result, the researchers said, could have revolutionary implications.

“Nothing out there does this,” Feitelson said. “It’s going to require more research, and it’s going to require longer trials. But if we can create a functional cure, then we have done something that no one’s been able to do in this field. And the drugs you see on TV that only treat symptoms will become obsolete, because we’ll have a drug that alters the course of disease. Moreover, this could be used to treat a long list of chronic inflammatory diseases, whose patients lack many of the same molecules that can be replaced by the drugs we are developing.”

## Continuing to Push Forward

SFA Therapeutics has acquired a license from Temple University to commercialize the portfolio of technologies currently comprising 15 issued patents and 33 pending patent applications. They recently completed a Phase 1B clinical trial for psoriasis treatment, and Spector says they are getting ready to publish world-class results showing their psoriasis drug is both safe and efficacious (within the limitations of a Phase 1B clinical trial).

They’re now working on raising money to fund a Phase 2 trial, where they plan to confirm the results from their Phase 1 trials.

But while they move through the process of bringing their psoriasis treatment to market, the team will continue to explore possibilities for their treatment platform.

“We have come such a long way since Mark and I read that article more than 10 years ago,” Arzumanyan said. “This is not serendipity. It is invention on top of invention. We solved that first fundamental problem in 2013. Since then, we’ve solved problem after problem, and we are continuing to solve more.”

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## Sarkis Bedevian, Jerusalem-Born Pillar of Community

BEDEVIAN, from page 7

the United States. In recognition of his contributions, he was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2010.

He had four grandchildren—Gregory, David, Matthew, and Ruby Alice, who entered Eternal Rest on July 23, 2024. He was also blessed with his loyal son Peter, who joined Bedevian Management in 2004 to continue his work; he was blessed with his daughter Debby, who accompanied him on his last trip to Armenia and who made sure he always had a stash of chocolate to snack on and *madzoon* soup when he came to California. And he was blessed with his youngest daughter, Peggy, who also provided companionship throughout his long and full life.

Sarkis will be remembered as a true gentleman, known for his generosity, kindness, and unwavering commitment to his family and church. He is cherished and will be greatly missed by his nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

In his last years, he worshipped from the pews at St. Leon in Fair Lawn and St. Gregory in Pasadena, Calif., singing the *sharagans* he had learned in his youth. For those who miss him, he will be present in the memories of those sacred spaces, inspiring others to serve with their own gifts.

Sarkis’ humility was reflected in his quiet dedication, and his generosity was a natural expression of his faith, values, and character. He will be laid to rest with earth from both Jerusalem and Armenia, alongside his father, his in-laws, and many beloved friends from St. Leon at George Washington Cemetery in Paramus, NJ.

The funeral will be on Saturday, January 18, at 11 a.m. at St. Leon Armenian Church. Following the burial, the family invites all to join them in the Community Center to share food and fellowship in Sarkis’ memory. In lieu of flowers donations may be made to St. Leon Armenian Church.





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Dangerous Fires Ravage Los Angeles County

FIRES, from page 1

The two largest fires began Tuesday, January 7, first in the wealthy coastal neighborhood of Pacific Palisades, in the western part of the city of Los Angeles in the morning, and, then hours later, in the evening, some 40 miles to the east, starting in the Eaton Canyon area and spreading through the neighborhoods of Pasadena, Altadena and Sierra Madre. They are respectively the fourth and second most destructive fires in Californian history. Large numbers of Armenians live in the area of the Eaton Fire.

Other fires which began in this period include the Hurst fire, in the San Fernando Valley's Sylmar area, which began Tuesday night, the Lidia Fire, which began Wednesday in Acton, the Sunset Fire, which began in the Hollywood Hills Wednesday evening, and the Kenneth Fire, which began Thursday afternoon, January 9, in the West Hills area of the San Fernando Valley on the border between Los Angeles and Ventura counties. A new fire broke out the evening of January 13 in Ventura County near Ventura Boulevard and Auto Center Drive, and so was dubbed the Auto Fire.

The Lidia Fire, burning over 395 acres,



Scenes from the fire in Altadena, California (photo courtesy of Shant Dergazarian)

was fully contained by January 11, the Sunset Fire was fully contained within 24 hours and the Kenneth Fire was fully contained on January 12 after burning over 1,000 acres, while the Hurst Fire, active

for six days and burning nearly 800 acres, was 95 percent contained by Monday, January 13. The new Auto Fire covered 56 acres and was 0 percent contained. Containment means that a control line has been

established surrounding the fire perimeter, though it does not necessarily mean that the fire has been extinguished.

The Pacific Palisades Fire, having destroyed around 5,000 structures over 23,000 acres by the morning of January 13, was only 14 percent contained, while the Eaton Fire, damaging 7,000 structures over 14,000 acres, was only 33 percent contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire).

Pasadena Public Information Officer Lisa Derderian told the *Mirror-Spectator* on January 8 that at that time, with zero percent containment of the fire, over 100 homes and structures were lost overnight but Pasadena had requested 50 strike teams (a strike team consists of five fire engines), and they had been arriving all day from several states along with some water and fire retardant dropping aircraft. There were around also 1,200 residents taking refuge at the Pasadena Convention Center.

Derderian said, "This is the worst-case scenario. It doesn't get worse than this."

According to Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna's January 13 morning *continued on next page*

## Firefighter Helps Save Altadena Homes

FIREFIGHTER, from page 1

south of Pasadena. He said: "I was born in the motherland of Glendale and grew up here in Pasadena. I am a local kid." He went to Pasadena City High School and Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School before starting Pasadena City College. However, he discovered his true vocation through a ride-along with the fire department, which led him to get his Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) license.

After two years of college, he went to the Fire Academy for six months of training, and then to paramedic school. He has been working 10 years fulltime as a firefighter-paramedic, and prior to that two years as a paramedic and one year as an EMT.

His main responsibility at present is the fire engine and the equipment, so he makes sure there is water in the pump to be able to provide it at the right pressure. Anything the members of his crew need – usually four people including himself – Jivalagian provides. For example, if one of the crew needs a chainsaw to cut something down, he gets them the chainsaw, which he checks every morning to make sure it works. Once everybody is set at a site and they need backup, Jivalagian said he will back them up on the fire line or the fire hose. If he is not pumping and if there is another fire engine there, he hops off his engine and goes inside or does whatever else is necessary in his support role.

### The Eaton Fires

Jivalagian explained that there are 13 cities in his area whose fire departments work together. While he was home in Altadena, an extreme wind event first started on Tuesday and his house lost power. He said, "Usually when we have a significant event, in the fire department, we have a civil duty, but when there is a catastrophic event, we have to show up for work. You make sure that your family is good and then you have to go and help."

A few other people who lived a little further away came to the station too, and then they collected as much equipment as possible to use their reserve fire engine. Their fire chief said that people are losing homes and the fire is burning, so they should make their way up there. They went first to the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL)

in Pasadena and waited for additional resources or firefighters to show up.

Since Jivalagian's house was not far away, he received permission to check on it. The crew took the fire engine there and found that it was okay. However, a local resident said that there were a few houses burning only several blocks distant, so the crew went with the fire engine to the nearby cul-de-sac and found that while one house was completely gone, another was still savable. Jivalagian said, "Some of the front stuff and part of the house was on fire, so we were trying out best to save it, but while that was happening, the wind event was still happening. So while you're fighting the fire, there is still ash and smoke and heat blowing on your face, on top of the wind on your face. It was chaotic, especially in the first 12 hours, I would say, because resources are still arriving, or [we are still] waiting for resources. A lot of the resources were at the Pacific Palisades fire."

Jivalagian said that they worked a few hours more through the night, trying their best. They went back to the station to rest about two hours. Then a new crew came in and he was sent again with them on the fire engine to check on the same house and keep going elsewhere.

The City of San Gabriel was affected a little bit by the high winds, so there were downed power lines, fallen trees, and the residual smoke and ash from the nearby Eaton Valley fires, but it was not directly endangered by the fires. Instead, the two fire stations were able to help their neighbors to the north.

He said that while usually there is a chain of command and teams are put together to fight fires, in this case, as there was so much going on at the same time and limited resources, "what we were doing was going to the known locations [of fires in the Altadena/Pasadena region]. Wherever you would see a flareup or a plume of smoke, we would go and try to save whatever we could – whatever houses were still standing."

Fortunately, most of the people living in these locations had already evacuated, and his crew did not have to extricate people from burning houses, but he did hear on the radio of a few such instances where people



Firefighter Hrag Jivalagian visited St. Gregory A. & M. Hovsepien preschool in October, 2024, to show students safety tips and give them a firsthand look at firefighting gear (courtesy St. Gregory A. & M. Hovsepien School Facebook site)

had refused to leave their homes and became burn victims.

Jivalagian worked continually from Tuesday night until Sunday morning, January 12, with minimal breaks in between when possible. He said he thought there might be a few more flareups forthcoming in the Altadena-Pasadena area, but that the main damage to homes and buildings had already taken place and the fire would move forward, depending on wind directions.

There are two types of firefighting, Jivalagian said: wildland and city. His own specialization is the latter, as he works for a city, and the type of fire engine he uses protects city neighborhoods. When the fire spreads to the nearby mountains, it will no longer be in his territory but in that of the wildland firefighters, who have specialized fire engines that look more like pickup trucks. The latter go up in the mountains to do what is called cutting lines, which, he explained, was to try to cut vegetation and eliminate potential fuel for spreading fires.

What will be left for the city firefighters will be working on the recovery phase. Jivalagian said that many houses still have gas lines open with residual gas, so flames

are still seen from their gas burning. Jivalagian said on Friday night that unless the winds pick up and the fire goes to another neighborhood, his fire station's work will probably end. What could cause more difficulties in the same area in the following week or so would be heavy rains that would create mudslides.

Jivalagian said he could not estimate how many homes belonging to Armenians had been destroyed in the Altadena and Pasadena area, but that it is a large number, and he encountered Armenians nearly on every block he went to for work.

One touching incident he recalled was in Altadena on a street where the fire hydrant ran out of water. However, one house his crew was trying to save had a swimming pool, so they worked "old school" and found buckets to fill up and throw at the house. He recalled, "The part that was beautiful was that while we were doing that, we were only four people, but we saw community members run up to us, saying how can we help you... Five guys of the community members picked up buckets and started helping us throw water on... It warmed my heart. It was like wow, that's beautiful."





## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

media report, 92,000 people were subject to mandatory evacuation orders, and 89,000 more received evacuation warnings (meaning they need to prepare to evacuate) in the various areas. The fire afflicted areas are subject to mandatory curfews from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

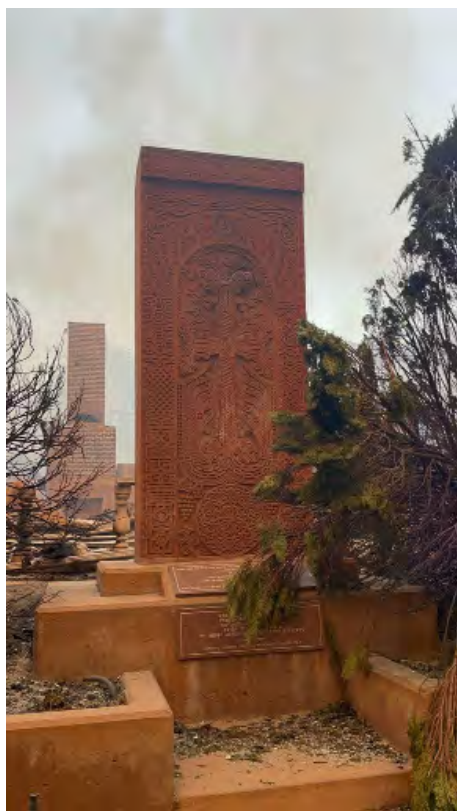
According to a news release of the Los Angeles County medical examiner on January 13, 8 deaths are recorded so far due to the Palisades Fire and 16 in the Eaton Fire.

Sheriff Luna expected numbers of fatalities to continue to increase, with 23 people reported missing, while searches were ongoing for bodies in the rubble. There were 30 people arrested in the Eaton area and 4 in the Palisades area, with looting and theft a serious concern. National Guard and police forces are patrolling the evacuated areas.

#### Armenian Losses

It is difficult to obtain accurate information about Armenian victims of the fires as the latter are not tracked separately. Construction Inspector at Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Shant Dergazarian estimated that by January 13 that some 53 homes of Armenians had been destroyed in Altadena and Pasadena. Other individuals spoke of personal knowledge of the burning of homes of Armenians in the Pacific Palisades and related areas.

The St. Gregory A. & M. Hovsepian Armenian School in Pasadena is safe, as is the Tekeyan Cultural Association Beshgeturian Center in Altadena. However, the latter has no electricity and is inaccessible because it remains in the evacuation zone which is guarded by National Guards and police against looting.



The *khachkar* that survived the fire at the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School in Altadena (photo courtesy Arlin Titanian)

A number of Armenians the *Mirror-Spectator* contacted from Pasadena and Altadena evacuated and went to stay with relatives in safer areas, though some had to move a second and even third time to escape the spreading fires.

Newly elected California State Assemblyman John Harabedian, whose Assembly district includes Pasadena, Altadena, Sierra Madre and other areas affected by the fires, is a Sierra Madre native who has friends and relatives whose homes burned down. He related on January 13 that on the one hand, all the Armenian families he has met personally in his district that have been affected have gone to other family members, and he thought this will continue to be true.

Harabedian recalled: "When I was in the



A view in Pasadena of the Eaton fires, January 7, 2025

fire zone the other day, there was an elderly Armenian man coming out in his car. He had been in his house. He survived. He hadn't been out of his house and was trying to find out where to go." Apparently, there are a certain number of people who remained in evacuation zones despite the orders, and who may be immobile for a variety of reasons. Searches by first responders and the unified command are going house to house to check.

In Altadena, the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School burned down. Chair of the Board of Directors Arlin Titanian in an interview on January 9 said that nobody was in the school building the day of the fire. It was going to be the first day of school but there were winds and bad air quality that had already led to canceling the opening even before the fire.

She said, "For now, we haven't figured out what to do about construction. Our top priority right now is to find a stable, safe environment for our students to continue their education and bring some things back to normal, especially for the students who lost their own homes. We are trying to connect with and help their families in their situation as well."

She estimated on January 13 that about 15 students' families lost their homes in Pasadena and Altadena while many others were displaced due to the mandatory evacuations.

Titanian said that there will probably first be a relocation. The school was examining several options and soon will finalize and publicly announce its plan. The idea is to stay in the Pasadena area since people are used to that commute and the school has not used buses in the past. On January 13, Titanian confirmed that a contract for the relocation would be signed and announced soon.

Optimistically, Titanian said that while the building was not salvageable, "Very symbolically, our *khachkar* [cross-stone] is still up. Our faith is still up. Our God is still standing. That is where all of our hope and faith is."

The Zorthian Ranch, a community art center and residency in Altadena founded by artist Jirayr Zorthian (1911-2004) was nearly fully destroyed.

#### Neighboring Glendale

The city of Glendale ordered the evacuation of the Glenoaks Canyon and Chevy Chase Canyon neighborhoods on January

8, as the fires were approaching this area, but removed the evacuation on January 9 when it appeared safe.

Glendale City Council member Ardashes "Ardy" Kassakhian said on January 8 that Glendale is affected because after two years of very wet seasons with record rainfall, drought conditions dried up vegetation that were prone to fires, which the strong Santa Ana winds spread. It is too early to tell what started the fire in this area, whether arson or aging infrastructure, but fortunately for Glendale, he said at present the direction of the winds are not affecting the city. Evacuations of Chevy Chase and Glen Oaks Canyons, nestled between local mountains, were conducted that day as a precaution because such actions would become very difficult in conditions of fire.

A major problem is sufficient water pressure when there are fires of this size, Kassakhian added. All regional fire resources



Scenes from the fire in Altadena, California (photo courtesy of Shant Dergazarian)

were stretched thin, with Glendale crews helping Altadena and Pasadena. The damage from the strong winds knocked out power around the city, along with a number of trees, he said.

Kassakhian concluded that fires, windstorms and similar events are not things that are predictable, whether from a Democratic or Republican perspective, and it was not the time for partisan attacks, which have appeared on social media, since there is only one way to put out a fire.

Mayor Elen Asatryan of Glendale on January 13 noted that the city had experienced a lot of damage from the high winds, especially from falling trees and tree limbs, and there were a lot of downed power

lines, so that 200 customers were still out of power, though obstructions for vehicular travel have been cleared. She declared, "We are not out of the woods just yet. We are expecting very high winds Wednesday and are at a very high fire risk in the city of Glendale."

The city has been coordinating regional efforts, Asatryan said, and she reached out to mayors of neighboring cities and its Los Angeles County Supervisor to offer assistance in any way possible. For example, Glendale has several evacuation sites available, but this offer has not been needed so far.

At the same time, Glendale will also need assistance when it comes to the debris and infrastructure repairs after the high wind damage.

During this crisis situation, she said, "I am also proud to say that we have been communicating with residents and businesses in all different kinds of languages, including Armenian, which is unprecedented. ... We saw the devastation that came during Covid and how different communities were left out, so getting the word out in different languages has been a priority for the city."

She remarked that so far she has been told that there has not been a need from the Armenian community for an evacuation center, adding, "I think in many ways our community is blessed with the support system that we have with families and friends, which puts us at an advantage. I know many families who are staying in Glendale right now with other families, with 8, 10 or even 15 people in the same house, but they are not going to evacuation centers."

As noted above, it is difficult to have information on the numbers of Armenians impacted by the fire. Not having information collected on Armenians in the federal US census, or even an Armenian checkbox on the state level, Asatryan said, leads to Armenians being the largest immigrant community in this region without any data. She has raised this issue with her city council colleagues in order to take some steps.

#### Looking to Rebuild and Recover

The emergency response and recovery in southern California is led by county fire, county sheriffs, CalFire, and Angeles National Fire. Meanwhile, Assemblyman Harabedian explained on January 9 that federal and state officials like himself are assisting in any way possible with supplies, and getting the processes going for residents to obtain state and federal resources. Their role will become even more important afterwards to help in the rebuilding process which will take years, as evidenced by examples over the last two decades.

Harabedian exclaimed, "My commitment is we are going to fight for every penny and every dollar from the Federal government with the support of our local Congressional representatives, who will also be fighting and doing everything they can.... The Biden administration has been great. It has made many pledges of support, and we will make sure and do our best that the Trump administration continues to do that. I am hopeful because these are American problems. These are not Democratic fires or Republican fires. We are all Americans and we all need help. I will use my position with full force to make sure that my constituents get all the help that they need."

see CALIFORNIA, page 12





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Dangerous Fires Ravage Los Angeles County

CALIFORNIA, from page 11

Evacuation centers will be open as long as they are needed, Harabedian said, but during the next stage, measures will be taken to assure renters and homeowners of housing in the medium-term, at prices in a way people are not taken advantage of.

As part of planning for recovery, on January 13, Harabedian as co-author introduced two bills in the California Assembly to provide financial relief and expedite rebuilding efforts. The Mortgage Deferment Act allows forbearance of mortgage payments for up to initial six months, which can be extended for an equal amount of time, while the second bill calls for the establishment of a state-led Disaster Housing Task Force to coordinate federal, state and local government housing reconstruction efforts.

The first bill is intended to reassure people so they will not feel pressured to sell their property due to immediate liquidity issues and stay in Altadena and the other fire-struck communities.

Harabedian said that Governor Gavin Newsom of California announced that he will expand the special session of the California legislature to further funding of the wildfire fighting, stabilization and rebuilding. People understandably impatient to go home or angry about delays should know, Harabedian continued, that the governor has issued numerous executive orders calling for the wrapping up of inspection and remediation efforts within 14 days so that debris can be removed, and everything can be set for people to return to their homes to assess the damage, if their homes are still there, and resume their lives. He said that he thought that the state and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) were also doing their best to act quickly.

Adrin Nazarian, a member of the Los Angeles City Council for the 2<sup>nd</sup> district (including North Hollywood, Studio City, Sun Valley, Valley Village, Van Nuys and Valley Glen) newly elected in 2024, declared that while his district was not direct-



Burnt homes in Pasadena, California

ly affected by the fires, what will happen in the aftermath was crucial for Los Angeles. He pointed out: “We have a new phenomenon of having Wall Street want to come in and buy out single family properties. What I am worried about is that they now have 20,000 or so single family property lots that they are going to try to go after. It’s started already.”

While the state and the county have the best jurisdiction in land and property issues, Nazarian said that the city is more involved on the planning end, and can work to try to protect properties as best as possible as well as to raise awareness of the issue so more people take precautions.

