



A view shows a courthouse on the day of the trial of former political figures and officials of the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, accused of various charges, including genocide and war crimes, in Baku, Azerbaijan January 17, 2025 (photo REUTERS/Aziz Karimov)

Azerbaijan Begins Trials of Karabakh Leaders, Including Ruben Vardanyan

By Nailia Bagirova and Lucy Papachristou

BAKU (Reuters) — A billionaire former banker and 15 other ex-officials in the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region which Azerbaijan retook in 2023 went on

trial on Friday in Baku in closed-door proceedings.

The most prominent of the defendants, Ruben Vardanyan, who earned his fortune in Russia before serving as the number-two official in Karabakh’s separatist government from late 2022 until Feb. 2023, was tried separately from the other 15.

“I once again ... state my complete innocence and the innocence of my Armenian compatriots also being held as political prisoners and demand an immediate end to this politically-motivated case against us,” Vardanyan, who faces up to life in prison

for 42 charges including terrorism, said in a statement on Thursday shared by his family.

Defendants in the other trial include three senior former separatist leaders and other civilian and military figures who face charges including genocide and war crimes, according to Azerbaijani prosecutors.

The court denied Vardanyan’s request to merge his case with those of the others, according to his son, David, who added that his trial was set to resume on Jan. 27 and be opened to the public.

see TRIAL, page 4



Armenian political prisoners who formed the leadership in Karabakh now on trial in Baku

Yerevan Defends Failure to React to Azeri Trials of Former Karabakh Leaders

By Gayane Saribekian

YEREVAN (Azatuyun) — A representative of Armenia’s political leadership on Monday, January 20, defended its failure to condemn or react otherwise to the trials of eight former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh which began in Azerbaijan on Friday, January 17.

The defendants include three former

Karabakh presidents and Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian-born billionaire and philanthropist who briefly served as Karabakh premier in 2022-2023. Also standing trial are eight other Karabakh Armenians who were likewise captured by Azerbaijan during and after its September 2023 military offensive that forced Karabakh’s entire population to flee to Armenia.

see REACTION, page 3

Putin, Pashinyan Discuss Armenia’s Bid to Join EU

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan telephoned Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday, January 17, to discuss Armenia’s plans to strive to join the European Union, which prompted stern warnings from Moscow.

Pashinyan explained the situation related to Yerevan’s recent steps in the context of relations with the European Union. The Russian leader gave corresponding comments and assessments,” the Kremlin said in a statement on the call. It did not disclose Putin’s comments.

The statement also said they discussed “further deepening of integration cooperation” between Russia and Armenia. “Significant practical benefits from joint work within the Eurasian Economic Union, including for the Armenian economy,” were noted in that context, added the statement.

The Armenian government’s press office said, for its part, that the two leaders discussed “upcoming actions within the framework of the EEU” as well as bilateral Russian-Armenian relations. It said nothing about the Armenian government’s January 9 decision to approve a bill on the “start of a process of Armenia’s accession to the European Union.”

Just hours after that decision, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Overchuk warned that the EU membership bid is “incompatible” with Armenia’s continued membership in the EEU, which gives the South Caucasus country tariff-free access to Russia’s vast market.

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Baku Massacre 35 Years Later

Remembrance and Denial

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Except for April 24, recognized internationally as the anniversary of the beginning of the Ottoman genocide, it is not common practice for major German media to observe Armenian commemorations. Recently, that changed. On the 35th anniversary of the Baku massacres, the leading public broadcasting radio station featured it on its “Calendar page” spot on January 12. And, although it lasted barely five minutes, the broadcast provoked a decisive response.

Daniel Guthmann, a prizewinning



Prof. Tessa Hofmann

filmmaker who has covered Azerbaijani-Armenian conflicts, interviewed Tessa Hofmann on Deutschlandfunk (German radio) to remember the “Pogrom against Armenians in the Azerbaijani Capital Baku.”

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

EU Mission Hosts Maragos in Goris

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The European Union (EU) Mission in Armenia hosted the European Union Ambassador to Armenia, Vassilis Maragos, in Goris. This was announced on the EU Monitoring Mission on social media on January 21.

It was noted that members of the EU delegation received detailed information about the border situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Goris region and discussed ongoing cooperation programs.

The extension of the EU mission in Armenia is under consideration. Azerbaijan and Russia oppose the move.

Kindergarten Fire in Forces Evacuation

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — A fire broke out at a kindergarten in Spitak, in Lori, on January 21.

Two fire and rescue crews were dispatched to the scene. The Rescue Service reported that the fire was extinguished at 11:09 a.m.

The blaze damaged nearly one square meter of the suspended ceiling in the bathroom.

A total of 117 children and 29 employees were evacuated.

Mkhitarian Autobiography to Be Published

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Newmag will release Armenian football star Henrikh Mkhitaryan's autobiography this year, its founder Artak Aleksanyan has announced.

"Henrikh Mkhitaryan fans have exciting news to look forward to: the renowned football star's autobiography is set to be published this year. Mkhitaryan first hinted at this project during the Newmag Summer Festival, and now production is in full swing," he wrote in a post on social media on January 21.

"The autobiography will be released in multiple languages, spearheaded by the Italian media giant CairaRCS MEDIA Group," Aleksanyan added.

Lavrov Invites Armenian Leadership To Great Patriotic War Parade

MOSCOW (News.am) — The leadership of Armenia has been invited to the military parade to be held on May 9 in Moscow, and dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War in World War II.

"We will be happy to see Armenia's leadership at the May celebrations in Moscow," Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov stated at a press conference held in Moscow with his visiting Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, on January 21.

Lavrov emphasized the importance of historical truth and memory of general history.

French Medical Mission Publishes Report on Ballistic Nerve Injuries from 2020 Artsakh War

By Levon Karamanoukian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

A medical report published in the December issue of the *Journal of Ultrasound* underscores the severity of ballistic nerve injuries of the arms and legs sustained during the 2020 Artsakh War. The report was authored by a multispecialty team of physicians who travelled from France after the war to help manage wounded veterans.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War represented an unprovoked and violent mili-

Seven medical missions were completed in Yerevan between January 2021 and May 2022 and directed towards the management of wounded veterans. Complex injuries were managed, included bone, soft-tissue, orthopedic, and peripheral nerve injuries.

According to lead author, Dr. Olivier Fantino, the severity of injuries, COVID and the psychological impact of Armenia's military loss made the situation very difficult. "The psychological state of the wounded was most often at the lowest, often with advanced states of prostration.



Ballistic nerve injury

tary attack by Azerbaijan on the civilian and military population of the Republic of Artsakh. The bellicose nature of the military engagement highlighted Azerbaijan's attempts to violate the self-determination and self-governance of indigenous Artsakh Armenians.

Post-conflict, a multidisciplinary team of medical experts were mobilized at the behest of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organize medical missions to assist in the care of Armenian war wounded. The specialists from Lyon included two upper-limb surgeons, a hand therapist, an anesthesiology pain specialist, a neurologist, an infectious disease specialist and a radiologist.

Conversely, some coped in an astonishing way," he wrote.

The report detailed the management of 25 wounded soldiers with peripheral nerve injuries in the setting of soft-tissue polytrauma. Veterans were treated at the Wigmore Clinic in Yerevan.

Of the 25, a total of 44 injured nerves were documented, including 17 patients with upper limb nerve injury, 7 with lower limb nerve injury, and one patient with both upper and lower nerve injury. Fourteen wounded veterans had wounds inflicted by shrapnel, 10 by high-velocity bullets, and one with nerve injury inflicted by prolonged compression with a hemorrhage-control tourniquet.

The indiscriminate use of drone, ballistic and explosive agents by the Azeri military during the war is widely documented, including the use of prohibited white phosphorus explosives on the population of Artsakh.

"The degree of complex soft tissue injuries inflicted on the civilian and military population of Artsakh overwhelmed the acute management of those wounded on the field," said Igor Zakharyan, chief of plastic surgery at Central Republic Hospital in Stepanakert (before 2023). "We are still dealing with the manifestations of those injuries years later."

The prospective study of wounded soldiers demonstrated the utility of ultrasound examination in the management of peripheral nerve injuries inflicted by shrapnel or high-energy bullets. During the seven medical missions completed by the French medical experts, ultrasound and electro-neuromyography management were used to demonstrate the extent of nerve injuries, qualify the success-rate of emergency nerve repairs, diagnose and mark the location and severity of nerve injuries before surgery, and validate intraoperative findings.

According to the published report, the team of physicians validated the use of ultrasound in the management of war-related peripheral nerve injuries related to ballistic weaponry.

"Post-injury disabilities remain prevalent among wounded soldiers," reports Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon Dr. Gayane Mkhitaryan, a microsurgeon in Armenia who continues to help wounded veterans. "Despite advancements in surgical and rehabilitative techniques, the complexity of these injuries often results in prolonged recovery and functional impairments," she added.

Wounded Artsakh war veterans still require extensive and prolonged management of their debilities. The acute management of their injuries has now transgressed into a long-term rehabilitative requirement.

Fantino concluded, "These events will remain forever engraved on my hard drive."

Gyumri IT Leader Named Europe Female Business Leader of the Year

GYUMRI — The Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) announced on January 15 that Amalya Yeghoyan, executive director of the Gyumri Information Technologies Center (GITC), has been named Female Business Leader of the Year at the Emerging Europe Awards 2024.

Recognized for her transformative efforts in empowering women through technology education, she has become a beacon of progress in Armenia. Yeghoyan was one of only two individual award winners this year, selected by a jury of experts from the global Emerging Europe community. Her work equips women, including displaced and marginalized individuals, with essential coding, business and entrepreneurial skills. Through her efforts, many women have achieved financial independence and stability.

"I am deeply honored to be recognized as the Female Business Leader of the Year by Emerging Europe. This recognition celebrates my work at the GITC, supported by the Fund for Armenian Relief, in empowering women in Armenia. Together, we have helped many women achieve financial independence and stability while

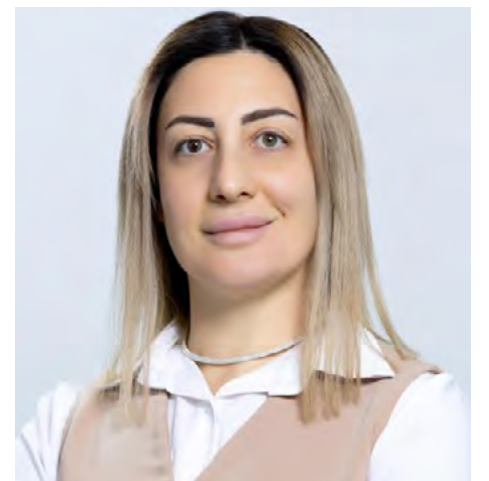
fostering innovation and opportunity," said Yeghoyan.

Marek Grzegorzczak from Emerging Europe described Yeghoyan's passion: "Her unwavering advocacy for the role of technology in addressing poverty and inequality has inspired women across Armenia to pursue careers in high-tech fields, creating lasting social and economic change in the region."

"Receiving this award recognizes the tireless work that Amayla and GTIC do every day and reinforces the importance of collaboration and technology in creating a brighter, more equitable future for Armenia," said FAR Executive Director Bree Carriglio.

The Emerging Europe Awards is a prestigious platform that honors leaders driving economic growth, innovation, and social development across the region.

Headquartered in Armenia's second-largest city, GITC is one of Armenia's leading IT institutions, helping to transform Gyumri and the other regions of Armenia into a place of opportunity following the 1988 earthquake. GITC seeks to end the cycle of poverty and inequality



Amalya Yeghoyan

by educating the next generation of coders and engineers and fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. More than 1,700 have graduated from the school's numerous training and certification programs since GITC was founded in 2005, and GITC alums continue to maintain an employment rate of more than 80 percent.

FAR is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a promising future for the people of Armenia. Founded by the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) in response to the devastating 1988 earthquake, FAR was reorganized into a not-for-profit charitable voluntary organization in March 1993.



ARMENIA

Galvanizing Diaspora Grants Program Projects Underway

YEREVAN — Several months ago, the Galvanizing Diaspora Grants Program was initiated by the Armenia 2041 Foundation. This program aimed to support individuals and organizations with innovative, pan-Armenian ideas by offering them grants. In October, the ten recipients of this initiative were announced. Below are some of the projects that, with the help of these grants, will soon become a reality.

Therapists for Armenia

Therapists for Armenia, a US-based nonprofit, is committed to advancing occupational, physical and speech therapy, promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities, and enhancing well-being in Armenia through education, collaboration, support, and advocacy. Since 2019, they have spearheaded numerous humanitarian and capacity-building initiatives in Armenian rehabilitation.

With the support of this grant, Therapists for Armenia is set to launch an innovative project titled “Azad 3D: 3D Printed Devices for Independent Living.” Azad 3D is an online social enterprise that enables customers to order 3D-printed assistive devices made in Armenia. These devices can significantly increase independence in daily activities such as dressing and eating. Compared to traditional manufacturing, 3D printing offers a more affordable and accessible alternative, helping to meet the growing demand for assistive devices.

Azad 3D brings together experts from both the diaspora and Armenia to strengthen Armenian communities and promote inclusion in several ways: (1) Supporting the well-being of older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with various health conditions, (2) Employing people with disabilities who are often excluded from the workforce, (3) Increasing the capacity for universal design concepts.

The program will initially launch in Armenia and later expand to other communities. “Our diverse team of diasporan healthcare providers, Armenian disability advocates, experienced engineers, and pas-



Dr. Noubar Afeyan



Therapists for Armenia volunteers collaborating with disability advocates in Armenia to understand assistive device needs

sionate robotics students will ensure the devices are both functional and ergonomic. With Azad 3D, we are not only creating assistive devices but also fostering a community of inclusion and support. We are excited to see the positive impact this project will have on the lives of many,” said Armineh Babikian, founder and executive director of Therapists for Armenia.

Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA)

Armenians continue to be underrepresented in STEM fields, both in Armenia and across the diaspora. While various initiatives have sought to address this gap, many lack the necessary coordination to drive meaningful change. The Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA) is working to shift this narrative.

Linda Megerdichian, the 2024 AESA president, highlights the organization’s vision: “Our shared passion for STEM fuels our quest for objectivity, innovation, curiosity, and ingenuity. Integrity and respect guide our relationships, encouraging us to treat each other as equals, transcend boundaries, and prioritize ideas over hierarchy. Together, we form a strong and vibrant community, dedicated to lifting each other up, embracing volunteerism, and creating

opportunities for collaboration and professional growth.”

Through this commitment, AESA aims to empower Armenians worldwide, fostering a culture of unity and excellence in STEM. With the support of the Galvanizing Diaspora Grants Program, AESA plans to launch an annual six-month mentorship program aimed at closing the STEM gap by fostering innovation and increasing Armenian representation in the field.

The AESA Mentorship Program will provide participants with a robust support system, including one-on-one mentorship and six specialized workshops. The workshops will cover critical topics such as goal setting, resume and cover letter writing, interview techniques, interpersonal and communication skills, emotional intelligence and professional branding.

By tapping into the expertise of subject matter experts and leveraging contributions from community members across the diaspora and Armenia, the AESA Mentorship Program aims to cultivate a strong network of skilled and empowered Armenian STEM professionals.

The Road: A Diaspora Media Platform

Another grant recipient is Dr. Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, professor of economics

at St. John’s University in New York. He plans to establish The Road, a nonprofit media outlet that will publish accessible expert opinions and analyses on Armenian diaspora-related topics.

This unique web-based platform will foster open discussions on diaspora issues, synthesizing complex academic insights into articles written for the general public. The Road aims to uphold the highest standards of modern journalism and analytical writing while making diaspora-related research more accessible to a wider audience.

The platform will serve as a vital connection between academics and the broader global Armenian community. There is a wealth of historical and contemporary research on the Armenian diaspora, addressing topics such as migration, community transformations, assimilation, and engagement with the Republic of Armenia. The Road will provide an open forum for informed commentary and the exchange of ideas on pressing issues related to the diaspora and diaspora-Armenia relations.

The winning projects of Galvanizing Diaspora 2024 have already started working on bringing their ideas to life. The projects are to be realized within 18 months, by spring 2026.

Yerevan Defends Failure to React to Azeri Trials of Former Karabakh Leaders

REACTION, from page 1

Neither Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s office nor the Armenian Foreign Ministry has issued any official statements on the beginning of hearings at an Azerbaijani military court denounced by Armenian human rights activists as a travesty of justice.

Vahagn Aleksanyan, a deputy chairman of Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party, confirmed that Yerevan’s silence, decried by the Armenian opposition, is deliberate.

“If you think that a couple of tough statements made for consolation would have contributed to the release of our captives, you are wrong,” he told reporters. “Additional publicity would only hamper this process [of trying to have all Armenian prisoners freed by Azerbaijan.]”

“They can’t make such immoral state-

ments and present their doing nothing as helping the prisoners,” countered Armen Rustamyan, a senior lawmaker from the main opposition Hayastan alliance.

Rustamyan said that Pashinyan’s government is simply afraid of angering Baku in line with its appeasement policy in the conflict with Azerbaijan.

“For the sake of that, [the Armenian authorities] are sacrificing everything: our identity, our territory and these persons [tried in Baku] who are bargaining chips for them in this big game,” he charged.

The Armenian National Congress (HAK), an opposition party led by former President Levon Ter-Petrosian, similarly condemned Pashinyan for his “obvious and complete indifference to the fate of the captured leaders of Artsakh.”

“Armenia is obliged to publicly raise its

voice in their defense, to make the issue of their release one of the necessary conditions on the agenda of Armenian-Azerbaijani reconciliation and peace,” the HAK said in a weekend statement.

Aleksanyan, the ruling party representative, also implied that some of the former Karabakh leaders held in Azerbaijan, notably Arayik Harutyunyan, have only themselves to blame for their captivity.

“I wish our Nagorno-Karabakh colleagues had listened to us and gone to Sofia to negotiate [with Azerbaijan before the September 2023 offensive] instead of listening to Armenian opposition forces,” he said.

Tigran Abrahamyan, another opposition lawmaker, said such statements make mockery of the Pashinyan government’s pledges to strive for the release of all Ar-

menian prisoners remaining in Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan was already accused by his domestic critics last fall of helping Baku legitimize Vardanyan’s continuing imprisonment with his scathing comments about the tycoon. Speaking during a news conference last August, the Armenian premier wondered who had told Vardanyan to renounce Russian citizenship and move to Karabakh in 2022 and “for what purpose.”

He seemed to echo Azerbaijani leaders’ earlier claims that Vardanyan was dispatched to Karabakh by Moscow to serve Russian interests there. Vardanyan hit back at Pashinyan in a September statement issued by his family.

Prior to their capture, Vardanyan and the Karabakh ex-presidents strongly criticized Pashinyan for publicly recognizing Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Discussions on Minsk Group Dissolution Underway, Armenian Speaker Says

YEREVAN (News.am) — Discussions are underway regarding the dissolution of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, Armenian National Assembly Speaker Alen Simonyan told reporters on January 21.

Simonyan declined to give further details, citing ongoing talks between the Armenian and Russian foreign ministers in Russia.

Regarding his previous positive assessment of the European Union's monitoring mission in Armenia, Simonyan was asked to comment on Azerbaijan's demand to exclude the presence of third-country forces in Armenia. He said Armenia had also submitted its own proposal to Azerbaijan, but refrained from elaborating.

Simonyan also expressed hope that the term of the EU monitoring mission would be extended.

Ambassador Visits with President of Belgian Senate

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — On January 21, Ambassador Tigran Balayan met with Valérie de Bue, President of the Belgian Senate.

The meeting highlighted the achievements of the partnership between Armenia and Belgium, as well as Armenia and the European Union, emphasizing the significant role of parliamentary diplomacy in these processes.

Balayan presented the consistent efforts of the Republic of Armenia aimed at normalizing Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, as well as establishing stable peace in the South Caucasus, and the "Crossroads of Peace" project developed by the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

Swiss Parliament Committee Approves Resolution on Artsakh Armenians

YEREVAN (News.am) — The Committee on Foreign Relations of the upper house of the Swiss parliament in Bern on January 21 adopted a resolution on the necessity of holding an international conference on the return of Artsakh Armenians.

On October 15 last year, the resolution had been adopted by the Foreign Relations Committee of the lower house of the country's parliament, the National Assembly.

After that, the lower house voted in favor of the bill.

The external relations committee of the Council of Cantons adopted this resolution. The next step will be the final step.

If finally adopted, the resolution will come into force and the Federal Assembly will commit itself to call a conference regardless of its will and position.

Ruben Vardanyan Insists on Innocence on Eve of Trial in Azerbaijan

BAKU (Azatutyun.am) — One day before the start of his trial in Baku, Armenian billionaire and former Nagorno-Karabakh premier Ruben Vardanyan on January 16, rejected criminal charges brought against him as politically motivated and accused Azerbaijani investigators of attributing false testimony to him. (See related story on Page 1.)

"I officially declare: I have given no testimony since the day of my arrest, except during the first interrogation, where I only stated my name and surname," Vardanyan said in a statement which his family in Armenia said was conveyed to it during his weekly phone call. "All protocols bearing my signature are falsifications. These documents do not exist in reality. My lawyer and interpreter were coerced into signing these documents."

"I once again reiterate and state my complete innocence and the innocence of my Armenian compatriots also being held as political prisoners and demand an immediate end to this politically motivated case against us," he said.

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Karabakh's leadership from November 2022 to February 2023, was arrested at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin corridor in September 2023 as he fled the region along with tens of thousands of its residents displaced by an Azerbaijani offensive. He was initially charged with "financing terrorism," illegally entering Karabakh and supplying its armed forces with military equipment.

Vardanyan said in his statement he is now facing as many as 42 charges, some of which carry [the penalty of] life imprisonment.

"I have not been granted the opportunity to fully review the official indictment," he said. "My lawyer and I were merely allowed to skim through 422 volumes of the case files, all written solely in the Azerbaijani language, which I do not understand,

within a very short timeframe — from December 9, 2024, to January 8, 2025. I only received the list of charges in Russian on January 8, 2025."

According to the Reuters news agency, Azerbaijani prosecutors insisted that Vardanyan's "rights to legal defense, the use of his preferred language, and other procedural rights were ensured" during the pre-trial investigation.

The defense lawyer mentioned in Vardanyan's statement is apparently not American attorney Jared Genser, who was not allowed last year to visit Azerbaijan and talk

Azerbaijani military court on January 17.

However, Vardanyan denounced in his statement the Azerbaijani authorities for "separating my case into a separate proceeding." He demanded that they "consolidate my case with the cases of the others accused" and make their trial public.

The Armenian government maintains that it has been trying hard to have Vardanyan and at least 22 other Armenians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity freed. Its domestic critics dismiss these assurances. They say that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan actually helped Baku legitimize Var-



Ruben Vardanyan, the state minister of Nagorno-Karabakh, leads a cabinet meeting in Stepanakert, January 3, 2023

VARDANYAN SAID IN HIS STATEMENT THAT HE IS NOW FACING AS MANY AS 42 CHARGES, SOME OF WHICH CARRY [THE PENALTY OF] LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

to his prominent client. Genser last month accused Baku of planning to hold a "secret trial before a tribunal that will be neither independent nor impartial."

As of Thursday evening, it was still not clear whether Vardanyan will stand trial together with seven other Karabakh Armenian leaders who were also captured by Baku shortly after the September 2023 offensive. Azerbaijani pro-government media reported earlier this month that 15 Armenian defendants will appear before an

danyan's continuing imprisonment with his scathing comments about the tycoon.

Speaking during a news conference last August, Pashinyan wondered who had told Vardanyan to renounce Russian citizenship and move to Karabakh in 2022 and "for what purpose." He seemed to echo Azerbaijani leaders' earlier claims that Vardanyan was dispatched to Karabakh by Moscow to serve Russian interests there. Vardanyan hit back at Pashinyan in a September statement issued via his family.

Azerbaijan Begins Trials of Karabakh Leaders, Including Ruben Vardanyan

TRIAL, from page 1

Reuters was denied access to the courtrooms on Friday, which were open only to Azerbaijani state media.

Nagorno-Karabakh escaped Baku's control in fighting around the time of the Soviet collapse when hundreds of thousands of ethnic Azeris fled their homes. Baku casts Vardanyan and other former separatist officials as leaders of an illegal armed entity who tried to stop Azerbaijan from reclaiming the territory.

Vardanyan, 56, was appointed state minister of Karabakh, the number-two position, after amassing a banking fortune in Russia. He was arrested alongside other officials by Azerbaijani authorities at a

border checkpoint as he tried to flee Karabakh into Armenia in September 2023.

In his statement, Vardanyan said he had not been given enough time to review the indictment against him, and the 422 volumes of evidence had been presented in Azeri, a language he does not speak.

Jared Genser, Vardanyan's international counsel, said the legal process was "extraordinarily opaque" and called the case "a political show trial."

"The substance of the so-called charges are not documented," he told Reuters by phone. "I haven't heard of any credible evidence that's been brought against him."

The Azerbaijani president's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Vardanyan's lawyers have said he was mistreated in custody. Azerbaijan's prosecutor general has said Vardanyan's rights were being respected and he had received visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

David, Vardanyan's son, said his father's mood was "stoic" when they last spoke on the phone this week.

"He tried to convey a very important message, that if both sides continue on the path of blame and these prosecutions and war, this is a road to nowhere," David told Reuters by phone.