Armenians stand to lose the benefits of communities with close ties, churches, schools and centers, and property wealth passed down sometimes over 2-3 generations, Nazarian said. Altadena is more of a middle class community than Pacific Palisades. Nazarian said, “People who lost

their homes in Pacific Palisades most likely will not end up selling that property but will rebuild them. In Altadena I don’t know if a lot of folks are going to be able to rebuild.”

If Armenians are forced to move elsewhere, they will not be able to recreate the same community because Los Angeles is already built out heavily.

The issue is not just about Armenians of course, but primarily about ensuring there is a thriving middle class, Nazarian said, which includes being able to buy a property, develop its equity and be able to pass it on to the next generation. If this is endan-

population, providing supplies and in some places, offering shelter. Some initial meetings for coordination have taken place.

Furthermore, the Hovsepian School has started a GoFundMe campaign for the Sahag-Mesrob School, stating: “We cannot stand by as mere spectators in times like these. It’s our duty to actively support a fallen Armenian school; otherwise, our values lose their meaning.” The fund (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-restore-sahagmesrob-school>), which exceeded its initial goal of \$50,000 and increased it to \$100,000, already raised \$77,602 as of the morning of January 14, and is going strong.

The Sahag-Mesrob School itself is accepting donations through Zelle (see its website [www.sahagmesrobschool.org](http://www.sahagmesrobschool.org)) and its alumni also may very soon start another GoFundMe.

Titanian declared that the school’s board of directors and the school association “are very, very thankful for all the community, schools, organizations and churches that have contacted us and raised their hands to help us. We truly, truly appreciate the amount of support that we got. Honestly, it just gives me chills to even talk about it.”

She stressed: “Our school has always been a community school. Whoever has stepped foot in Sahag-Mesrob can say that our school is like a family. The building is gone but our school is not just a building. It is a community, and that hasn’t been damaged, that has not gone through the fire. That is what Sahag-Mesrob stands for and we will get through this.”

A member of the Zorthian family has also started a fundraiser for restoring the Zorthian ranch (see <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-zorthian-ranch-recover>).



The Tekeyan Cultural Association Beshgeturian Center in Altadena during the night of January 9, 2025

gered, Nazarian said, “this is where there is a huge possibility of an erosion of the middle class. That is what is very frightening here.”

He observed that the first significant wave of such a phenomenon took place 15 years ago during the great economic recession of 2007-8, when equity firms went directly to the banks to buy large property in masse instead of the latter individually conducting auctions.

Nazarian said that he has already reached out to a lot of city and state officials “because this could be a big deal. This could be the single biggest and quickest form of transferring wealth from the hands of the middle class to equity firms and hedge funds. And we have to stop that. The fires are not even out now, but these are the things you have to start worrying about.”

### Armenian Community Pulls Together

Meanwhile, the intact Armenian centers and churches in Pasadena and others in nearby Glendale and various other neighborhoods are coming together to help the

me.com/f/help-zorthian-ranch-recover). There are also many ongoing GoFundMe campaigns for Armenian individuals and families.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union announced on January 11 that it was donating \$100,000, equally divided between the American Red Cross and World Central Kitchen, for southern California aid efforts.

Harabedian on January 13 urged readers in southern California to continue to heed the instructions of first responders and fire personnel, as strong winds would again flare up over the next two days. He declared: “Do not feel hopeless. You are not alone! Whoever is affected, we are here. We are going to help. There are thousands and thousands of people literally on the ground and in the background helping to make sure that this gets solved as quickly as possible.” Even though the fires turned out to be a catastrophic event, he said that solutions are being found, so people must work to get through it day by day and the sun will come up again tomorrow.



The Tekeyan Cultural Association Beshgeturian Center in Altadena on January 10, 2025

## Tekeyan Central Board Extends Condolences to Victims of the Terrible California Fires

TCA, from page 1

Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School in Altadena, which was destroyed in the fires. This is the greatest institutional loss of our Armenian community in the area. TCA has offered the Sahag-Mesrob School the use of the Beshgeturian Center.

We wish our Tekeyan members, the Armenian community and of course the population of southern California overall the best in this situation, which some have even called apocalyptic.

When our Center is again accessible and usable, we are ready to try to help the local community.

Regards,

Dr. Arshavir Gundjian

President,

Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and

Canada

January 10, 2025





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# ‘The Day Heaven Touched Earth’

## Armenian Christmas at St. Vartan Cathedral

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

NEW YORK — The Armenian Christmas Divine Liturgy on Monday, January 6, at St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral, once again united the Armenian Christian family to mark the Feast of the Nativity and Theophany.

But the service also proved particularly symbolic. As the faithful approached the edifice, the framework of scaffolding that had surrounded its exterior last year during the first phase of the St. Vartan Cathedral Restoration Project was noticeably absent. What has emerged is a renewed and revitalized façade and gilded dome with the Holy Cross atop.

Known as the Theophany (Asdvadzahaydnoutiun), or the Feast of the Birth and Manifestation of Jesus Christ, the Armenian Christmas service celebrates the revelation of God to mankind through the blessed nativity. As the congregation rejoiced together, faith united them as one body as the Kingdom of God became present and active within the cathedral. Consistent with the early traditions of Christianity, the mystery of the baptism of Jesus Christ was also commemorated on this day, with a special “Blessing of Water” (Churorhnek) ceremony following the Divine Liturgy.

Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, celebrated the Divine Liturgy before the faithful in the cathedral sanctuary, as well as to a global audience via the livestream broadcast.

Bishop Mesrop’s passion, conviction and vigor evoked a strong spiritual connection with his flock throughout the entire service.

Red poinsettias bathed in candlelight adorned the holy altar, while the sweet smell of incense rose from the censers, gently swathing the sanctum as it lifted the prayers of the badarak toward the heavens. Bishop Mesrop, clad in violet and gold-colored liturgical vestments, led the congregation in prayer and blessed parishioners as he walked in procession.

His homily focused on God choosing to walk among mankind. He emphasized that Christmas was “the day that heaven and earth united,” as Creation welcomed its Creator in human flesh.

“The Creator of the universe was born as a baby to share in our joys and our sor-

rows, to heal our wounds and to redeem our lives,” he said. “Christ knows your struggles because He lived them himself, promising mankind ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

### Hope for Life’s Struggles

The Primate also reassured the faithful that, even during the most difficult and dark times in our own lives, God sees you and hears your prayers. “Maybe a struggle in your family, a challenge at work, or a burden has been weighing you down,” he empathized. “When you feel overwhelmed or unworthy, remember that Jesus came to call you His own. When you feel alone, remember that Christ is walking beside you.”

The sermon concluded with a powerful reminder that Christ is not waiting for you to “have it all together” and is not put off by your struggles, doubts, or failures. God sees the love and sees His children offering themselves to Him.



In his homily, Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan called Christmas “the day that heaven and earth united.” “Christmas is not a reminder of all that is wrong in the world; it’s a promise of what God has made right,” he said. “The light of Jesus shines through and wraps us in God’s love to assure us that we’re never alone.” (Photo by Diran Jebejian)

“God rejoices over us, not because we’ve gotten everything right, but because we are His children,” he said. “Christmas is not a reminder of all that is wrong in the world; it’s a promise of what God has made right. The light of Jesus shines through and wraps us in God’s love to assure us that we’re never alone.”



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan celebrated the Armenian Christmas liturgy at New York’s St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral on Jan. 6, 2025. Pictured (l-r): Fr. Davit Karamyan, Fr. Simeon Odabashian, Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Fr. Mesrob Hovsepyan, Dr. Tavit Najarian. (Photo by Diran Jebejian)

The Godfather of the Cross (Gunkahayr) for the Christmas Blessing of Water ceremony was Dr. Tavit O. Najarian, distinguished leader of St. Stepanos Church in Elberon, NJ, whose dedication and benevolence has served the Diocesan community as well as the worldwide Armenian community.

The Armenian Christmas Divine Liturgy went forward with the participation of Fr. Simeon Odabashian, Diocesan Vicar; Fr. Davit Karamyan, Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral; Fr. Mesrob Hovsepyan, pastor of St. Gregory the Enlightener Church (White Plains, NY), as well as a large contingent of deacons and altar servers. Maestro Khoren Mekanejian directed the angelic voices of the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, accompanied on the organ by Kris Kalfayan (director of the Gomidas Choir).

The online broadcast was directed by Yervant Keshishian, with Chris Zakian providing the narration, and handheld camera operation by Mano Baghjajian. Dn. Diran Jebejian photographed the service inside the sanctuary.

St. Vartan Cathedral’s Christmas celebration began on the evening of January 5, with the solemn *Irakalouys* (“Lamp-lighting”) service followed by scripture readings traditionally celebrated on Christmas Eve. The Divine Liturgy, celebrated by Fr. Karamyan, immediately followed. In accordance with Armenian church tradition,



The Godfather of the Cross (Gunkahayr) for the Christmas Blessing of Water ceremony at St. Vartan Cathedral was Dr. Tavit O. Najarian: distinguished leader of St. Stepanos Church in Elberon, NJ, whose dedication and benevolence has served the Diocesan community as well as the worldwide Armenian community. (Photo by Diran Jebejian)

the Feast of Theophany will be formally observed through January 13, completing the “octave” of Theophany.

## How Jimmy Carter Paved the Way for the Craft Beer Revolution

BEER, from page 7

that it’s legal, it’s not going to be as much fun.” But it turned out that it’s really a blast and I’m still brewing after 50 years.

**Peter Biello:** And in addition to the hobby staying fun, as fun as it ever was, what other changes happened to the hobby once the bill was signed lifting the prohibition?

**Charlie Papazian:** Well, the bill really had some serious effects, positively, on the quality and the quantity of and the variety of beer-making supplies, ingredients, equipment. The ingredients became more fresh as people were able to really learn about homebrewing and access these ingredients. But what really inhibited things was the ability to get together and have homebrew competitions and homebrew events and share

your knowledge and your beer with others. And that’s what the legislation really addressed more seriously than the ability to make it at home. It was the ability to share it with your friends and go to club meetings and conferences and competitions and learn about the art and science of homebrewing.