INTERNATIONAL

Human Rights Activists in Germany Call for International Observers in Baku Trial of Armenian POWs

BERLIN — On January 17, the trials of 23 people illegally arrested by Azerbaijan as a result of the attack on Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in September 2023 began in Baku. Several German human rights organizations have warned of a politically motivated show trial and are calling for observation by German embassy staff.

“The accused are civilians, among them are eight democratically elected leaders. By imprisoning them and criminalizing them in court, Azerbaijan is turning the victims into perpetrators and concealing its own crime against Artsakh,” said Sarah Reinke, head of the human rights work of the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) in Göttingen.



Sarah Reinke

Together with the Central Council of Armenians (ZAD), the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) and the Working Group on Recognition, Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), the Society for Threatened Peoples demands that these politically motivated trials be observed by German embassy staff.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan violently attacked Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, displacing 100,000 Armenians. This was preceded by a nine-month hunger blockade by the de facto Republic of Artsakh in violation of orders of the International Court of Justice. Human rights organizations and the international law expert Luis Moreno Ocampo assess both the blockade and the expulsion as genocide. Instead of those responsible in Azerbaijan, especially President Ilham Aliyev, being brought before an international court for this crime, a show trial against Armenians is now being staged in Baku, the spokespersons of the NGOs explain. Politics is influencing the Azerbaijani judiciary. This is characterized by systematic corruption and violations of internationally applicable laws. Judges are often expected to reflect the interests of the government, and members of the political opposition, journalists, and activists have experienced this repeatedly, they explain.

In 2023, the German government did not put a stop to Azerbaijan when the Armenians were expelled en masse, but maintained its relations with the dictator Aliyev during and after as if nothing had happened. The human rights organizations conclude their appeal to the Foreign Office in Berlin, stressing that it is only right and proper that at least observers be sent to these trials and the immediate release of those affected be urged.

—Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

18th Anniversary of Hrant Dink Assassination Commemorated

ISTANBUL — Hrant Dink, who was assassinated 18 years ago in front of the Sebat Building, where *Agos* Newspaper’s former office was located, was commemorated by thousands of people on Sunday, January 19, at 3 p.m.

At the commemoration, Tülin Özen read a letter from Çiğdem Mater, who has been imprisoned since April 2022 as part of the Gezi trial, sent from Bakırköy Prison. In her letter, Çiğdem Mater wrote: “Today, I am sure there are those in front of the Sebat Building who were not yet born when Hrant was killed. Generations are changing, but the answer to the question ‘Where are we?’ draws its strength from persistently being here. We are still here, stubbornly.”

Erarslan Sağlam read a message from Osman Kavala, who has been unlawfully detained since November 2017. Kavala conveyed: “Despite murders, massacres, and all forms of tyranny, I continue to hope that we will see days when peace and justice prevail. I demand justice for Hrant and for all our citizens.”

At the commemoration where calls for justice were persistently voiced, this year’s address was delivered by Takuhi Tovmasyan, one of the leading figures in Armenian cultural writing.

In her speech, Takuhi Tovmasyan said: “What was his ‘crime’? It was obvious: a



Takuhi Tovmasyan speaks as Rakel Dink watches. (Photo: Cemre Gürbüz)

love of human beings, a passion for democracy and human rights, a firm belief in freedom of expression, and on top of all this, advocating for peace between two peoples, calling for the opening of the [sealed] Turkey-Armenia border... And above all of this, he possessed a God-given gift to persuade others, which scared some to their

core.”

She also said, “It’s been 18 years since that dreadful Friday on January 19, 2007. On each and every January 19th, thousands of kindred spirits have gathered right here to commemorate you.”

In her speech she referred to the generational trauma of Armenians in Turkey.

On the evenings of January 18 and 19, a video projection titled “Liberating Promise,” prepared by Memed Erdener in memory of Hrant Dink, was displayed on the exterior façade of the Sebat Apartment.

Since 2019, video projections in memory of Hrant Dink have been created by Ümit Kıvanç from 2019 to 2023, and by Hale Tenger in 2024.



Assembled marking the anniversary of Hrant Dink’s death (Photo: Cemre Gürbüz)

Armenian FM Has a ‘Sincere and Constructive’ Meeting with Lavrov

MOSCOW (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan called the meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Moscow on January 21 “sincere and constructive.”

He thanked Lavrov for organizing the talks and for his hospitality. “Today’s meeting was held in a sincere and constructive atmosphere. The range of issues discussed was quite comprehensive and diverse. We reviewed issues of bilateral cooperation and, naturally, touched upon the topic of peace in the South Caucasus,” Mirzoyan said at a press conference following the talks.

He said that the importance of maintaining political dialogue at all levels and continuing cooperation in various fields was emphasized during the talks. In addition, the parties discussed the situation in the media space and ways to create a more favorable information atmosphere.

“I hope that today’s discussion will serve to strengthen mutual understanding and

continue further mutually beneficial cooperation,” the Armenian Foreign Minister concluded.

Lavrov revealed plans to visit Armenia.

“We will also resume and maintain regular dialogue between Deputy Foreign Ministers and have agreed to prepare another two-year plan for consultations between the foreign ministries in the near future,” Lavrov noted.

In turn, Mirzoyan indicated that he would be looking forward to meeting with his Russian counterpart. “I will be flattered and will be happy to see you in Yerevan,” he said.

Armenia is ready to unblock all communications in the South Caucasus, Mirzoyan added during the meeting.

“I am glad to confirm Armenia’s vision of unblocking all economic and transport communications, the implementation of which is expected within the framework of the “Crossroads of the World” project,” he noted.

Putin, Pashinyan Discuss Armenia’s Bid to Join EU

EU, from page 1

Russian-Armenian trade has skyrocketed in the last three years, solidifying Russia’s status as Armenia’s number one trading partner and main export market. Overchuk said that a withdrawal from the EEU would not only cause a sharp decline in Armenian exports, but also push up the cost of Russian natural gas and food imported by Armenia.

Armenian Economy Minister Gevorg Papoyan said on Monday, January 20, that Yerevan has no plans yet to leave the Russian-led trade bloc. However, Overchuk reiterated afterwards that the bill approved by Pashinyan’s cabinet is viewed by Moscow as the “beginning of Armenia’s withdrawal from the EEU.”

The bill has not been formally included on the agenda of the Armenian parliament so far. It is still not clear when the National Assembly will start discussing it.

Pashinyan and his entourage have been toying with the idea of an EU membership bid as part of their efforts to reorient Armenia towards the West amid increased tensions with Russia.

According to Armenian government data, Russia accounted for over 41 percent of Armenia’s foreign trade in January-November 2024, compared with the EU’s 7.5 percent share in the total.



INTERNATIONAL

Baku Massacre 35 Years Later: Remembrance and Denial

REMEMBRANCE, from page 1

By way of introduction, he recalled that the Armenian-populated Nagorno Karabakh (also called Artsakh in Armenian) “had been handed over to Azerbaijan by Stalin against the explicit will of the Armenians, though with an autonomous status” and, as the USSR disintegrated, they “wanted to join the Republic of Armenia.” Hofmann, genocide researcher and Armenia expert, added that Yerevan “at that time supported their desire.” She reported also that, in the course of the reignited conflict, Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia.

These victims of expulsion, Guthmann explained, contributed to spreading hatred against those Armenians still residing in Azerbaijan. They had not forgotten the Sumgait massacres just two years earlier, which had claimed the lives of 50 Armenians. Guthmann described the massacres that began in January 12 in Baku by quoting the brutal scene of an attack on a church, from a novella entitled *Stone Dreams* by Azerbaijani writer, Akram Aylisli.

Hofmann characterized the massacres as premeditated and planned: perpetrators broke into targeted homes that had been marked by Christian crosses or the words, “Armenians live here”; they set homes on fire, pushed inhabitants off balconies, raped, massacred, and killed residents with clubs or knives. A hundred Armenians perished at the hands of “fanatical Azerbaijani nationalists,” said Guthmann.

It was not only a commemoration but a timely condemnation: “An era which we all thought had ended, the era of pogroms, has resurfaced,” he said. This was a quote from an Open Letter that appeared in the *New York Times* on July 27, 1990, signed by intellectuals Juergen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Elie Wiesel, and others. They wrote: “The situation of Armenians in the Caucasus is, in fact, too serious for us to remain silent. There are moments when we must assume the moral obligation to assist a people in peril.” Now, Guthmann said, 35 years later, the Armenians’ plight in the Caucasus is even more difficult and serious, following the September 2023 aggression by “Azerbaijani dictator Aliyev’s troops, who conquered Berg-Karabakh and expelled the Armenians from their homeland.” Unlike 35 years ago, however, from the “so-called civilized world hardly a cry of indignation has been heard.”

The Banality and Brutality of Denial

It must be said, that some cries of indignation have, indeed, been heard, but from other quarters. They have come loud and clear — from Baku itself. On January 14, Report.az, Caliber.az and Azernews, among other official Azerbaijani news outlets, published nearly identical articles responding to the program. “The Western Azerbaijan [sic] Community,” they reported, “has strongly condemned a slanderous broadcast aired on Germany’s public radio channel, Deutschlandfunk, on January 12, 2025, accus-

Community had, in a statement, reportedly denounced the “racially discriminatory broadcasts of Deutschlandfunk” and officially called on the radio to “condemn Armenia’s policies of racism” instead. To date, there has been no response from Deutschlandfunk.

Significantly, in these articles from Baku no mention was made of the Azerbaijani novelist whom Guthmann had quoted. Akram Aylisli had been hailed as a national author and decorated by the president himself in 2002. Following the release of his novella, *Stone Dreams*, in



Armenians in Baku in 1988. (imago images / SNA / Victor)

ing it of spreading biased narratives against the Azerbaijani people and state.” They had “deep concern” over the interview with “notorious Azerbaijanophobe [sic] Tessa Hofmann,” for having “allegedly perpetuated [sic] claims of illegal actions against Armenians in Azerbaijan in 1990 ... through the lens of radical Armenian nationalist narratives.” The not otherwise identified Western Azerbaijan

2012, which depicted the anti-Armenian pogroms, he lost his honors, his title, his pension, his membership in the Writers’ Union, his freedom to travel, and had reason to fear losing citizenship. His books were burned in public, and no longer circulated in schools. His wife and son lost their jobs. It was even mooted that he might be an ethnic Armenian.

Azerbaijan’s Aliyev Places ‘Zangezur Corridor’ Back on Peace Process Agenda

Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev appeared to ratchet up tension in the South Caucasus by unexpectedly reviving a demand for extraterritorial rights on a land corridor connecting Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhchivan (Nakhichevan/Nakhijevan) exclave across Armenian territory. But some experts in Baku believe that the issue can be managed.

Aliyev surprised regional analysts by seemingly tossing a diplomatic grenade into the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process during an early January interview with Azerbaijani journalists. He repeatedly referred to Armenia as “fascist” and restored the issue of what is known as the Zangezur corridor to the top of the negotiating agenda. In the months prior to Aliyev’s comments, both sides had sent signals that a peace deal seemed close.

Armenian and Azerbaijani officials announced last August that they had set aside the Zangezur issue, saying the two countries would first finalize a peace deal, then return to the corridor matter. From Armenia’s standpoint, the issue was problematic for two reasons; one, officials in Yerevan did not want to surrender sovereignty over the land route connecting two Azerbaijani territories; and two, Armenia was leery of allowing Russia to act as a guarantor of stability along the corridor.

Yerevan’s relationship with Moscow has soured since Azerbaijan inflicted a decisive defeat of Armenia in the Second Karabakh War, which ended in late 2023: many Armenians believe Russia betrayed their country by not fulfilling treaty obligations to defend Armenian sovereignty. A 2020 agreement had enshrined a Russian peace-



A road in Nakhchivan. Aliyev has revived a demand for extraterritorial rights on a land corridor connecting Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhchivan exclave across Armenian territory. (Photo: gov.az)

keeping role over the Zangezur corridor, but the August bilateral decision to defer the issue effectively froze Moscow out of any future presence.

Russian officials at first bitterly complained about the Armenian-Azerbaijani move to defer Zangezur but eventually backed off after Iran forcefully supported shelving the corridor issue.

In recent months, as Armenian-Russian relations have continued to spiral downward, the Armenian government’s interest in reducing the Russian presence in the

country has taken on increased importance. A key for Armenia, then, is that Aliyev’s revival of the Zangezur issue doesn’t imply that Baku wants Russian peacekeepers along the route, independent analyst Shujaat Ahmadzade told Eurasianet.

“I think Azerbaijan is equally unhappy with [the idea of] Russian control [of the Zangezur corridor],” said Ahmadzade, an expert in South Caucasus affairs, adding that Baku is content to leave Armenia to act as the main point of resistance because the issue is “more of an Armenian-Russian

dispute.”

Aliyev’s early January interview served as a reminder to Armenia that while Zangezur may have been deferred, it would not be forgotten by Baku. At the same time, Ahmadzade indicated that there was potentially a certain amount of flexibility in Baku’s approach on the issue. Zangezur, in Baku’s view, is linked to the broader issue of expanding regional trade networks, he added. Over the past year, Azerbaijan has actively pursued projects with other neighboring states to boost East-West trade via the Middle Corridor route, including the restoration of a railway with Georgia and an ambitious plan with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to export electricity.

“There are three tracks [in the bilateral dialogue] — a peace agreement, borders, and connectivity — that both countries have disputes in, yet connectivity is the only space over which Armenian-Azerbaijani bilateral negotiations have not begun,” Ahmadzade noted. “I think at this point the parties are trying to recalibrate their stakes over this matter.”

Ahmadzade believes Azerbaijan wants to explore unblocking all bilateral connectivity routes. As for Zangezur, Azerbaijan doesn’t necessarily insist on Armenia sacrificing complete sovereignty over the corridor; Baku’s bottom line is it wants Azerbaijani vehicles traveling on the corridor between the mainland and Nakhchivan to move freely without any inspections. “I think this is where Armenia is resisting,” he said.

(This article originally appeared on the website Eurasianet.org on January 17.)



Community News

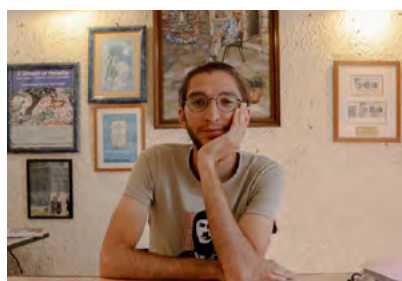
Protecting the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem: A Call to the Diaspora

WATERTOWN — The founders of the Save the ArQ movement, Hagop Djernazian and Setrag Balian will offer a presentation and host a community gathering about the Armenian community's status in Jerusalem, the ongoing legal battle, at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, at 1:30 p.m.

The event is being organized by the Armenian Assembly of America, together with the Pan Armenian Council of New England.

Hagop Djernazian embodies resilience and determination as a fourth-generation descendant of the post-Genocide Jerusalem-Armenian community. His passion and advocacy for the preservation of the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem has lead him to take on the role as a co-founder of the Save the ArQ movement. Through leadership and dedication, he has played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the importance of safeguarding the historic and culturally significant Armenian land. Hagop also serves an integral role as the Executive Committee member and leader of the Scouts at the Hoyetchmen Club in Jerusalem, a cornerstone institution in the Jerusalem Armenian community. His involvement ensures the continuity of cultural traditions and values for future generations. In pursuit of furthering his knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the region, Hagop holds a BA in International Relations and Middle East Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and is currently pursuing a second BA in Law.

Setrag Balian is an activist, writer and fourth-generation descendant of the esteemed Balian family. He has studied economics in France and Ar-



Setrag Balian

menia, and explored the world of ceramics in Spain. His roots run deep in the cultural heritage of his ancestors, as the Balias are one of the founding families of Armenian Ceramics in Jerusalem. With passion about preserving his cultural legacy of the Armenian community in Jerusalem, he is not only an activist but a co-founder of the Save the ArQ movement, dedicated to defending and safeguarding the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem - a cause close to his heart. Setrag has also emerged as a prominent voice in advocating for the preservation of the architectural, historical, and cultural treasures of his cherished Armenian Quarter. Beyond his activism, Setrag has also contributed to scholarly discourse on Jerusalem Armenians through several articles. His insights offer valuable perspectives on the challenges and triumphs of the vibrant community, shedding light on their unique cultural identity and historical significance, particularly in the Old City of Jerusalem.



California Assemblymember John Harabedian meets with volunteers at the Jivalagian Youth Center

Legislators Visit Jivalagian Armenian Center Where Eaton Canyon Fire Relief Efforts Are Underway

PASADENA — The Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region (ANCA-WR), joined by representatives from the ANCA National office and volunteers from the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF), gathered at the Jivalagian Youth Center in Pasadena to coordinate relief efforts for families displaced by the Eaton Canyon Fire. Federal and State legislators visited the volunteer-led operation which sprang into action by the initiative of the local Armenian community.

"I'm here to say to the Armenian-American community that I am devastated by what has happened," said Rep. Judy Chu. Chu has represented the Altadena area since 2013, following redistricting in 2010. "We are there for you, and we are going to make sure that you get the resources that you need. You are not alone," she concluded.

During the visit, Chu and Assemblymember John Harabedian also met with the leadership of the Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School in Altadena, which tragically burned during the fires, to explore effective mechanisms for rebuilding and aid. Former California State Senator Anthony Portantino was also present, accompanying Harabedian to assist with the ongoing relief efforts.

"For anyone affected in the Armenian community, we are here for you," said Harabedian, who was recently elected to represent the area. "I want to thank everyone here; the volunteers, the ANCA—and if anyone is in need of anything, we are here to help." A Foothill native and a former Mayor of Sierra Madre, Harabedian's deep ties to the community underscore his commitment to supporting those impacted during this difficult time.

see RELIEF, page 8



California Assemblymember John Harabedian and former California State Senator Anthony Portantino

UCLA's Promise Institute To Host Conference on Preservation of Armenian Cultural Sites

LOS ANGELES — The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, in collaboration with the Fowler Museum at UCLA, is planning to hold an all-day conference on the protection and preservation of Armenian cultural heritage sites titled, "Armenian Cultural Heritage: Past, Present, and the Future," on Saturday, February 8, from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. (Pacific Time) at the Lenart Auditorium in the UCLA Fowler Museum.

This conference will bring together a diverse group of experts to delve into the rich Armenian cultural heritage of the South Caucasus and present-day Eastern Turkey.

The event will feature discussions on the current state of these heritage sites, their preservation efforts, and initiatives to monitor, document, and protect them amidst a challenging geopolitical landscape. Experts will also explore the future of cultural heritage studies, offering valuable insights and strategies for safeguarding this vital legacy.

"As the global Armenian Community continues to face destruction and loss of its heritage and culturally significant sites, from Turkey and Artsakh to Syria and Lebanon, it is absolutely crucial to have these conversations regarding documentation, monitoring, and safeguarding of this heritage. A great many of these physical sites are hundreds of years old, some well over 1000 years old, and are a critical part of the long history of the Armenian people," stated Professor Ann Karagozian, director of the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute. "In Southern California we have recently experienced extraordinary losses due to unprecedented firestorms, including material losses for many in our local Armenian-American community. What scholars locally are calling the 'mass erasure of heritage' refers to historic Southern California landmarks that are in most cases around 100 years old. It is thus all the more important for us to document the loss, and in many cases, purposeful destruction, of the cultural heritage of an entire people."

Registration for this event is required and free. To learn more and RSVP, visit bit.ly/PAI02-08-25.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided. Registration will begin at 8 a.m. and the conference will start at 9 a.m. sharp. It is anticipated that the conference will be live-streamed on the Promise Armenian Institute's YouTube Channel.

This event is co-sponsored by the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, the UCLA Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History, the UCLA Narekatsi Chair in Armenian Studies, the UCLA Promise Chair in Armenian Music, Arts, and Culture, the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA Law, the UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research NAASR, the Ararat-Eskijian Museum, and the UCLA Armenian Students' Association.



OBITUARY

Hirant Gulian (1948-2025)

Active Member of New York Community

NEW YORK — Hirant Gulian, an active member of the New York Armenian community, passed away on January 13, 2025. He was 76.

With profound sorrow, the Eastern Diocese mourns the loss of Hirant Gulian, a lifelong servant of the Armenian Church and an indispensable figure in our community life for the past half-century, who passed away on January 13, 2025. He was 76.

Born in Dikranagerd to Gazaros and Samiran Gulian, Hirant grew up in Istanbul, where he attended Armenian school and served on the altar at the city's Sts. Vartanants Church.

As a boy he began his apprenticeship under the jewelers Ohaness and Varujan Bahar, under whose tutelage he acquired his foundation in jewelry craftsmanship. At the age of 18, Hirant left Istanbul to begin a new life in America, settling in New York. His parents and siblings — Agop, Yervant and Mary — joined him soon after.

Hirant quickly immersed himself in Ar-

menian community life, joining the Gomidas Choir (in which he sang during the consecration of St. Vartan Cathedral) and the Diocesan drama society pioneered by Dr. Nishan Parlakian and Jack Antreassian.

In the ensuing decades, the name and reputation of Hirant Gulian became known to everyone familiar with Armenian life. Every major Armenian institution, and numerous smaller ones, benefited from his dedication and leadership. These included Holy Echmiadzin; the Eastern Diocese; St. Leon Church; AGBU; Hye Doon; the Karabagh Committee; the Armenian-American Sport and Educational Center; the Armenian Radio Hour; various Armenian schools and youth groups; the Bolsa-Hye organizations; St. Giragos Church in Dikranakerd — among countless others.

He had a deep and abiding relationship with the Knights and Daughters of Vartan. It was among the Knights that Hirant found mentors for his early activism; and where, later, he would be recognized as an exem-

plary and visionary leader. In the 1980s, Hirant and his fellow Knight, the late Sam Azadian, led the pioneering committee that organized the first commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in Times Square.

More generally, Hirant was a highly respected deacon of the church; a devoted servant of the Armenian heritage; a patriot both to his adopted land of the United States and to his ancestral homeland of Armenia; a civic leader and advocate for justice; an honored businessman; and a beloved friend to countless individuals.

In his professional life as a jeweler, Hirant was known for bringing beauty and elegance into the world. But his most beautiful contributions in life came from his personal warmth, his generous heart, his gracious demeanor, and his genuine humility before God. These are the qualities that his friends and admirers will always fondly remember; they were the virtues that made Hirant beloved by all who knew him.

Even more touching were Hirant's numerous acts of personal kindness and generosity — acts performed without any public fanfare, but simply for the sake of doing a good turn for another human being. It was a blessing to know such a man, and our community will always owe Hirant a



profound debt of gratitude.

He leaves his wife Ruby, and their children Anoush and Haig. May God grant them consolation in this time of grief.

Visitation hours were held at St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral (630 Second Avenue, New York City) on Monday, January 20.

The funeral service took place at St. Vartan Cathedral on Tuesday, January 21. Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan presided and delivered the eulogy. Burial followed at Cedar Grove Cemetery (130-04 Horace Harding Expy., Flushing, NY).

Ara Belian

Dedicated Armenian of Michigan

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. — Ara Garabed Belian passed away on January 14, 2025. He was born on June 19, 1971, in Detroit. As the eldest of three siblings, he shared a close bond with his sister, Lisa and younger brother, Raffi. Ara graduated from Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills in 1989 and also completed his studies at St. John Armenian Church Sunday School. He was 53.

He pursued higher education at Wayne State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in art history. A few years later, he returned to obtain a second bachelor's degree in accounting, exemplifying his diverse interests and intellectual curiosity.

Ara was deeply rooted in his Armenian heritage and a dedicated member of St. John Armenian Church. His service extended across several organizations, where he



made a lasting impact. He was a respected chairman of the Men's Society and served as treasurer for both the Fine Arts Committee and the Tekeyan Cultural Association for several years. His contributions earned him numerous awards in recognition of his dedication and service to the community. Additionally, Ara lent his voice to the Gomidas Choir. His love for his church and community was profound, reflecting his deep pride in his cultural heritage.

Ara was passionate about travel and cherished the opportunity to immerse himself in different cultures. His most treasured journeys, however, were to his ancestral homeland of Armenia. During one memorable trip, he volunteered with Habitat for Humanity in Ijevan, helping construct homes and building lasting relationships. Ara's connection to Armenia extended beyond its

capital, Yerevan, to the small villages and communities he came to love.

An avid supporter of the arts, Ara served as the accountant for a startup organization called Imaginos Workshop. This venture, dedicated to creating comic books, short films, and even a feature film, was a source of great pride for him. Beyond his contributions as a member of the team, Ara became involved in drawing, writing, and acting, forging deep friendships with fellow creatives from diverse backgrounds.

Ara also excelled in his role as an uncle. His nieces and nephews adored him for his playful spirit and ability to connect with them as if he were their peer. His presence brought joy and laughter, and his absence will be profoundly felt.

A man of many talents and interests,

Ara's kindness, generosity, and vibrant spirit touched all who knew him. He saw only the good in people and situations, embodying a rare purity of heart.

Ara was a dreamer with a heart of gold, and his legacy inspires us to lead lives of compassion, creativity, and love. May we honor his memory by following the example he set — living with kindness, dreaming without limits, and always cherishing the simple beauty in life.

Visitation and the funeral service took place on Tuesday, January 21, at St. John Armenian Church. Interment took place afterwards at White Chapel Cemetery in Troy.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. John Armenian Church or to the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF).