**Peter Biello:** So what was the impact of finally being allowed to have those conferences and those competitions?

**Charlie Papazian:** Well, in those days there was very little homebrew knowledge available. There weren’t very many books. Mine was one of the few. So we had to rely on each other’s experiences and the sharing of knowledge one-on-one with each other. So it was pretty damn important that we be able to get together and taste each other’s beer and talk about



Charlie Papazian

what we were tasting or what was good about our beers and what was not so good about our beers. And that was the whole foundation of the culture of homebrew-

ing was the sharing of knowledge. And it continues to this day, not only with homebrewing but the foundation of and the idea of collaboration and sharing information really has spilled over to the professional craft beer and brewing movement as well. So it was homebrewers that were really driving the craft beer movement throughout the ‘70s, ‘80s, ‘90s and even today. A lot of the innovation that we see has its foundation in some homebrewer’s home brewery.

**Peter Biello:** Well as we raise a pint to President Carter, Charlie Papazian, thank you so much for speaking with me. I really appreciate it.

**Charlie Papazian:** Thanks for having me, Peter. It’s fun. Too bad we couldn’t be sharing a beer while we were doing this. sharing a beer while we were doing this.



# Arts & Culture

## Deadly Wildfires Destroy Los Angeles Art Spaces As Museums and Galleries Close

By Benjamin Sutton

LOS ANGELES (*The Art Newspaper*) — Alto Beta, a gallery in the Southern California community of Altadena, opened a solo exhibition of new works by the Los Angeles-based artist Mary Anna Pomonis on Sunday, January 5. Just days later on Wednesday, the gallery's owner Brad Eberhard posted a video on Instagram showing the strip mall on Fair Oaks Avenue where the gallery is located engulfed in flames from the Eaton fire. In the caption, he wrote that "the gallery is gone", adding: "So sorry for the loss of Mary Anna's show."

Large swaths of Altadena and Pacific Palisades have been destroyed by the Eaton and Palisades fires, respectively, that have been burning out of control in the Los Angeles area since Tuesday (7 January) amid dry conditions and dangerously high winds. According to official estimates, the Eaton and Palisades fire have destroyed more than 5,000 structures each. Ten deaths have been reported from the wildfires around the Los Angeles area, but officials expect that figure to increase.

The Zorthian Ranch, a community art center and residency in Altadena founded by the Armenian American artist Jirayr Zorthian (1911-2004), was almost completely destroyed by the Eaton fire. "We lost everything: 95% of the infrastructure of the ranch, all the artwork that Jirayr created, retaining walls made of wood burned down, the stage collapsed, the bridge is gone," Julia Zorthian, an artist and manager of the ranch, wrote on a Gofundme page seeking support for its staff and rebuilding. "Please help us keep this place a community space for generations of artists who've come before, and who've yet to come."

The Norton Simon Museum in neighboring Pasadena "is safe and currently not in the evacuation zone for the Eaton Fire", according to a post on the museum's Instagram page on Wednesday. However, it is closed Thursday, January 16, "to ensure the safety of all our staff and visitors".

Cultural spaces in Pacific Palisades—including the performing arts venue Theatre Palisades and early-20th-century entertainer Will Rogers's historic home in the state park bearing his name—were largely or completely destroyed by the Palisades fire. Other art spaces in the area, including the Charles and Ray Eames's Case Study House #8 and the Getty Villa, have been spared but remain at risk. (The Getty Villa and the Getty Center in Brentwood will remain closed until at least 13 January and 12 January, respectively.)

Two artist fellowship and residency venues in the neighborhood operated by a German non-profit, the Thomas Mann House and Villa Aurora, are also still in danger. "There see ZORTHIAN, page 17



Margarita Parsamyan

### OPERA ALBUM REVIEW:

## 'The Leopard' A Splendidly Engaging New Opera

By Ralph P. Locke

BOSTON (Artsfuse.org) — *The Leopard* (Il gattopardo) is the most famous 20<sup>th</sup>-century novel in Italian. Published very soon after the death of its author, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957), it quickly became a best-seller in many languages. A famously extravagant film was made of it, directed by Luchino Visconti and starring Burt Lancaster, with the latter's dialogue dubbed. The film also exists in an English version, in which the other characters are dubbed. This 1963 film was trimmed substantially for release in theaters but can now be seen (on any of several streaming channels) in its full two-hour-and-forty-nine-minute splendor, complete with a long, visually virtuosic ballroom sequence.

Nobody until now, it seems, has tried adapting the work for the stage, much less for the musical stage. Along comes Michael Dellaira (b. 1949), a composer whose name I had never encountered, but at least three of his previous operas have been released on commercial CDs.

Dellaira's opera, "The Leopard," has had some previous partial tryouts, but now the University of Miami's Frost School of Music has taken on the challenge of giving it a full production and releasing it on a commercial recording. At the helm is the renowned conductor Gerard Schwarz (longtime music director of the Seattle Symphony). Some major operatic performers take leading roles here, with experienced young professionals and some Frost School students picking up the rest.

The result is very engaging and approachable, except for the intense angularity of many of the vocal lines — do composers feel they have to write this way to be taken seriously? On the plus side, Dellaira seems to have avoided giving any role too extended a range: nearly all the singers seem to be able to encompass both the highest and lowest notes comfortably. (I complained of the opposite in regard to an opera by Scott Wheeler that I otherwise greatly liked, *Naga*.)

The staged performances were hailed by the prolific critic and historian Paul Du Quenoy because they were easy to understand (he did not complain about the vocal lines). They were a relief from, as he puts it, the spate of recent operas about minorities, the agonies of the creative class, and other, to his mind, fashionable topics. (Du Quenoy's review of a performance appeared in *The European Conservative*.) I have been deeply stirred by some of the works that Du Quenoy seems to be alluding to. (See my enthusiastic review of Jeanine Tesori's opera about police see OPERA, page 15

## International Armenian Literary Alliance Awards \$8,500 in Grants

LOS ANGELES — The International Armenian Literary Alliance (IALA) has awarded \$2,500 to Lori Yeghiayan Friedman for her work-in-progress, *How to Survive a Genocide*, and \$3,000 to Taline Voskeritchian and Christopher Millis to co-translate of *Deserts of Heaven* by Krikor Beledian, and to Lilit Hayrapetyan to translate *Aftershocks* by Nadia Owusu.

IALA has also announced runners up for its 2024 grants — applicants who hold great promise: Liana Aramyan for the Israelyan Armenian Translation Grant, and Sarah Elgatian for the Creative Writing Grant.

Lori Yeghiayan Friedman is an Armenian-American from Los Angeles. Her father was an Armenian from Ethiopia and her mother an Armenian from Palestine. She holds an MFA in theatre from the University of California San Diego and much of her writing explores themes of performance and the roles we play. Her work has been published in numerous literary magazines and other outlets including: *Mizna*, *Consequence Forum*, *phoebe*, *Longleaf Review*, *Memoir Land* and the *Los Angeles Times*.



Lori Yeghiayan Friedman

Her piece, "The Emperor's Dentist," was recently nominated for Best of the Net by the journal *Atlas and Alice*. Her essay, "How to Survive a Genocide," published in *Exposition Review*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Highlights of her work can be seen on her Linktree.

Taline Voskeritchian has published widely in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East; her prose and translations have appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *Bookforum*, *Words without Borders*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *The Markaz Review*, *Jadaliyya*, and other publications. Co-producer and translator of the documentary Վահե Օշական՝ Միջնաբերդ (Vahé Oshagan: *Between Acts*) on the modernist Armenian poet, she has taught at Boston University, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and American University of Armenia and has conducted translation seminars for the Palestine Festival of Literature.

Christopher Millis is the author of four books of poetry, including *The Handsome Shackles*, *Impossible Mirrors*, and translations of the Italian poet Umberto Saba, *The Dark of the Sun*, for which he received a see AWARDS, page 15





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# ‘The Leopard’ — A Splendidly Engaging New Opera

OPERA, from page 14

brutality against young African-American men: Blue.) But, setting aside his distaste for the librettos of other recent operas and my annoyance at the work’s incessant vocal up-and-downs, Du Quenoy is right to praise this piece. Dellaira’s *The Leopard* is one of the most accessible new operas I have encountered in recent years. And that is indeed something to hail.

*The Leopard*, in any of its manifestations, tells the tale of an aristocrat in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, Don Fabrizio Corbera, who is caught between the comforts of his life and family and the challenges posed by the Risorgimento, in the person of his own beloved nephew Tancredi Falconeri. The libretto was crafted by the renowned poet, critic, editor, and libretto-translator J. D. McClatchy (1945-2018; he died just as the opera was being completed). He used relatively straightforward language, peppered by occasional poeticisms that, unfortunately, border on obscurity (“At last, beloved Sicily will throw off the Bourbon rule and resign its mystery”—resign?).

The libretto is well structured. The main action-scenes take place in 1860, near Palermo, when Garibaldi’s small red-shirted army arrives in Palermo to promote the unification of Italy — a process that will greatly reduce the power and influence of landed families such as the Corberas. These scenes are framed by a Prologue and Epilogue in which women in the family, a half-century later, recall, sometimes bitterly, the events in the opera’s main scenes. There are also occasional moments when a character (the town priest Pirrone, the nephew Tancredi) will “break the fourth wall” — as one says in the world of the theater — in order to comment directly to the listeners on the events being shown on stage. The isolated Concetta repeatedly engages in self-revealing soliloquy, though this seems less novel, since soliloquy has been a mainstay of opera — as indeed of spoken theater — since

its very beginnings.

The plot involves an operatic triangle: Don Fabrizio and his wife Stella, Princess of Salina, want their nephew Tancredi to marry their daughter Concetta, but the spirited young man is drawn to the beautiful Angelica, daughter of Don Calogero Sedara, described in McClatchy’s wonderfully detailed synopsis as “a self-made man and an opportunist.” Father Pirrone tells us that Don Calogero makes money partly by buying up land “in shady deals,” strategically raising the price of grain during periods of famine. He “has a wife of great beauty whom no one has laid eyes on. And,” McClatchy adds pointedly, “a daughter, Angelica, whom everyone has.”

The opera includes many of the famous scenes in the book, such as when the priest (Father Pirrone) comes to talk to Don Fabrizio and finds him in his bath — and is flustered (and perhaps excited) to see him naked — or, toward the end of Act 2, a ball, at which Don Fabrizio — who, somewhat sympathetic to Tancredi’s cause, has voted for Sicily to become part of Italy — watches as Tancredi and Angelica dance and remarks that young people in love are “blind to each other’s faults, deaf to the warnings of fate, thinking their lives will be as smooth as the ballroom floor.” The opera gives particular emphasis to the role of Concetta, beloved by her parents but left, by Tancredi, to live her life alone, as shown in the epilogue when she slashes a portrait of her father with a knife and collapses weeping. (He is known as “The Leopard” because that fearsome animal is on the family crest.)