Eaton Canyon Fire Relief Efforts Are Underway

RELIEF, from page 7

Altadena, an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, was devastated by the Eaton Fire. The disaster has impacted this multi-class, diverse neighborhood, which is home to a significant Armenian-American community, including Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School. In addition to the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian School, Zorthian Ranch, a community history landmark dedicated to renowned artist Jirayr Zorthian was also a casualty to the fire.

"This is the place to come if you need help," said Senator Perez, who was recently elected to represent the district. "I really want to thank these folks and the ANCA for doing such incredible work to make this happen, and to really take care of our community during these challenging times." Senator Perez, who previously served as the Mayor of Alhambra, was recently elected to serve California State Senate District 25, which covers the area hardest hit by the Eaton Canyon Fire.

"This heartwarming outpouring of un-

conditional support is a true testament to the power of the Armenian-American community," said Oshin Harootyan, Chair of the ANCA-WR Board of Directors. "It is only through the united efforts and dedication of organizations like the AYF and so many others that this well-organized relief effort has been so successful."

As of January 16, the Jivalagian Youth Center closed its in-person relief operations, after the outpouring of support and donations from the community yielded a massive package of goods to be dispersed among the displaced. While physical operations are concluding, impacted community members can continue to access assistance through the Jivalagian Youth Center's disaster relief hotline, which offers comprehensive services, including Armenian language support from 10:00 AM to midnight daily. The hotline is available to assist with a wide range of relief efforts, including guidance on FEMA disaster claims and related needs.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Holy Trinity Celebrates 100th Anniversary with Grand Gala

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — On a historic evening, Holy Trinity Armenian Church celebrated its 100th anniversary milestone with a gala that brought the community together in a grand way. The night was filled with heartfelt speeches, including one from the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, who was in attendance to join in on the celebration. Speakers shared stories of the Church’s rich history and its profound impact on generations of families and offering encouragement for the future ahead. A toast was raised in honor of the century of faith, fellowship, and service, marking a significant chapter in the life of the parish.

The evening continued with big smiles, warmth, and excitement as guests danced through the hall to the upbeat rhythms of Armenian music, expertly played by the Yerakouyn Band and DJ Rams. It was impossible not to be swept away by the energy in the room as everyone of all ages danced to familiar and favorite music.

Guests were also treated to a delicious meal, featuring a curated selection of gourmet foods, offering something for every taste. And as for the cake, guests gathered around to see their beloved Holy Trinity Church recreated in the form of a cake; it was certainly the sweetest part of the night.



Serena Williams’ Husband Alexis Ohanian Opens Up on Daunting Realities of Fatherhood

By Tanisha Kapoor

LOS ANGELES (Essentially Sports) — Serena Williams’ husband Alexis Ohanian wears many hats, and he wears them well. From advocating for female athletes to investing in groundbreaking ventures, he’s doing it all. However, there is one role that Ohanian plays most proudly. And that’s of being a father. Whether it is whipping up pancakes or turning into a caddy on the golf course, his little girls have him wrapped around their fingers. And he has now shared another glimpse of his fatherly duties. This one really proves that no matter how big your achievements are, kids always find a way to keep you grounded.

Ohanian and Serena Williams’ story is nothing short of a fairytale. They first crossed paths in Rome in 2015. They got engaged in 2016 and welcomed their first child in September 2017. Just two months later, the couple tied the knot in a glamorous wedding that had all the makings of a Hollywood movie. In August 2023, the family welcomed their second daughter, Adira. With Olympia and Adira in the picture, the Williams-Ohanian household is as vibrant as ever.

Serena and Ohanian often give their fans a glimpse into their lives via social media. Ohanian recently shared a hilarious fatherhood snapshot in an Instagram story, wearing a chocolate-stained T-shirt. He

wrote, “I take @olympiaohanian for gelato and she still uses me as the napkin smh.” If you’re a parent, you know the feeling all too well.

Ohanian also shared his daughter’s beautiful play-dough creation on X. He

the sport, and her dad has been right by her side. It’s no surprise then that Alexis Ohanian was one of the first investors in the TGL, a golf league founded in 2022 by Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy.

The TGL isn’t just another business ven-



Alexis Ohanian with his daughter Olympia

Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter

Valentine's SOIREE

Guest Singer Angelina Nazarian

A fun night out

Marina Margarian Armenuhi Hovakimian

Piano Violin

Dining, Wine and Music

February 1, Saturday, at the Baikar Center

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

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

Flyer design modified from Freepik.com

humorously dubbed the art piece, “Candy City” and proudly showed off her daughter’s talents.

The Reddit co-founder is an extremely dedicated father. In an interview he had revealed how fatherhood had changed his perspective on life. “I have this family that I know is going to be my actual legacy, and it puts into perspective how important those moments with my family are. My family is what I am actually going to be remembered for by the people I actually care about. I don’t think this makes us any less competitive,” Ohanian had said in a conversation with CNN in 2022.

Continuing further, he added, “If anything, I think I’ve gotten more competitive since becoming a father. But I look at all of my decisions through this lens of I’m having a future conversation with my kid, and I want her to be super proud of what I did, the decisions I made, the stakes of which are now the stakes of my legacy.”

That’s how he made an investment decision related to golf. Their daughter, Olympia has shown a budding interest in

ture for Alexis Ohanian. He co-owns the LAGC team alongside Serena, Venus Williams, and a few others. The connection to golf feels deeply personal for the family.

Speaking about the investment, Ohanian said, “To wit, my wife Serena [Williams] and I have enjoyed as Olympia’s taken a liking to golf. This is another piece of the legacy I’m building for my family and I hope this team can become a part of many families’ lives, too.”

Serena Williams was also seen supporting the LAGC at TGL on 14th January as her team played against Jupiter Links GC. She also shared how her daughter loves golf in an interview with ESPN. The American veteran said, “My daughter plays golf. One was playing, and one was rolling around on her back, I am not kidding.”

From hilarious gelato outings to ambitious investments in golf, Alexis Ohanian and Serena Williams show that family and success go hand in hand. As Olympia grows up surrounded by such inspiration, the big question remains: will she become a star in tennis, golf, or something entirely new?



COMMUNITY NEWS

AGBU Center Offers Space to Sahag-Mesrob School Students in Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES — In the wake of a catastrophic wildfire that destroyed the Pasadena campus of Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School, up to 190 students from Kindergarten through 8th grade will temporarily relocate to the AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Cultural Center, just four miles from the original school campus. It will serve as a vital bridge to recovery for the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School community in the months ahead.

AGBU Central Board, working with leadership of the AGBU Western Region on the ground, moved immediately to offer the use of the AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Cultural Center through the end of the 2025-2026 school year. This extended period will allow the school to regroup and rebuild while ensuring minimal disruption to academic instruction for the year.

The wildfires, which ravaged towns and communities in LA County, spread to the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School campus on January 8, leaving nothing intact except a khachkar (Armenian cross-stone) that symbolically endures as a beacon of faith and resilience. Despite the devastation, the school remains steadfast in its mission to offer a Christ-centered education rooted in Armenian religious and cultural heritage while pursuing academic excellence.

The Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School was established in 1980, serving students from pre-school to 8th grade. Recently, it underwent a major renovation of its facilities, including a new roof.

“As soon as we heard that the school had perished, we knew we had to step in and lend support,” stated AGBU Western Region Chair Kevork Zoryan. “While we are on edge with the regional fires, not-know-



Before and after shots of the Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School, which burned down during the horrific fires in the Los Angeles area.

ing where the next emergency will arise, we know that, as AGBU, we cannot sit idle. We reached out to our friends at Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School within the early moments of this tragedy to assure them that they can count on us for support,” he added.

In a public statement, the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School board affirmed its determination to rebuild, and its Chair Arlin Titanian expressed profound gratitude to AGBU for the partnership it forged literally overnight.

“It’s rare to encounter such a strong and compassionate partner, and AGBU’s com-



mitment to supporting us has not gone unnoticed. We are incredibly fortunate to have you by our side; in unity is strength,” said Titanian.

In addition to welcoming the students with open arms, AGBU has already do-

nated \$50,000 each to the American Red Cross and the World Central Kitchen to support their initial relief efforts. Grass-roots outreach is under way, keeping in mind the importance of public safety and the wellbeing of all.

AGBU President Sam Simonian noted, “It is times like these when humanity is put to the test. AGBU and its members always rise to serve, and we are pleased to be able to offer this solace for the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School community. The AGBU Central Board will continue to coordinate with the AGBU Western Region leadership and on-the-ground volunteers to provide support to those in need. We will keep the public updated on our progress as we work together to recover from the great upheaval that has befallen the county of Los Angeles and its residents.”



The Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School burned down during the horrific fires in the area. Further above, pictures of classrooms before



Tekeyan Cultural Association
Boston Chapter
presents

“Remnants”: Armenian Genocide
April 11 Lecture

How the Ottoman Armenian communal body was dismembered, disfigured, and later re-membered by the survivor community, tracing the histories of women and children rescued during and after the war



with author Elyse Semerdjian

holder of the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University, Worcester,

7 p.m. Friday at the Baikar Center

755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA

(use Norseman Ave. entrance). Free admission. Book signing. Email for info: syogurtian@comcast.net

AMAA Christmas Message Reaches Over 10,000 Children in Armenia

PARAMUS, N.J. —Each year, with the support of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) and in collaboration with the Evangelical Church of Armenia (ECA), Christmas joy is spread to thousands of children in Armenia.

The AMAA’s 2025 Christmas Joy Programs were held this year from December 21, 2024, to January 12, 2025. Thousands of children, youth, and adults in different parts of Armenia were presented with an important message, mainly through theatrical performances: the joy of Christmas, calls for change and transformation of the environment, making it more peaceful, harmonious, and bright.

Twenty-two churches of the ECA throughout Armenia prepared Christmas Joy Programs. In 20 of them, the play “Hand in Hand” was staged. Zohrab Bekian wrote the play based on Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you.” The ECA’s Christian Education team spared no effort to present the Gospel of the Nativity of Christ in the most accessible, beautiful, and unique way possible. Special attention was paid to the idea that love, and forgiveness can unite people and contribute to positive changes.

As part of the Christmas Joy Programs, 3,200 children and teenagers from Yerevan, Ayntap, and Abovyan gathered at the Hakob Paronyan Theater in Yerevan to watch the play “One Good Deed,” directed by scriptwriter Nune Abrahamyan. For two days, the audience enjoyed the play



AMAA Christmas Joy Program in Yerevan

with professional actors and children from the “Hayasa” theater group in several shifts and learned that one good deed can be contagious and become an occasion for new

ones. The performance concluded with the 6th chapter of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians, verse 9: “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

More than 10,000 children in 42 locations in Armenia, including 22 border villages, heard, saw, and enjoyed the message of God’s love and Christmas.

All events concluded with a festive surprise. The children took home a small bag of Christmas Joy package, wrapped with warmth and love.

“It is so heartwarming to see so many happy children. A smile on a child’s face is indeed one of the most priceless things



AMAA Christmas Joy Program in Vanadzor

in the world,” said Serge D. Buchakjian, AMAA’s newly appointed CEO/Executive Director.



AMAA Christmas Joy Program in Berd



AMAA Christmas Joy Program in Sisian



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”

POSTPONED

JANUARY 26, 2025
5:00 PM



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SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER
HIS EXCELLENCY ARMEN MELKONIAN
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Arts & Culture

Musicians Delight International, Local Audience In Wiesbaden Concert to Benefit Mirak-Weissbach Foundation

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WIESBADEN, Germany — A benefit concert took place here on Sunday, January 12, to raise funds for projects supporting Armenian refugees from Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). The venue was the Anglican Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury in Hessen's state capital. More than a benefit concert, it turned out to be an intercultural gathering, bringing together members of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, who shared the beauty of music from Armenia, Europe, and America.

This was the first such benefit concert that the Mirak-Weissbach Foundation, with the sponsorship of the John Mirak Foundation, had orga-



Lusine Arakelyan (Armen Stepanian photo)

nized. Of all the rooms available for such events, we chose the Anglican church, which hosts concerts regularly. Its imposing structure, built in 1865, with high vaulted ceilings, graced by neo-gothic arches mounted on columns along the nave and side aisles, accounts for its excellent acoustics, and a Bechstein concert grand piano, recently refurbished, make it a sought-after location for musicians. In addition, the church, its rector, and parishioners are noted for their inclusiveness and warm hospitality.

Three prominent young Armenian musicians agreed to perform for the concert, soprano Lusine Arakelyan, bass-baritone Hovhannes Karapetyan, and pianist Diana Sahakyan. Both Arakelyan and Karapetyan completed voice training at the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan. She continued her studies at the Berlin University of the Arts, and Bavarian Opera Academy, and has held solo concerts in Armenia and abroad, also appearing in international music festivals.

Karapetyan, while still at the Conservatory in Yerevan, sang the title role in student productions of "Don Pasquale" as well as Leporello in

see CONCERT, page 16



Movie Based on Armenian Family Escaping Azerbaijan to Be Released Nationwide on January 26

LOS ANGELES — "Between Borders," a movie based on the real-life story of Ivan and Violetta Petrosyan will be released in theaters nationwide for only three days only — January 26-28.

"Between Borders" centers on Ivan and Violetta Petrosyan, who, in a crumbling Soviet Union, are outcasts wherever they go. Armenian heritage marks them for discrimination both at home in Azerbaijan and in Russia. The film is based on a riveting true story of faith and hope set amidst great oppression in the shadow of exile.

The film stars Elizabeth Tabish, who is of Armenian descent, known for her portrayal of Mary Magdalene in "The Chosen." Tabish has had notable appearances in the series "The Son and the Seducer" and the films "The Shift," "Christmas with the Chosen: The Messengers" and the recently released "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever."

Based on real events that took place in the late 1980s during the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which created hundreds of thousands of refugees, "Between Borders" follows the perilous journey of Violetta (Tabish) and Ivan Petrosyan (Patrick Sabongui), and their two young daughters, and the challenges they face in their search for a place to call home, and aims to capture the desperation and resilience at the heart of the refugee experience.

see FILM, page 16



From left to right: Ivan, Olga, Julia, and Violetta Petrosyan. | Credit: Photo courtesy of the Petrosyan family

'Unwittingly Preserved for Over 100 years: Letters Of Survival' by Dr. Talin Suciyan

FRESNO — Dr. Talar Suciyan will give a presentation on "Unwittingly Preserved for Over 100 years: Letters of Survival" on Friday, January 31, at 7 p.m., in the Smittcamp Alumni House (2625 E. Matoian Way), on the Fresno State campus.

Suciyan was appointed as Kazan Viiting Professor in Armenian Studies for the Spring 2025 semester and will be giving a three-part lecture series concentrating on the family archives of Armenian Genocide survivors.

This lecture will introduce the content and context of letters sent from Istanbul in the fall of 1922 by Sourpik (Surpouhi) Tekian to her daughter Tacouhi in the United States. Originally from Angora, the Catholic Armenian Tekian family had been exiled to Istanbul as a result of the Armenian Genocide. Sourpik Tekian's letters were written at a pivotal moment, the fall of 1922, which marked the end of the Ottoman Empire and held deep repercussions for the remaining Armenians in Istanbul. Her letters are a rare source



Dr. Talin Suciyan

detailing everyday life in that period, making visible new temporal layers and routines of the day, enabling us to write a history from the perspective of a female survivor of the Armenian Genocide. In Sourpik's letters, the dilemma of having been left behind in a purgatory, stuck between a former annihilated life and a new unknown one of perpetual exile, is clearly present.

Suciyan was born and raised in Istanbul. After graduating from the University of Istanbul, she continued her studies in Germany, where she obtained her doctorate. Based in Munich, she has been teaching and researching at the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Munich for more than 15 years. She is the author of *Outcasting Armenians: Tanzimat of the Provinces* (Syracuse University Press, 2023) and *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, History and Politics* (I. B. Tauris, 2016). Her research focuses on Armenians in the Middle East and Mediterranean. Her areas of interests are colonialism, histories of the autochthonous populations, medicine, peasantry and temporality.

The lecture is free and open to the public.

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



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Chef George Mardikian, greeting a customer at Omar Khayyam's restaurant, May 1945, San Francisco. Photo: Peter Stackpole

George Mardikian's Favorite Recipes

"Compiled especially for CONSUMER TIME listeners by San Francisco's famous chef. Mr. George Mardikian recently made a guest appearance on CONSUMER TIME, in cooperation with the War Food Administration's programs for effective use of our food supply. The Armenian-born chef specializes in preparing delicious, unusual dishes, with the most economical use of foods...and has consented to pass on to homemakers some of his food-saving hints, and favorite recipes."

A survivor of the Armenian Genocide, George Mardikian (1903–1977) was an Armenian-American restaurateur, chef, author and philanthropist who escaped a prison labor camp by pretending to be a U.S. citizen. He later said, "I became an American before I became an American," and remained earnestly faithful to his new home.

Mardikian was born on November 7, 1903, in Bayburt, in what was then the Ottoman Empire (now Turkey), to Magar Mardikian and Haiganoush Amirian. Mardikian's father, Magar, was of one of the approximately 250 ethnic-Armenian intellectuals and community leaders arrested on April 24, 1915, known as Red Sunday. After his arrest, the Amirians were driven out of their homes and marched to Erzincan. Mardikian's maternal grandmother, Vartanoush Amirian, committed suicide by jumping in the Euphrates, while the rest of the Amirian family was either beaten to death or burned alive. Witnessing the massacre of his mother's side of his family, Mardikian wanted to avenge their deaths and prove to his mother that he was a true warrior. As a result of his ambition, Mardikian ran away from his home and joined the Armenian volunteer units, in which his uncle, Krikor Amirian, was a high-ranking member. After the First World War ended, Mardikian returned to his mother as a war hero.

After reaching Ellis Island on July 24, 1922, he took a train cross-country to San Francisco, eating only potato salad along the way for eight days, since—he claimed—it was the only item he could identify on the menu. It wasn't even good potato salad, he reported, but he did discover a passion for showing Americans how to eat well and economically, even during the scarcity of the Great Depression and the rationing of World War II.

In 1942, Mardikian was appointed as a food consultant to the Quartermaster General of the United States Army, a position that he would hold until 1954. GIs everywhere are grateful to Mardikian for improving the quality of their meals. The Reader's Digest has conferred the title "Champion of G.I. Chow." Mardik-

WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON 25. D. C.
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Date: 2/9/1945

ian would receive presidential commendations for the drastic changes that he made to the United States military. In 1944, he published a cook book, *Dinner at Omar Khayyam's*, that was reprinted numerous times over the next two decades.

Dinner at Omar Khayyam's was Mardikian's ode to what made him and his San Francisco restaurant so celebrated—simple Armenian food, frugally and healthfully prepared with the American palate in mind. Vegetables, both fresh and traditionally pickled, play a prominent role. Other recipes include havabour—wedding soup—and Chicken Tchakhokbelli—a Georgian preparation with paprika and sherry that Mardikian favors as the only way to do justice to the bird. There are piroshki, desserts—such as a festive, citrusy plum pudding—and many traditional breads including the flatbread lavash and a variety of breakfast loaves known as gatahs.

During World War II, dignitaries such as first lady Eleanor Roosevelt often dropped by with service members, whom he personally served for free. He served 210 wounded soldiers from Bay Area hospitals on Thanksgiving 1943 alone. That paled in contrast to the amount of feeding he did during the signing of the United Nations charter in San Francisco in 1945. For nine weeks, 282 delegates from 50 nations, plus their staff, ate food he catered for free in the basement of the Opera House. According to the Life article, that was almost 2,000 meals in three hours, five times a week, with 500 members of the American Women's Voluntary Services helping.

According to the Life article, Mardikian told a Turkish United Nations delegation member eating his food, "A few years ago my greatest joy would have been to put poison in your eggplant just because you are a Turk. But now that I am an American I feel no animosity."

Mardikian took his culinary skills abroad as a food consultant for the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1954. After the end of WWII he found many displaced Armenian families throughout Europe and convinced and helped more than 5,000 to immigrate to the United States by forming the American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA).

In 1951, Mardikian was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Harry S. Truman for his work as a consultant to the Quartermaster General of the United States Army. A portion of the citation reads, "With vigorous energy, keen powers of observation and analysis and a dynamic personality, he enlisted the enthusiastic interest of commanders and soldiers alike in the preparation and service of food under varying conditions in the combat zone." Later that year, Mardikian would appoint his uncle as his chief Armenian typist and Soghomon Tehlirian as his assistant.

In 1976 Mardikian was honored by Presidents Nixon and Ford during the Bicentennial Fourth of July Commemorations for his sincere devotion to the United States and his great contributions to the greatness of the American democracy. In 1977 he was honored during the ceremonies for the opening of the Ellis Island Museum with five other prominent Americans who first saw the U.S. from the island.

It is said that George Mardikian's recipe for a good life has three basic ingredients: belief in yourself, belief in your country and, most important, belief in God. Combine everything and back it up with hard work and a sense of humor – you can't miss.

The San Francisco Chronicle's obituary for Mardikian said, "He liked to tell army mess sergeants that they were competing with every soldier's mother and that they had better use their wits to convert a slice of Spam into something more appetizing and attractive." So concerned was Mardikian with conserving food during World War II, he issued 10% refunds to diners in war stamps if they would simply clean their plates.

George Mardikian's final resting place is at Ararat Armenian Cemetery in Fresno. His wife Nazenig, his brother Archie and sister-in-law Minnie, and nephew Gregory are buried with him in the Mardikian family lot. Established in 1885, the cemetery is the burial place of many prominent figures of Armenian-American history, including Soghomon Tehlirian, Victor Maghakian, and William Saroyan.

"He was a great force of nature, with boundless energy," said his son Haig Mardikian. "I literally don't think this man slept."

Here are some of George Mardikian's favorite recipes featured at the United States War Food Administration website from February 1945:

Potato Salad

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound fresh potatoes
- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- White pepper, to taste
- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 pimiento (chopped finely) or cherry pepper
- About 2 cups mayonnaise, to taste
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley

PREPARATION:

Boil potatoes in skins. When potatoes are cool, peel and cut in quarters. Then slice or dice. Add vinegar, mix well, and let soak. Slice onion and sprinkle salt over it. Then squeeze out all the juice and wash salt away with cold water. Mix onion with the potatoes, add the pimiento, eggs, salt and pepper, parsley and mayonnaise. Mix well and chill in the refrigerator for some time before serving.

Kouzou Kzartma (roast shank of lamb)

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 lamb shanks
- 4 large pieces of potato
- 2 tomatoes, quartered or 1 cup tomato puree
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2 cups water



ARTS & CULTURE

PREPARATION:

Wash the lamb shanks well and let it stand in clean water for at least 15 minutes. Place lamb in an open roasting pan; add tomatoes, salt, paprika and water. Cook for half an hour at 375°F. Turn meat over and cook for another half hour. Now add the potatoes to the same pan and roast with the lamb shanks for 30 minutes, then turn both potatoes and meat and let cook for another 30 minutes. Meat should cook for at least 2 hours altogether. Serve with its own juice as gravy.

Victory Garden Meal

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound parsnips or celery root, shredded
- 1 pound carrots, shredded
- 1 pound potatoes, shredded
- 1 cup chopped parsley
- 2 cups sliced onions
- 1 cup peanut or olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Bell peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes to stuff
- 2 cups tomato puree or sauce, to taste

Preparation:

Sauté onions in oil for 15 minutes. Then add shredded carrots, parsnips or celery root and cook for 15 minutes. Add shredded potatoes, parsley, salt and pepper, and cook until partly done. Stuff this vegetable mixture into the prepared peppers, eggplants or tomatoes or a combination of the three and set in a baking pan. Pour the puree or sauce on top and bake for 30 or 40 minutes. If there are leftovers, they are equally tasty when served cold for luncheon the following day.

Omar Khayyam’s Spinach Salad

Remove stems from raw spinach. Wash very well in cold water. To help remove sand and grit add 1 teaspoon of baking soda to the water in which you wash it. Drain spinach well and cut into strips 1-inch wide. Season with salad oil and lemon juice and chill. When ready to serve add hard-boiled eggs (chopped) and garnish with tomatoes and asparagus. Serve with the following dressing.

Omar’s Dressing

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 7 cups catsup
- 1 pint salad oil
- 1 cup vinegar
- 2/3 cups warm water

PREPARATION:

Mix all ingredients except the oil, vinegar and water in a mixing bowl that has been rubbed with a clove of garlic. Stir ingredients into a smooth paste. Add the oil slowly alternating with the vinegar. Beat with an electric mixer into a thick dressing, adding the warm water slowly. Cover and keep in a cool place.

Bean Plaki

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound white dry beans
- 1 cup diced potatoes
- 1 cup diced carrots
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 1-2 cups chopped parsley
- 2 cups tomatoes
- 1 cup olive oil or peanut oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped finely
- Salt and pepper, to taste

PREPARATION:

Soak the beans overnight. Wash them and cook in fresh water in a large pot. After cooking beans for 1 hour, add all other ingredients and cook for 1 hour more. Serve hot as a main dish in stew bowls, or serve cold, as a salad, on a lettuce leaf with a slice of fresh lemon.

Stuffed Rolled Cabbage Leaves

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 green cabbage, medium-size
- 1 pound ground meat (lamb)
- 1 pound onions, chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1 cup rice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Black pepper, to taste
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 cup tomato puree or sauce
- 1 teaspoon dried mint or tarragon

PREPARATION:

Rinse the cabbage clean, then immerse it in a large pot of boiling water and cook it for 4-5 minutes until leaves are soft and pliable, but not overly soft.