I find Michael Dellaira’s music in this work generally effective at putting McClatchy’s savvy, touching, generally plain-spoken text across. There are frequent brief allusions to musical styles associated with various aspects of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Italian life: church hymns, ballroom waltzing, a string-instrument village band

tuning up, a guitarist outside the window playing Edgardo’s final aria from *Lucia di Lammermoor*. There are notable moments when, “over” orchestral music, the characters do not sing, but are seen doing ordinary (or “ordinary”) things, such as dressing, gathering, making shady business deals (Don Calogero), or (in the case of Tancredi and Angelica) chasing each other playfully and then kissing passionately. Here the listener, unlike an operagoer in the theater, needs to follow the libretto’s stage directions closely in order to imagine the crucial stage action.

Another reason to look at the libretto frequently: those incessant up-and-downs in the vocal lines sometimes make the words hard to grasp by ear. In the theater, one would probably, I guess, be glancing often at the supertitles. If opera composers want the audience to watch the singers, they should try hard to make the words come across directly, as in a good Broadway show.

In general, the performances are vivid, creating distinctive characters in front of us. We hear some notable artists: Kim Josephson (who has sung major baritone roles at the Met) as Don Fabrizio; Robynne Redmon (likewise much heard at the Met and other notable opera houses) as Stella; the fine character tenor Frank Ragsdale as the family priest; a wonderful young lyric tenor named Minghao Liu as Tancredi (the man of the future who ends up becoming less idealistic over time); Margarita Parsamyan, an accomplished young mezzo, as Concetta; and the bright and alert soprano Yaqi Yang as Tancredi’s beloved but rather superficial Angelica.

The renowned bass-baritone Kevin Short (another Met singer: Masetto, Colline, Yamadori) lights up one scene as a delegate from the new government, Cavaliere Chevalley di Monterzuolo, who offers Don Fabrizio a lifetime seat in the Senate as the spokesman for Sicily. The tired and aging

Leopard refuses, and curses Sicilians for wanting to rest undisturbed — half-aware that this is just what he is doing by rejecting an appeal for his support. Thandolwethu Mamba (a member of the Metropolitan Opera Chorus) projects well as the unscrupulous Calogero.

All strive valiantly, and often with success, to put McClatchy’s text across while maintaining a steady core of tone. I hardly heard a single wobble or moment of barking!

I encourage anybody interested in the current state of opera to get to know Michael Dellaira’s *The Leopard*. If you stream or download instead of using CDs, you can find the synopsis and the libretto (though not the performer bios) at Naxos.com.

*Ralph P. Locke is emeritus professor of musicology at the University of Rochester’s Eastman School of Music. Six of his articles have won the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for excellence in writing about music. His most recent two books are Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections and Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart (both Cambridge University Press). Both are now available in paperback; the second, also as an e-book. Ralph Locke also contributes to American Record Guide and to the online arts-magazines New York Arts, Opera Today, and The Boston Musical Intelligencer. His articles have appeared in major scholarly journals, in Oxford Music Online (Grove Dictionary), and in the program books of major opera houses, e.g., Santa Fe (New Mexico), Wexford (Ireland), Glyndebourne, Covent Garden, and the Bavarian State Opera (Munich). He is part of the editorial team behind the wide-ranging open-access periodical Music & Musical Performance: An International Journal. The present review first appeared in American Record Guide and is included here by kind permission.*

## International Armenian Literary Alliance Awards \$8,500 in Grants

AWARDS, from page 14

Fulbright Grant. The recipient of awards from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Massachusetts Arts Council, his Off Broadway productions include the libretto for Jean Erdman’s dance opera *The Shining House* and *Garbage Boy*, first produced in 2006 by the New York



Taline Voskeritchian

International Fringe Festival. The former art critic for *The Boston Phoenix*, he has taught at Boston University, New York University and Fordham University.

Voskeritchian and Millis’ collaborative translations from Krikor Beledian have appeared in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *International Poetry Review*, *Asymptote*, and *Wasafiri*.

Lilit Hayrapetyan is a Yerevan-based translator and aspiring writer. Since 2016, Lilit has collaborated with Zangak Publishing House, where her translations have become national bestsellers in Armenia. Her portfolio includes psychological non-fiction such as *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman and *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman as well as creative non-fiction like *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert. Lilit holds a BA and an MA in Psychology from Yerevan State University. She has years of experience working with neurodivergent children on adaptation and in women’s rights nonprofits, focusing on women’s mental health. Currently, she serves as a Workshop Team Manager at TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, where she combines her passion for creativity with non-formal education management. She is also working on her debut novel, which explores early attachments and the mental health struggles of navigating life’s paths.

Born and raised in Yerevan, Armenia, Liana Aramyan, is an undergraduate student of English and Communications at the American University of Armenia. Having taken translation courses at AUA, she has realized translation will be an integral part of her life moving forward. Liana’s credits include an Eastern Armenian translation of Benjamin Moser’s essay “What Susan Sontag Saw” (Granish, 2024), and a translation of Toni Morrison’s Nobel Prize Lecture (forthcoming).

Sarah Elgatian is a mixed-identity writer whose cross-genre work has appeared in or is forthcoming from journals including *Beholder Magazine*, the Iowa Writers’ House print anthology *We The Interwoven*, and BRINK Literary. A grandchild of genocide survivors, Sarah is involved with



Lilit Hayrapetyan

community organizing and works at the Midwest Writing Center where she works to make creative writing accessible and enjoyable. She likes bright colors, dark cof-

fee, loud music, and long sentences. She dislikes meanness and corporate farming. You can connect with her via Instagram @rahelgatian.

The International Armenian Literary Alliance’s 2024 Creative Writing Grant, offered for the third year in a row, was for creative nonfiction. In previous years, IALA has offered creative writing grants for poetry and fiction. The 2024 grant was judged by Susan Barba, Aram Mrjoian and Nadia Owusu.

IALA’s 2024 Israelyan English Translation Grant, also offered for the third year, was for a work of literature (in any literary genre) written in either Western or Eastern Armenian and published any time after 1900. It was judged by Tamar M. Boyadjian, Karen Jallatyan and Garen Torikian.

IALA’s 2024 Israelyan Armenian Translation Grant, offered for the second year, was for a work of contemporary literature written by an Armenian in English. The grant was judged by Ovsanna Babayan and Sevak Ghazaryan.

In addition to its judges, IALA is grateful to Nancy Agabian, Tatevik Ayyvazyan and Garen Torikian for the time they devoted to organize the 2024 grants. IALA is also indebted to Souren A. Israelyan, whose funding will ensure more Armenian literature is translated from and into English.

Visit [www.armenianliterary.org](http://www.armenianliterary.org) to learn more about IALA’s 2024 grants and past winners.





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



## California Raisin and Pumpkin Spice Bread

FRESNO — “The story of California Raisins can be traced to the late 1800s when growers in the San Joaquin Valley began experimenting with drying grapes as a way to preserve their harvest. The first commercially successful raisin production was established in Fresno in 1873, and by the turn of the century, California was the largest producer of raisins in the world. Throughout the 20th century, California Raisins became an iconic symbol of the state’s agricultural heritage. In the 1980s, the California Raisins even became the stars of a popular animated television series, further cementing their place in American culture.”

The Friends of the Fresno Fair - Armenian Exhibit adds, “Some of the first Armenian raisin farmers in Fresno County include the Seropian Brothers, Stepan Shahamirian, and Melkon Markarian. Before the advent of commercial packing houses, farmers did their own basic packing and would ship their product by mule or train. Most of the raisins at that time were made from Muscat grapes. It was in the early 1920s that several Armenian-owned packing houses were established, including Lion Packing Company in Fresno (still operating today as Lion Raisins), Tusan Packing in Sanger, Enoch Packing in Del Rey, and Del Rey Packing (still being operated today by the Chooljian family). Armenian packers currently control over half the raisins produced in the United States.”

The California Raisins website states, “History indicates that raisins were discovered for the first time by accident when they were found in the dried form on vines as early as 2000 BC. Wall paintings from ancient times show that dried fruits were consumed and used as decorations in the Mediterranean regions of Europe. Historians tell us the ancient Phoenicians and Armenians took the first steps in perfecting viticulture, the process of grape growing and selection. The Phoenicians and Armenians then began to trade raisins with the Greeks and the Romans who consumed them in large quantities. As the popularity of the raisins grew, so did their value. They were given as prizes in sporting events, used as barter to trade, and used as a cure for what ails you.”

“California Raisins are 100% fruit and this fruit has many benefits that help to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Raisins are enjoyed worldwide and are a staple ingredient in many cuisines. They are not only used in sweet dishes like desserts and baked goods but also find their way into savory recipes, adding a unique depth of flavor. The history and origins of raisins have shaped their significance in culinary traditions, making them a versatile and beloved ingredient in cooking, like in this California Raisin and Pumpkin Spice Bread. And don’t forget the icing.”

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cups pastry flour
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon double acting baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 3 cups solid pack canned pumpkin
- 1 cup granulated sugar (part brown sugar, if desired)
- 1 cup olive oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup California golden raisins
- 1 cup California natural raisins
- 1 cup toasted green pumpkin seeds (or chopped walnuts or pecans)
- 2 tablespoons raw (untoasted) pumpkin seeds (pepitas); for garnish

CINNAMON GLAZE:

- 1 cup confectioners’ sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Brush four 5-1/2 x 3-inch loaf pans, lightly, with olive oil and set aside. Mix flours, salt, baking powder, baking soda, and spices together in medium mixing bowl. In another bowl, combine pumpkin, sugar, olive oil, eggs and vanilla; mix together well, and add to mixing bowl with dry ingredients. Stir to combine well. Gently stir in raisins and 1/2 cup toasted pumpkin seeds. Divide, evenly, and turn into oiled loaf pans. Sprinkle tops, generously with raw pumpkin seeds.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes or until top of loaf feels firm when touched and wooden toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Set aside in pans to cool for a few minutes; then, turn onto wire rack and cool to room temperature.

Meanwhile, for Cinnamon Glaze, measure sugar and cinnamon into small bowl; stir together well. Add and stir in lemon juice until smooth; divide and drizzle over loaves.