Cut cabbage leaves into almost 6-inch squares. Mix well meat, onions, parsley, rice, pepper, juice of 1 lemon, mint or tarragon, and 1 teaspoon salt, and make into a stuffing. Put about one or two teaspoons of stuffing into cabbage leaves and roll like a long round package, say about 3 inches long, and 1 inch thick. Place in rows in a baking or cooking pot, add salt and 1 cup of tomato puree or sauce, and cover with water. Cover the pan and bake in the oven at 350°F or cook on the stove until the rice is cooked. Cook for at least 1 hour. Check rice to ensure it is cooked. Serve hot.

Gregorian Cocktail

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups catsup
- 1 cup pickled relish
- 1 cup broiled and mixed chopped green peppers
- 1 medium onion and 1 tomato
- 6 dashes Tabasco sauce
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/6 teaspoon white or black pepper
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh or dried mint
- 7 cups juice of pickled grape leaves

PREPARATION:

Broil vegetables (I really mean broil either over charcoal or on the gas broiler), and chop very finely. Mix all ingredients in a large bowl and chill. Keep covered in the refrigerator. When serving, cover top of this dish with chopped walnuts.

Dziranov Havgit (Eggs with Apricots)

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 eggs
- 1 large can apricots or 2 cups cooked dried apricots
- 1 cup butter

PREPARATION:

Drain off the juice and put apricots through a sieve. Pour pulp into a preheated buttered pan and simmer. Beat the eggs thoroughly and add to the apricots, stirring constantly so that eggs will not lump. Serve at once on hot plates with rice pilaf.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library. Compiled especially for CONSUMER TIME listeners by San Francisco’s famous chef, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library.

For these recipes, go to: https://archive.org/stream/CAT31071178/CAT31071178_djvu.txt

Some of these recipes were formerly posted on: www.lostrecipesfound.com

Dinner at Omar Khayyam’s Hardcover – April 14, 2020 by George Mardikian (Author). America’s ‘best known and best loved’ chef ran a world-famous Armenian restaurant in San Francisco. This is a new edition of the 1944 classic by George Mardikian, America’s first celebrity chef.

From the Foreword of this 150-page book, William Saroyan said, “It is a prize package of a book, but it is more than a cookbook. It is the smiling chef himself -- the generous-hearted, enthusiastic, easygoing George Mardikian himself talking to you, just as he does in his famous restaurant, Omar Khayyam’s. When George Mardikian came to San Francisco to open his famous restaurant, Omar Khayyam’s, he was well aware that he followed an ancient and honorable tradition. George had taken pains to study the record, to examine the growth of American cookery in general and most especially California’s and San Francisco’s contribution to the tradition. What George really wants in this book is to tell you something of how he cooks the food that has won his restaurant in San Francisco a secure place in a city famous for providing gustatory pleasures.”

Order at Sophene Books: <https://sophenebooks.com/collections/books/products/dinner-at-omar-khayyams>

Order at Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Dinner-Omar-Khayyams-George-Mardikian/dp/1925937313>

REFERENCES:

For George Mardikian’s “Havabour” or “Wedding Soup,” go to: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/my-dinner-at-omar-khayyams/>

See: https://armeniapedia.org/wiki/George_Mardikian

See: Remarkable Armenians at: <https://www.remarkablearmenians.com/blog/george-mardikian>

See: <https://horatioalger.org/members/detail/george-m-mardikian/>

See: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/posts/how-george-mardikian-introduced-middle-eastern-food-to-americafor-over-50-years-/10156251618170794/>

See: <https://www.diningindiaspora.com/stories/2017/8/11/the-life-and-times-of-george-mardikian>

See: <https://www.sfgate.com/food/article/America-s-best-known-and-best-loved-chef-ran-16347392.php>

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Musicians Delight Audience in Wiesbaden Concert to Benefit Mirak-Weissbach Foundation

CONCERT, from page 13

“Don Giovanni.” He continued his training at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he performed as Argenio in Händel’s “Imeneo,” Trulove in “The Rake’s Progress” and Figaro in “Le nozze di Figaro.” Among the numerous awards he has received are the special prize at the Tatevik Sazandaryan Singing Competition, second prize at the Nodar Andguladze competition in Tbilisi, and first prize at the Lusine Zakaryan Competition. In the current 2024-2025 season, he is an ensemble member of the Hessen State Theater in Wiesbaden and will debut in the title role of Doctor Bartolo in “The Barber of Seville” in March.

Sahakyan also started her music education in Yerevan and continued in Germany at the Frankfurt University for Music and the Performing Arts and at the Reina Sofia School of Music in Madrid. She has attended numerous master classes, won awards and is the founder and artistic director of the first Music Festival of Women Composers in Frankfurt. Her recordings of works by Fanny Hensel and Mel Bonis have contributed to acquainting a broader public with the outstanding works of lesser-known women composers.

An Opera Studio for Children

Rev. Christopher Easthill, rector of St. Augustine’s, welcomed the guests to his church, many of whom were there for the first time, and read greetings for us from the foundation. The program would present works from the European and Armenian opera and classical repertoire, as well as folk and modern music, also from America. The proceeds from the concert are earmarked to support a unique music project, an opera studio for children, which the singer and director Garen Garibyan launched in 2023.

Garibyan, who left his career in the US after Armenia’s independence to establish a music school in Karabakh, was forced twice to flee aggression, in 2020 and again in 2023, ultimately finding refuge in Armenia. Stranded in Nor Hachn, a small village north of Yerevan, he felt desperate. As he recounted in a message to the concert, “I gathered 30 to 35 children there and opened an Opera Studio at the music school and started classes — vocal exercises, selecting soloists, dancers, children’s choir, state sets — everything needed for staging a children’s opera.” He approached a mutual friend in Germany and together we raised funds, and sent him enough to start again from scratch. Garibyan was overwhelmed with gratitude: “And suddenly one morning I woke up and found out that God was sending help from Germany... The Mirak-Weissbach Foundation appeared to me in the form of an angel from Germany. Our music school and I thank you for helping our school.” The project took off in 2024, bringing hope to the young refugee musicians, who performed their first opera locally, in Yerevan, and in other cities.

Intercultural Musical Exchange

The evening opened with two Armenian works, Komitas’s *Alagyaz bardzr sarin* (On the high mountain Alagyaz) sung by Hovhannes Karapetyan and G. Chechyan’s

Aghavniner (Doves) presented by soprano Arakelyan. Both Komitas, venerated musicologist, clergyman, and composer, as well as this piece are familiar to most Armenians, but new to others in the audience.

For one German, herself an accomplished soprano, the song “swept me away, off through the boundless Armenian landscape, and I wish I could have sung along as well.”

The singers, both trained for the opera stage, then entered their element: Karapetyan followed with Rossini’s Aria by Don Magnifico from “La Cenerentola” and Rachmaninow’s Alekos Cavatina from “Aleko,” and Arakelyan returned with Rusalka’s Aria from Dvorak’s “Rusalka” and Arditi’s “Il Bacio” (The kiss). Both sang with rich, resonant voices, interpreting their roles with spirited character.

Sahakyan, who accompanied the singers, demonstrated her mastery of the keyboard and sensitive interpretation in three solo pieces: Schubert’s *Auf dem Wasser zu singen* (To sing on the water) in an arrangement by Franz Liszt, Chopin’s *Waltz op. 64 Nr. 2 C# minor*, and Babadjanyan’s *Vagharshapat Dance*.

During the short break, guests had a chance to taste the champagne and wine prepared by the parish’s organizing committee, and nods of approval accompanied enthusiastic comments. The brilliance of the vocalists was “remarkable,” said one, to which another rebutted, “And the pia-



Hovhannes Karapetyan (Armen Stepanian photo)

nist? Superb!” And, “What interesting music from Armenia!” The particular tonality and harmonies were intriguing, and, as one amateur musician remarked, “Armenian music seems to have a somewhat melancholic mood.”

The performers returned with more opera, but also jazz. Lusine Arakelyan sang Leonora’s Aria from Verdi’s “Il Trovatore,” the well-known “Granada” by A. Lara, and Silva’s Song from “Die Csárdásfürstin” (The Csardasz princess) by E. Kálmán. Karapetyan began with Davit Bek’s Aria from the opera of the same name by A. Tigranyan, then moved to American classics, and with a notable shift in interpretational approach, George Gershwin’s *Somebody Loves Me* and *Some Enchanted Evening* from “South Pacific” by R. Rogers. The response from the audience grew from delighted to enthusiastic. For their finale



Diana Sahakyan and Lusine Arakelyan (Armen Stepanian photo)

the two sang a duet by R. Amirkhanyan, *Karmir tsaghik me garuni* (The red flower of spring), whose warm lyrical quality offered a soothing denouement after the robust and dramatic operatic mood of earlier pieces.

Diversity in Universality

The audience was as varied as was the program. In addition to the helpers from the church who managed ticket sales and refreshments, many in the audience were members of the parish, people originally from the UK, or North America, or the Commonwealth countries now living in the Wiesbaden area. The church also hosts services of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and has recently launched a program to help integrate refugees from Ukraine. The concert may have introduced regular parishioners to Armenian music and musicians for the first time.

That was also the case for a second group of visitors made up of local German residents, music lovers who regularly attend concerts there. The leading local newspaper, *Wiesbadener Kurier*, ran a lottery for the concert, offering two pairs of free tickets to readers who signed up to compete. One of the couples who won, wrote in to express their thanks for the opportunity to enjoy “a wonderful evening with superb

artists in a cordial and warm atmosphere.” Another music enthusiast was impressed by the “wonderful, very special concert,” and added, “especially the Armenian songs kept lingering and echoing in my mind.”

The third group of visitors was comprised of diaspora Armenians from the tri-city Rhine-Main region, Frankfurt, Mainz, and Wiesbaden; members of their large and active local organizations, which also host concerts and dancing, turned out in significant numbers for the evening. Although there are no Armenian churches in their localities, diaspora Armenians from this region do have the opportunity to attend Armenian church services in Mainz and Frankfurt, where certain German churches open their doors once a month to Armenian priests and parishioners, as St. Augustine’s does for the Ethiopian Orthodox. For the Armenian guests this may have been their first visit to the Anglican Church, whose members welcomed them most cordially. One member of the organizing committee sent a note, saying “What an evening! Thank you for inviting your friends into our church,” while another wrote that she “really enjoyed the concert on Sunday and was happy to see that so many people had attended on such a cold evening!”

Movie Based on Family Escaping Azerbaijan to Be Released

FILM, from page 13

The film also stars Elizabeth Mitchell of “Lost” and Stan Mayer.

“If there ever was a film for Armenians everywhere to rally behind, this is that film,” said Armen Karaoghlanian, founder and CEO of the Armenian Film Society. “This is a film that will resonate with Armenians around the world, as well as anyone who has ever chased a dream.”

The film had its festival premiere at the 2024 Armenian Film Festival in September, where the Armenian community of Los Angeles had a first-look at the film. The cast and crew, including the film’s re-

al-life subjects Ivan and Violetta Petrosyan, joined the premiere for a Q&A.

Tickets are now available, and audiences are encouraged to purchase tickets in advance, which could help the film receive an extension beyond its three day theatrical run.

In addition, Armenian Film Society will be hosting a screening of the film on Sunday, January 26 at 5:30 p.m. at AMC Americana at Brand, followed by a Q&A with actress Elizabeth Tabish, director Mark Freiburger, and producer Ken Carpenter.

To purchase tickets or find out more about the movie, visit www.betweenbordersmovie.com.

ARTS & CULTURE

Svetlana Gulyan

A Life Writing on Film, on TV, on Rouben Mamoulian

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On January 14, in Yerevan, Svetlana Gulyan, film scholar and researcher at the Institute of Arts of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, passed away at the age of 86. She was a notable expert in world and Armenian cinema and television, and the author of a monograph on eminent American-Armenian stage and film director Ruben Mamoulian (*The Sign of Mamoulian*, 2015, in Russian).

Gulyan joined her beloved husband, historian and rare specialist in Arabic countries and the Armenian Genocide, Nikolay Hovhannisyan, who passed away on April 24 of last year.

I am sharing excerpts from my interview with my esteemed colleague and friend, conducted in 2018.

Dear Svetlana, there is an opinion that art historians are those who were unsuccessful in the art field themselves. Is this true in your case?

To some extent. I really wanted to become a director! But I understood that it is very difficult for women in this profession. I also wasn't particularly healthy. I gave up the idea of becoming a film director, but I couldn't give up cinema. And five years after graduating from the Russian philology faculty of Yerevan State University, I sat back down on the student bench, but this time at the film studies faculty of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow.

You were the first among Armenian women film scholars and one of the first professional Armenian film scholars with a VGIK diploma. What did your education at VGIK give you?