Serves: 24Note: Chopped walnuts or pecans may be substituted for the pumpkin seeds. When icing is set, loaves may be wrapped tightly and frozen to thaw and serve within 2 to 3 months.

Recognized as the first Armenians to permanently settle in the area, the Seropians first stepped foot on Fresno soil in 1881. Originally from Marsovan, they immigrated to Massachusetts—where they were merchants—before making the trek out to California seeking improved health and better opportunities. They would later become the first Armenians to buy property in Fresno, the first to start a business (a general store in downtown), and the first to pack and ship fruit.. Photo: <https://www.armeniansfresno.com/seropian-brothers.php>

Raisin Administrative Committee  
2445 Capitol Street, Suite 200  
Fresno, CA 93721-2236  
Phone: (559) 225-0520  
Fax: (559) 225-0652  
<https://www.raisins.org/>

The Raisin Administrative Committee (RAC) is a federal marketing order, led by 47 growers, packers, and a public member. The RAC is directly overseen by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and was created in 1949 as a result of the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937. The RAC meets regularly at their headquarters in downtown Fresno, collects and distributes delivery data weekly, shipment data monthly, publishes an annual report of industry statistics and policies, actively and directly markets into 19 foreign nations, and collaborates with the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). California Raisins are inspected under the most rigid standards by both plant quality control technicians and USDA inspectors throughout the packaging process, thus assuring that California Raisins are the cleanest, highest quality in the world. After final inspections, raisins are automatically weighed and packed in a variety of bulk industrial and convenient retail sizes. California Raisins are shipped throughout North America and the world for consumers to enjoy. For videos and information, see: <https://californiaraisins.ca/industry/>

For information about the California Raisin Marketing Board, see: [https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Exhibit%208%20CRMB-RAC\\_Industry\\_Brochureweb2016LR.pdf](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Exhibit%208%20CRMB-RAC_Industry_Brochureweb2016LR.pdf)

- Connect at:
- <https://californiaraisins.ca/>
  - <https://californiaraisins.ca/about-california-raisins/>
  - <https://californiaraisins.ca/recipes/>
  - <https://caraisins.com/browse-recipes/>

## Christmas Donations

The Hauri Chepjian Fund of Brookline, NH, donated \$500 • Berdj and Margaret Kiladjian of Winchester, MA donated \$300  
The Hagopian Family Foundation of Birmingham, Mich. donated \$100





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Armenian Museum of Fresno To Host Readings from Book Of Poetry *Carpet Weavers*

FRESNO — A book signing event for a recently published poetry book, *Carpet Weavers*, by Brenda Najimian Magarity, will take place on Tuesday, January 21, 3 to 5 p.m., at the Armenian Museum of Fresno, located at the University of California Center in Fresno.

Born in Fresno, Najimian Magarity is a second-generation Armenian



Brenda Najimian Magarity

American. When she was in her mid-20s, she became the driver for author William Saroyan. This friendship fed her passion for writing and her interest in her Armenian heritage. A former high school English teacher, she has published poetry, essays, and stories in various online and literary journals and has participated in two documentaries about Saroyan.

“Within these poems, Brenda Najimian Magarity’s deep reflections of her inner being are a testimony of her longing for a homeland that was taken away from her ancestors a century before – the soul of that motherland itself lives in her, rising again and again through tribulations of the times,” said Varoujan Der Simonian, President, Armenian Museum of Fresno.





## Movie Night

TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION METRO LOS ANGELES CHAPTER  
AND THE ARMENIAN SCHOOLS OF EGYPT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (KNB)  
INVITE YOU TO THE SCREENING OF “WE ARE EGYPTIAN ARMENIANS”



**SUNDAY  
JANUARY 26, 2025  
5:00 PM**

إحنا المصريين... الأرمن  
**We Are Egyptian ... Armenians**

**SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY ARMEN MELKONIAN**  
**FORMER AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO EGYPT**

**FREE ADMISSION - RECEPTION TO FOLLOW**  
TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION BESHGETURIAN CENTER  
1981 N. ALLEN AVENUE, ALTADENA, CA 91001

## CALENDAR

### OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## MASSACHUSETTS

**JANUARY 20 — Khachkar Café (For Men Only),** at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. On Monday, at 6:30 p.m., \$25 per person includes (a plate of Kawerma & Pilav, salad and hummus), Ghyema is Additional plate for \$15 @ Nishan & Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont, Venmo @hcaccma (Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in MA), for pre-orders contact us (617-489-2280) or email:(holycrossbostonma@gmail.com).

**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](http://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. Baika Center, 755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, \$75/person, RSVP: Sossy Yagurtian 617 281-1647 or syagurtian@comcast.net

**FEBRUARY 8 — Valentine's with Frank Sinatra,** featuring Rich DiMare, hosted by Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. An unforgettable evening featuring a specially crafted dinner sponsored by Fiorella's. Saturday, 6 p.m., Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Tickets \$85. (617) 489-2280 or email:holycrossbostonma@gmail.com.

**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](http://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.globalartslive.org/content/event\\_page/10301](http://www.globalartslive.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](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support)

**APRIL 12 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church presents a nostalgic concert** by Marten Yorgantz and Meghedi Vocal Ensemble, artistic director Marina Margarian. If your child would like to perform on stage, they can audition to join Meghedi Children's Chorus every Saturday, 3.15 to 4.15 p.m. 200 Lexington St., Belmont. For registration and information, call 781-929-3415 or 781-439-3702.

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

## Wildfires Destroy Los Angeles Art Spaces

ZORTHIAN, from page 14

are first indications that parts of Villa Aurora were able to withstand the destructive fires. However, the building continues to be in the danger zone," a statement on the non-profit's website on Thursday morning reads. "The Thomas Mann House is undamaged so far. This too is a momentary snapshot, as the situation can change any time."

Institutions far from the wildfires opted to close on Thursday (9 January) in the interest of staff and visitors' safety. The Museum of Contemporary Art announced that both its Grand Avenue and Geffen Contemporary locations would be closed on Thursday 9 "due to the current wind conditions and devastating fires affecting the Los Angeles area"; it remains closed on Friday 10 January. The Broad, Academy Museum of Motion Pictures and Los Angeles County Museum of Art also closed on Thursday (9 January); all the institutions remained closed on Friday 10 January.

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) cancelled undergraduate classes and moved graduate classes online

for January 9 and 10, though its campus remains open. Its marquee art institution, the Hammer Museum, is closed on Thursday and Friday. UCLA's Fowler Museum is closed on Thursday and postponed a preview event for its upcoming exhibition "Fire Kinship: Southern California Native Ecology and Art," whose grimly timely subject is "the importance of traditional burning as a land management practice of California Indians," according to a press statement about the postponement.

Commercial art spaces throughout the city have also opted to stay closed during the fire emergency. Gagosian indefinitely postponed the opening of Alex Israel's new solo show at its Beverly Hills location, which was originally scheduled for Thursday night. "We express heartfelt concern for everyone affected," a statement on the gallery's website reads.

Pace's Los Angeles space remained closed "out of an abundance of caution," according to a statement on the gallery's website. Night Gallery is closed until further notice according to a statement on its website. Sean Kelly's Los Angeles location "will be closed until further notice in solidarity with our colleagues, loved ones and all those affected," according to a statement posted by the gallery on Instagram.



## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
— SINCE 1932 —



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# Deportations from the West: the Story Of Families Sent Back to Azerbaijan

By Aytan Farhadova

On May 2, a group of men dressed in civilian clothes raided disabled activist Famil Khalilov's house in the Sulutepe settlement in Baku. Khalilov, whose arms are entirely paralyzed, was being bathed by his wife, Kichikkhanim Khalilova.

"there was a knock on the door. My little daughter opened the door, and then she came up and told me that there were uncles outside calling for me. When I came out, they introduced themselves as police," Khalilova tells OC Media.

After she took her husband out of the bathroom, she saw many people in black clothes in the hall and the house's second floor, who proceeded to search the entire house.

"They dragged Famil out of the house into the yard. After that, they took him back to the house and filmed him," Khalilova says.

"The investigator took a blue napkin from his chest pocket, and said that there was something white in there. I insisted that it did not belong to us. They showed a small packet to us and after that said Famil was selling drugs."

The police took Khalilov and his family to the police station, where they demanded the passwords to Khalilov's phone and computer. After they refused, Khalilov's eight-year-old daughter was taken by police to another room, where she showed the police how her father opened his phone. After that, they were all allowed to go home, Khalilova says, with the exception of Famil, who was detained.

"My children were frightened and they hid under the table at home; no one worried about their situation," Khalilova tells OC Media. "since that day, my children keep the door closed, and if it is not me, they refuse to open it. They are still scared of the police."

Khalilov and his family originally lived in the village Digah in Azerbaijan, where he faced abuse from the other villagers due to his disabilities. The abuse eventually led Khalilov and his family to immigrate to Sweden in July 2015.

In Sweden, Khalilov continued to criticise the Azerbaijan government. However, according to the Swedish Migration Centre, the Khalilov family were not political refugees, but rather migrants who required humanitarian support.

After eight years of fighting with the migration services in Sweden, in July 2023, the family was deported back to Azerbaijan.

"When they deported us from Sweden, they told us that nothing would happen to us because my husband is a disabled person, that no one would hurt us in Azerbaijan. The Swedish Migration Service told us that Azerbaijan is a rich country, and that we await a comfortable life," Khalilova tells OC Media.

Less than a year later, Khalilov's house was searched and he was detained.

"In the police station, a police officer insulted me and asked why I allowed Famil write such things about our country," Khalilova says about the time immediately after her husband was detained.

"He could not move his hands and I did everything for him. He couldn't drink water without my help, and he writes with his toes. When the police arrested Famil, they insulted me, because they thought I helped him in writing his posts on social media. They did not believe me that he could write his posts himself," she adds.

Khalilova struggles with thinking about how she will financially cover the needs of her husband, and also how her husband survives in prison with paralyzed hands. She also worries for her children who suffer from their father's absence.

"My son asked me about his father and I couldn't say anything. I haven't replied to his question about when his father will return home," Khalilova says.

On August 15, Khalilov began a hunger strike in order to force the authorities to release him on house arrest. After more than 80 days, Khalilov ended his hunger strike on November 10 after his health deteriorated to the extent that his legs are now also paralyzed. On November 28, however, he began his hunger strike again, after promises that he would be released on house arrest did not come to fruition. Finally, on December 3, almost seven months after he was originally detained, Khalilov was released on house arrest, still awaiting a full trial regarding the charges of drug trafficking.

Khalilov is only one of the Azerbaijani activists deported

from Western countries in recent years.

In 2018, activist Samir Ashurov joined a protest in Baku demanding freedom for political prisoners; he also shared his opinions on social media. That year, he was arrested two times by the Azerbaijani authorities: once for public disturbance and the second on drug charges. It was at this point he realized he was no longer safe in Azerbaijan, after which he decided to emigrate with his family to Germany, his wife Nurana Ashurova tells OC Media.

They moved to the small Bavarian town of Grafenau, where the family attended multiple court hearings, during which they were told that no one would arrest them for sharing opinions on social media because Azerbaijan was a democratic country.

After their residency permit was rejected for the second time, Ashurov held a solo protest in front of the migration center for 35 days.

When the family again attempted to register as political refugees, Ashurova says they did not provide the authorities with any new documentation about how her husband was tortured in Azerbaijan, because by this point, they had been living in Germany for three years.

Their status was rejected again, and after a subsequent attempt to appeal, they were deported back to Azerbaijan in March 2023.

"On March 29, we were not even allowed to take our clothes. Samir was in a t-shirt and his hands were in handcuffs. His hands were released by the German police only half an hour before arriving at the Baku Airport. From Germany, four police officers accompanied us to Baku. When we arrived, Azerbaijani police interrogated Samir for around three hours, and after that, we were released," Ashurova says.

Two days after that, Ashurov was summoned by the police and was interrogated about the trafficking of migrants for around four hours.

According to her, the family was followed multiple times by unknown cars and by police in civilian clothing. They changed their residence several times, but

nothing helped.

"When Samir left the house, he said goodbye to us every time, like it may be the last time," she tells OC Media.

After March 31, when Ashurov was released from detention for the first time, he spoke with journalists about how he might be arrested for his political views. Shortly after, on April 5, when opposition party Musavat member Aziz Mamiyev was arrested, Ashurov stood in front of the police car, attracting further attention from the police.

"On April 19, Samir was going to visit his father, and after a couple of hours, he messaged me that he was on the way home. I asked him to buy juice for the children, and he replied "Okay." After that, he did not respond to all my calls and messages," Ashurova says.

Her husband had been arrested in front of the grocery store.

According to the indictment, Ashurov was accused of stabbing Elshan Nabiyeu in the street in the Nizami district of Baku in April 2023.

After speaking to the head of the Shaki District Executive Department, Mazahir Mammadov, and Nabiyeu's lawyer Nazim Mehdiyev, OC Media has learned that Nabiyeu has had multiple criminal cases opened against him for fraud and is still currently wanted by police. His whereabouts remain unknown.

In Ashurov's statement to the court in December 2023, he claimed that on that day, one person had attacked him and that he tried to run, shouting for help. Instead, police officers dressed in civilian clothing arrested him, placing a knife in his pocket. He also stated that he did not know Nabiyeu.

Despite his statements, the court found Ashurov guilty of intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm from hooligan motives and hooliganism committed with the use of a weapon or an object used as a weapon, sentencing him to six years and six months in prison.

Afghan Mukhtarli, an Azerbaijani journalist who lives in exile in Germany, tells OC Media that he knows of at least six people besides Samir Ashurov, who were deported from Germany to Azerbaijan, and then arrested by Azerbaijani authorities on charges of drug trafficking.

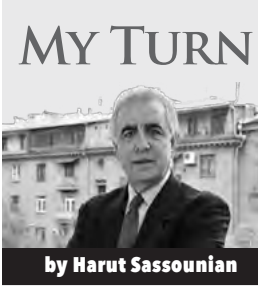
One of them, Emin Malikov, was deported back to Azerbaijan directly from a specialized German hospital for mental health in March 2023.

*continued on next page*





COMMENTARY



# Aliyev the Wolf vs. Pashinyan the Lamb: It Is Clear Who Will Devour Whom

There seems to be no end to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s concessions to Azerbaijan’s demands. The only end will be the end of Armenia.

Last week, when President Ilham Aliyev once again issued threats against Armenia, Pashinyan responded with further concessions. It feels like Aliyev is ruling Armenia from Baku.

Aliyev gave a lengthy press conference to the Azeri media on January 7, 2025, during which he made arrogant statements about Armenia using an extremely demeaning tone. Here are excerpts from his remarks:

- Armenia returned the four villages in the Tavush region to Azerbaijan “as a result of a monologue rather than a dialogue.” Armenia returned these villages “under coercion.”
- “Armenia cannot compete with us in the arms race.”
- “The independent Armenian state is, in fact, a fascist state.... Therefore, fascism must be eradicated. Either the Armenian leadership will destroy it, or we will.”
- “Armenia must immediately cease arming itself. France and other countries that supply weapons to Armenia must terminate and cancel these contracts. The weapons that have already been delivered to Armenia must be returned.”
- “The dissolution of the [OSCE] Minsk Group and the amendment of the constitution; without these, a peace treaty is impossible.”
- “The Zangezur corridor must and will be opened.”
- “During his [President Trump’s] first term, there was no issue in US-Azerbaijan relations. On the contrary, the relations were very positive, and we were able to make progress in many areas. The main mistake of the Biden administration regarding Azerbaijan was that they sacrificed U.S.-Azerbaijan relations for U.S.-Armenia relations.”
- “Considering that the current territory of Armenia essentially includes the historical lands that were predominantly inhabited by Azerbaijanis, today we assert that 300,000 Western Azerbaijanis should return to those regions. However, the total number of those who have been displaced from that region, and who are now living in various parts of Azerbaijan, along with their descendants, is several times greater than 300,000.”

After members of the Armenian media complained about Pashinyan’s eerie silence about Aliyev’s threatening comments, he finally agreed to answer a few questions from Armenpress on January 8:

Pashinyan said that by making aggressive statements about Armenia, Aliyev expected a similar aggressive response from Armenia “to form the basis for a new escalation in the region. We will not take that path and we will remain committed to the strategy of peace.” Pashinyan keeps begging for peace and ignoring Aliyev’s multiple rejections. Aliyev prefers a piece of Armenia rather than a piece of paper which he will ignore even if he signs it. In this

short interview, Pashinyan repeated the word peace 11 times.

When asked for his reply to Aliyev’s accusation that Armenia is “a fascist state,” Pashinyan sheepishly agreed that there is such a perception about Armenia in Azerbaijan, just as there is a similar perception about Azerbaijan in Armenia.

Regarding Aliyev’s persistent demands for an Azeri corridor through Armenia, Pashinyan once again failed to demand that, as stated in the 2020 agreement, Azerbaijan allow a reciprocal access for Armenia through Azerbaijan.

In responding to a question about Aliyev referring to the Republic of Armenia as “Western Azerbaijan,” Pashinyan simply said: Aliyev “has said nothing new about this topic for me to have a new reaction.”

Regarding Aliyev’s complaints about Armenia acquiring arms, Pashinyan stated: “no one can dispute the right of the Republic of Armenia to have a defensible army.” He then added: “we do not have an objective of militarily returning more than 200 square kilometers of occupied territories of the Republic of Armenia....”

In response to Azeri accusations of Armenia violating the ceasefire, Pashinyan repeated his proposal “to create a joint mechanism to jointly investigate each report about ceasefire violations, and draw joint conclusions.”

On January 9, Pashinyan posted on his Facebook page a lengthy statement comprised of 17 points, complying with Aliyev’s demands for concessions.

He described “Western Azerbaijan” as consisting of several towns located in the Western part of Azerbaijan, including parts of Artsakh. He falsely named cities in the Republic of Armenia as being “Western Armenia,” adding facetiously, “there is no Western Armenia beyond this and cannot be.”

He then detailed the components of “establishing lasting stability and peace in the region”:

- “Mutually abandon escalatory narratives.”
- “Continue the delimitation process.”
- “Sign a peace treaty which is 90-percent ready.”
- “Implement the ‘Crossroads of Peace’ project.”
- “Introduce a joint mechanism for investigating ceasefire violations.”
- “Fully resolve the issue of detained persons.”
- “Work in full intensity to locate and resolve the issue of determining the fate of those considered missing.”
- “Withdraw the claims against each other, including, but not limited to, claims in international courts.”
- “Work on the complete and effective implementation of the provisions of the peace treaty.”
- “Form a mechanism for negotiating around mutual arms control, quota allocation, and implementing restrictions on the use of armaments.”
- “Discuss in full the issues pertaining to refugees from the two countries by forming a joint professional, expert commission after the establishment of peace.”
- “Dissolve the OSCE Minsk Group.”

Some of these points are a rehash of Pashinyan’s previous proposals which Aliyev has not accepted. However, several are against Armenia’s interests, particularly: the withdrawal of mutual lawsuits in international courts and dissolving the OSCE Minsk Group. Both of these demands were dictated by Aliyev.

from previous page

Fakhraddin Mehdiyev, a human rights defender, tells OC Media that Malikov was detained just one week after his return to Azerbaijan. He adds that in December 2023, Malikov was charged with selling drugs, and was subsequently sentenced to six years in prison.

“He was defended by a lawyer hired by the state, and that lawyer never appealed the court’s claims,” Mehdiyev says.

Mehdiyev took Malikov’s case on appeal, arguing that he should be acquitted because ‘there is no evidence of his guilt.’

The last time he met with Malikov in person was in December 2023.

“His health condition was not good, and he was in the prison hospital. At the same time, he did not remember all that happened to him. He suffers from mental illness,” Mehdiyev says.

Another deportee, Mutallim Orujov, a member of the opposition Popular Front Party, was arrested in October 2021, three months after he was deported from Germany. Once again, the charges were drug trafficking.

The head of the Azerbaijan Parliament’s Human Rights Committee, Zahid Oruj, told local media at the time that none of Orujov’s family members had contacted him, and that if family members of those deported back to Azerbaijan reached out to the committee, they would take their

cases under consideration.

Orujov’s son, Elvin Orujov, tells OC Media that he had contacted the committee via Oruj’s assistant, but never received a response.

Germany is one of the most popular countries for Azerbaijani dissidents to move to. Between 2014-2024, according to Germany’s Federal Office of Migration and Refugees, 1,952 people, and 233 people were deported in 2023 back to Azerbaijan.

OC Media reached out to the Azerbaijan State Migration Service for clarification on the statistics of Azerbaijani citizens who left the country for Germany, but did not receive a response.

According to Mukhtarli, the Azerbaijani government should follow the readmission agreement signed with the EU on 28 February 2014; similar agreements were signed separately with Norway, Sweden, Serbia, and Montenegro. These agreements impose certain obligations on Azerbaijan, including a prohibition on the unjustified targeting of returned citizens.

He notes that whether a deportee is later detained in Azerbaijan depends on their involvement in political activities when abroad.

Human rights lawyer Fariz Namazli tells OC Media that drug possession charges are easier to “prove” than other charges, requiring only witness testimony.

He notes that investigative bodies often extract “confessions” from detainees through threats and torture, explaining the frequency with which government opponents were found to have admitted to trafficking drugs.

“In cases when [...] a person is searched, drugs are allegedly found on him, and the person “confesses” that he either found the drugs or bought them from an unknown person, it is clear how these confessions were obtained,” says Namazli.

Following his arrest, Samir Ashurov’s wife Nurana and their children emigrated to Tbilisi, where they hoped to start a new life.

On November 29, the Migration Service at the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs rejected their request for asylum. While Nurana Ashurova has appealed the decision, she has no guarantee that she will win — and no expectation of safety if she is forced to return to Azerbaijan.

(This piece originally appeared on OC-Media on December 26.)

## LETTERS

### Thank you, Aram Arkun, for Timely LA Story

To the Editor:

Aram Arkun’s article “Dangerous Fires Rage in Southern California,” posted on January 8, 2025 on the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*’s website was not only timely but informative on the conditions of this windy, huge fire and its dire effect on local residents and buildings especially as connected to the large Armenian communities around Glendale and surrounding areas of Los Angeles County.

As a former *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* correspondent living in Massachusetts so far away from this tragic destruction in LA, I was very impressed with Aram’s pertinent coverage including interviews with people on the ground and in the know as well as effective photos and videos, and commend Aram on his well-written and researched article.

Nancy Kalajian  
Massachusetts



# Georgia Faces Becoming a Pariah State to West

By Beka Chedia

TBILISI — On December 29, Mikheil Kavelashvili was inaugurated as the new president of Georgia. The Georgian Electoral College elected him on December 14 (1tv.ge, December 29, 2024). Kavelashvili is a former footballer (soccer player) who became famous for his anti-Western statements as a member of parliament and is winning sympathies only from Moscow. No Western leaders congratulated him on his presidency, and congratulations came only from countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Serbia, Hungary, Türkiye, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Notably, in his congratulatory letter to Kavelashvili, PRC leader Xi Jinping highlighted that Georgia and the PRC are continuing their current strategic partnership and “maintain[ing] a positive development momentum ... Georgia and China continue to consolidate political mutual trust, achieving fruitful results within the cooperation framework in the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative” (Fmprc.gov.cn, January 3). Additionally, no guests, diplomats, or foreign delegations accredited in Georgia were invited to the inauguration, demonstrating the international isolation of the Georgian government due to its authoritarian and pro-Russian course.

The inauguration took place against the backdrop of ongoing mass protests in Georgia that have lasted for nearly a month and a half. Protesters are tirelessly demanding a repeat of the parliamentary elections and the continuation of Georgia’s rapprochement with the European Union, which Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze suspended on November 28. On December 31, the ministers of the Weimar

Triangle countries (France, Germany, and Poland) called on Georgian Dream to consider the possibility of new parliamentary elections (Diplomatie.gouv.fr, December 31, 2024).

Georgia’s previous president, Salome Zourabichvili, has refused to recognize the legitimacy of the newly appointed president and intends to continue her international activities as the legitimate president. On the day of Kavelashvili’s inauguration, Zourabichvili addressed the anti-government protesters gathered in front of her residence and declared that she would only be leaving the presidential palace but “taking with her the Georgian flag and the legitimacy of the presidency” (Radiotavisupleba.ge, January 1).

Additionally, on January 6, Chair of the U.S. Helsinki Commission Joe Wilson requested that Pia Kauma “reconsider” the planned trip. Wilson stated that he is concerned that the ruling Georgian Dream “would exploit any OSCE PA official engagement with its leaders under present circumstances to legitimize its tenuous grasp on power” (X.com/RepJoeWilson, January 6). Following these statements, Kauma postponed her visit until “a time that the OSCE PA’s engagement would be most effective” (X.com/PiaKauma, January 6).

Concerns that Georgian Dream would try to use any visit from the West for propaganda purposes and to strengthen its legitimacy became apparent after Secretary

vention in Georgia is rapidly growing, and more new Russian businesses are opening their branches in Georgia. In the fall of 2024, the Russian online sales company Wildberries began operating in Georgia (Radiotavisupleba.ge, October 23, 2024). In early January, the Russian restaurant chain Syrovarnya opened in Tbilisi in a hotel owned by Ivanishvili (Netgazeti.ge, January 6). Additionally, Russian diplomats are actively working in Tbilisi. In October 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov publicly admitted, “Our diplomats are working [in Georgia], who, as needed, have the opportunity to discuss current issues, primarily in the areas of trade, tourism, and direct communications between peoples” (RIA Novosti, October 18, 2024). Additionally, Georgia entered the top five most popular tourist destinations for Russians (Mtavari.tv, November 22, 2024).

Russia is actively trying to take advantage of the cooling of relations between Georgia and the West to establish soft power with the encouragement of Georgian Dream. Immediately after the new president’s inauguration, a proposal was made from Moscow for the Russian and Georgian football teams to play each other in 2025. Russian media reported that Anzor Kavazashvili, a former Soviet footballer, addressed

this proposal to Kavelashvili and Kakha Kaladze, who is the mayor of Tbilisi, general secretary of Georgian Dream, and a former footballer himself (Gazeta.ru, December 31, 2024). This sporting initiative has a political background, as the proposal states that it is “a peaceful and necessary step to strengthen good-neighborly relations” (Mtavari.tv, January 1).

Over the past few weeks, Georgian Dream has adjusted its hostile rhetoric toward the United States. While it previously used the term “global war party” as its invisible enemy, in December 2024, it introduced the term “deep state” into the political lexicon. Georgian Dream continues to follow conspiracy theories, but instead of a global war party, it has now declared the so-called deep state as its primary but invisible enemy, hinting at the United States. Simultaneously, Kobakhidze hopes that U.S. President-elect Donald Trump will still be able to defeat the deep state (Civil.ge, January 8). The leader of the parliamentary majority and the ruling party’s executive secretary, Mamuka Mdinardze, however, said that Georgia should not place unnecessary hopes on Trump’s presidency (Radiotavisupleba.ge, December 23, 2024). Additionally, Kaladze stated, “Trump will certainly pursue the interests of the American people. He will not be able to do anything [in Georgia]” (Radiotavisupleba.ge, December 24, 2024).

Georgia, a country located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia with a border with Russia and the Middle East, was once considered the main supporter of the West in this region. Under Georgian Dream, however, Georgia is increasingly moving away from the West and, under the pretext of strengthening its sovereignty, is approaching the authoritarian regimes of Russia, Iran, and the PRC.

(This analysis was originally published on the website Jamestown.org on January 14.)

## RUSSIA IS ACTIVELY TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COOLING OF RELATIONS BETWEEN GEORGIA AND THE WEST TO ESTABLISH SOFT POWER WITH THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GEORGIAN DREAM.

On January 5, Zourabichvili stated that President of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) Pia Kauma’s planned visit to Georgia on January 8 was ill-timed and would cause discontent among the Georgian people (1tv.ge, January 6). Latvian Member of the European Parliament Rihards Kols also called such a visit “a disastrous and ill-timed move” (X.com/RihardKols, January 5).

General of the Council of Europe Alain Berset visited Georgia in mid-December and met not only with Kobakhidze but also with the country’s informal leader, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. The motivation and purpose of this visit remained unclear and caused serious discontent in Georgia, both in society and in opposition circles. Berset later explained that the conversation with Ivanishvili concerned “the broad geopolitical context” (Radiotavisupleba.ge, December 20, 2024). Georgian Dream, however, presented his visit as a confirmation of the Western world’s acceptance of the results of the parliamentary elections in Georgia.

Georgian Dream’s international isolation is also being reinforced by the introduction of sanctions against representatives of the country’s ruling elite. On December 27, the U.S. Treasury Department announced its first sanctions against Ivanishvili (Sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov, December 27, 2024). According to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the United States introduced sanctions against Ivanishvili on charges of undermining democracy and the Euro-Atlantic future of Georgia in favor of Russia (State.gov, December 27, 2024). On December 19, the United States included the Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomerlauri, and his deputies in the Global Magnitsky sanctions program (State.gov, December 19, 2024).

In addition to introducing sanctions, individual European countries have begun suspending economic projects in Georgia. Germany has suspended several large infrastructure projects in Georgia worth 237 million euros (\$244 million). The deterioration of relations with Western countries directly affects Georgia’s investment environment. According to official statistics released on December 9, 2024, in the third quarter of 2024, foreign direct investment decreased by 55.2 percent compared to the same period of the previous year (Geostat.ge, December 9, 2024).

The scale of Russia’s economic inter-

### Applications Being Accepted for Professional Volunteer Program for Diaspora Armenians

YEREVAN — The Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs has announced it is accepting applications for the DiasPro Professional Volunteer Program for 2025.

The program invites Armenians from the Diaspora to share their experience in support of Armenia’s state and local self-government bodies.

DiasPro aims to foster and strengthen collaboration between Diaspora specialists and the aforementioned bodies, promote deeper Homeland-Diaspora connections, and harness the professional expertise of the Diaspora to support the initiatives undertaken by these institutions.

Diaspora specialists will contribute through professional consultations, experience sharing, training sessions, and other forms of expertise.

While most activities can be conducted online, certain tasks may require on-site involvement.

The involvement of specialists in the program will be coordinated in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs and the relevant state entities of Armenia.

A specialist is considered eligible for the program if they meet the following basic requirements:

- Hold a university degree
- Apply for a position in a field where they have at least one year of professional work experience
- Proficiency in Armenian is desirable.
- Preference will be given to specialists with experience in the following areas for professional work:
  - Project Management
  - MS Office Specialization
  - Foreign Language (English, Russian, French, Spanish, and other languages)
  - Graphic Design.

Applications are open from January 14 to March 1, 2025. Selected candidates will be invited to participate in online or onsite interviews.

The program is entirely voluntary and does not provide any financial compensation.