The profession of a film scholar. For five years, students of this university not only attend lectures on the history and theory of cinema, but the lectures are accompanied by film screenings on the subject. Often, we had to watch 4-5 films a day related to cinematography, directing, the work of artists in cinema and music in cinema. Many hours were dedicated to practical sessions at the film studio.

And if you had become a director, what kind of films would you have made?

I don't know. Different ones. I would have made detective films.

Which director do you feel is closest to you?

It's hard to say. There are many. I love the films of Visconti and Antonioni. I love the documentary films of Artavazd Peleshyan. I try not to miss the works of Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev.

When you write about a film, how many times do you watch it?

A lot. At least three times. I almost know the film by heart by the time I write about it.

You were the first in Armenia to engage in television theory. Years ago, one of our high-ranking television officials said, "Television is not culture."

How can that be? Television is exactly culture — the culture of communication, the culture of life, the culture of behavior.

But there is no television culture as such in Armenia.

Yes, that's true. Unfortunately. Television is primarily about programming. In world television, there is such a profession — programmer. This is a person who knows the place of each show in the schedule. A professional programmer arranges the shows not randomly, but according to a specific law. In our television, the concept of "programming culture" is not even considered. As for the quality of the shows, I won't even mention it. An intelligent, inter-

esting show in Armenian television, spoken in proper language, is a rare occurrence.

I remembered the words of Wim Wenders: "Television is useless, especially if you are doing something useful. Television is a disease. I feel sick when I switch channels. That's why I love films."

Well! Wim Wenders is a director who is in his bones a "cinema" director. It's no wonder he gets sick from television. But I watch TV. It's a spectacle that has become so embedded in our daily life, in our existence, that you can't escape it.

By the way, I don't have a TV either, just like Wenders, like Atom Egoyan...

A lucky person! I envy my husband because he only watches those programs that are of professional interest to him. I, on the other hand, often watch things that are interesting but completely unnecessary to me. I understand that it's bad, that I'm wasting my time. And yet, I still watch.

There is a distinction between film studies, film journalism, film criticism, film theory and film history. For you, it seems, there are no such boundaries.

No. I wrote without thinking about the genre. But what has always interested me most is the history of cinema. That's what I delve into with pleasure. I have over 70 published articles. And they are very diverse. My very first article was published in the Yerevan Russian-language newspaper *Kommunist* in 1964. It was a review of a very good film by director Laert Vagharsyan, "Martiros Saryan."

Every art historian has their so-called hero. Your hero is our common favorite, Rouben Mamoulian.

Rouben Mamoulian unintentionally became my "hero" during the process of working on a book about him. I started studying Mamoulian's work by accident. I knew nothing about him. I only knew that he was the creator of the film "Queen Christina" and that he worked in Hollywood. When, in the early '90s my husband and I found ourselves in the US, I didn't know what to do with myself due to boredom. I started learning English; I attended a special English school for Mexicans, for six months. A wealthy philanthropist, Carlos Rosario, opened this school in Washington for his compatriots. I even have a diploma from that school. Once I was able to read and write in English, I became bold enough to start researching the work of Mamoulian. I watched all of his films at the Los Angeles Film Institute. I photocopied all the literature about him in three famous libraries in Washington: Adams, Jefferson and the Library of Congress. My husband was a great help to me in this. He became not only my guide and translator, but also my advisor and sponsor. By the time we returned to Yerevan, I had accumulated a huge amount of material about him, of course, in English. And I spent many years writing the book about Mamoulian, often at night.

But even after so many years of studying Mamoulian's work, he still didn't become one of the most significant figures in cinematography for you.

No, he didn't. I am extremely objective when it comes to Mamoulian. He is a wonderful director. Masterfully skilled in film directing, thoroughly understanding all the nuances of creating a cinematic image, knowing how to shoot, he didn't think at all about what to shoot. He was a pioneer in the use of artistic means of expression in cinema. Today, filmmakers around the world use techniques and methods of shooting that were first introduced by Mamoulian, without even knowing it. A simple example: Directors worldwide use the technique of film panoramas with a dolly on wheels. But none of them know that this method was invented by Mamoulian. The first director to place a camera on a dolly was Mamoulian. Initially, he placed the camera on iron rails, and later he transferred it to a dolly with wheels. Mamoulian made the camera incredibly mobile! The word "first" is often applicable to Mamoulian's films. "He was the first to do this in cinema, to do that..." There are many such "firsts" in his work, and the most eminent was that in 1935 he shot the very first three-strip color film in the history of cinema!

You dedicated your book about Mamoulian to your husband. Our highly respected Nikolay Hovhannisyan, in turn, dedicated one of his books to you, saying that without you, "none of his books would have been written." Such mutual appreciation is, I

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JANUARY 26 — "Protecting the Armenian Quarter: A Call to the Diaspora," on Sunday, at 1.30 p.m., St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Join the founders of the SavetheArq movement for a presentation and community gathering to learn about the Armenian community status in Jerusalem, the ongoing legal battle and how those in the diaspora can get involved.

JANUARY 29 — Gift Planning for an Enduring Legacy: Wednesday, 5 to 6 p.m. Virtual presentation by Ken Dolbashian, noted expert in charitable gift planning. Program of the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. For details and to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar

FEBRUARY 1 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter Valentine's Soiree: dining, wine and music. Pianist Marina Margarian, violinist Armenuhi Hovakimyan, 8 p.m. Baika Center, 755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, \$75/person, RSVP: Sossy Yogurtian 617 281-1647 or syogurtian@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

MARCH 1 – Poon Paregentan ("Great Carnival") Dinner-Dance. Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. A terrific family evening of great food, music and dancing. Featuring the fabulous Ani Ensemble – Oud Virtuoso John Berberian; Dave Anisbigian, guitar and vocals; Art Chingris, Dumbeg; and Ara Jeknavorian, clarinet. Also featuring the latest dance tunes from Armenia and America Pop music by DJ Garen. Adults: \$35. Students: \$15. Children under 6: free. Paid reservation must be made by February 26 either on the church website, stsvartanantz.com, or by contacting Corie Horan, coriehoran@gmail.com.

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, \$58www.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

APRIL 11 — Lecture by historian and author Dr. Elyse Semerdjian sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter. Semerdjian is the holder of the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of the Armenian Genocide Studies at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide, Clark University. Her new book is called Remnants. 7 p.m., Friday, the Baika Center, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. (Use Norseman Ave. entrance.) Free admission. Book signing. For info, email syogurtian@comcast.net.

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.

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

think, very touching. Is it difficult to be the wife of an outstanding, productive scholar?

It's not difficult. Nikolay Hovhannisyan has a good character. My life with him has been easy, without complications. I've always felt very comfortable with him. I love and respect my husband deeply, and I just admire his work ethic. He is a very big, true scholar. Understanding this, I've always tried to create the right conditions for him to work.

Does your husband have an interest in cinema, and do you have an interest in Oriental studies?

It's inevitable. Nikolay's good taste showed in everything. And in cinema too. He has just started to understand its subtleties. As for me, I must say that the East didn't exist for me at all. Nikolay Hovhannisyan made me love it. Thanks to him, I've been to Egypt, Syria and Israel. I fell in love with Syria. Damascus, Aleppo — such amazing cities! How painful it is to see what is happening there now! As for

Oriental studies, I didn't delve into it because I don't know the language. Naturally, I read all his books and articles in Armenian and Russian, and I attended all his lectures both abroad and in Armenia. Of course, I learned a lot. Now, I understand Oriental studies much more than any other film scholar.

And the last question – do you have any hobbies?

I love to read. I recently discovered a wonderful writer, Narine Abgaryan. Smart, talented, with a wonderful sense of humor. I am reading her third book with great pleasure. I read slowly, to prolong the enjoyment. I adore detective stories. I know all the detective writers, the international ones. Thankfully, the computer allows me to read everything. Also, since childhood, I've really loved cats. Unfortunately, I don't have one. I have a small toy cat. It's my talisman.

And this too connects you to our beloved Mamoulian!



COMMENTARY

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



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is
published weekly, except two weeks in
July and the first week of the year, by:

Baika Association, Inc.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.A.	\$80 one year
Canada	\$125 one year
Other Countries	\$200 one year

© 2014 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston,
MA and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

Postmaster: Send address
changes to The Armenian
Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount
Auburn St.,
Watertown, MA 02472

Other than the Editorial, views
and opinions expressed in this
newspaper do not necessarily
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publisher.

Armenia Faces Challenges in 2025

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

As Armenia enters 2025, it is clear that the year will present significant geopolitical challenges for the country. Armenia's security, political stability and economic development will continue to be shaped by complex dynamics. The ongoing tensions with Azerbaijan over the so-called Zangezur corridor, Iran's weakening positions in the region, fall of the Assad regime, the Russian-Ukrainian war and evolving role of Russia in the South Caucasus and the change of global power all lead to a volatile situation.

Iran's Weakening Positions in the Region

Iran's positions in the region have significantly weakened after the downfall of the Assad government in Syria. Previously, Iran had been deeply involved in supporting Bashar al-Assad together with Russia but eventually reduced its engagement due to the Iranian confrontation with Israel and other factors. While Iran had traditionally maintained a significant presence in Syria, especially through military bases and alliances with groups like Hezbollah, the recent ascendancy of Turkish-backed forces and the withdrawal of both Russian and Iranian forces from key positions in Syria, as well as Iran's setback in Israel, led to the loss of Syria and weakening of Tehran's strategic position in the region.

Another factor that might contribute to Iran's suppression is US President Donald Trump's ascendancy to power once again on January 20. Given Trump's previous records of harsh economic sanctions on Iran and Iran's alleged assassination attempt on Trump, the 47th president of the US will possibly make US policy towards Iran harsher. One former Trump official even highlighted that "Tightening the economic noose around Iran is going to be a day one foreign policy priority to start cleaning up Biden's Middle East mess."

Iran's diminishing influence in the region could pose a challenge for Armenia, especially in light of the ongoing discourse around the so-called Zangezur corridor. It is important to note that Armenia considers Iran as its ally, especially in countering Turkish and Azerbaijani plans of opening this corridor as a link between Azerbaijan and Turkey through the territory of Armenia. The Iranian leadership, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, in the past had repeatedly expressed its opposition to such a corridor. However, following the downfall of the Assad regime in Syria, the Iranian stance on the matter may be weakened. Iran has already agreed to engage in talks with Turkey about this issue — signaling potential concessions. As Turkey becomes more assertive, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Iran may find itself increasingly forced into compromising its positions on this and other issues.

Consequently, Armenia's reliance on Iranian assistance could be unpredictable, especially if broader geopolitical dynamics continue to shift. Thus, it's crucial to diversify Armenian security partnerships and diplomatic engagements.

Fall of the Assad Regime

Another potential challenge for Armenia in 2025 could be the influx of Armenians from Syria, a situation closely tied to the shift of power in Syria and the fall of the Assad regime. The country that benefited most from the Assad regime's fall is Turkey, as the Syrian opposition gained power largely through Turkish support. This has led to the expansion of Turkey's influence, while Russia and Iran's positions have weakened, with their presence in Syria likely to diminish further in the near future.

This shift in regional dynamics is a concern for the Armenian community in Syria, especially during such an unstable period. The Armenian community in Syria currently faces two key challenges: first, safeguarding the community's security, and second, ensuring that its religious, cultural rights, and identities are respected by the authorities. Armenian Member of the Syrian Parliament Maria Gabrielyan provided an update on the current situation in Syria by reporting that despite challenges, the Syrian-Armenian community is gradually returning to normalcy: "Schools are being reopened, and community life is set to resume soon, with all canteens and cafes now operational."

However, new events are unfolding nearly every hour, primarily driven by global factors. This means that while the situation appears relatively calm and the Armenian community is returning to its normal rhythm, it remains fluid and the situation could change at any moment. This is an uncertain period for the Armenian community, and as a result, there could be waves of Syrian Armenians

once again emigrating to Armenia. The Armenian government must be prepared to address this challenge and provide the necessary support to these Armenians.

Russian-Ukrainian War

Another challenge for Armenia is the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. Whatever the outcome is, it is going to inevitably influence Armenia. John Lough of the British policy institute Chatham House identifies 4 possible scenarios for the war outcome:

1. 'Long war' – An attritional conflict that tests each side's limits,

2. 'Frozen conflict' – An armistice that would stabilize the front line where it is.

3. 'Victory for Ukraine' – A Western policy shift on support that allows Ukraine to force Russia back to at least the demarcation line of 23 February 2022.

4. Defeat for Ukraine' – Ukraine's acceptance of Russian terms of surrender (change of government, demilitarization, neutrality) and territorial losses."

Armenia has distanced itself from Russia on the Ukraine issue, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan affirming that Armenia is not an ally of Russia in this conflict. This divergence from Moscow reflects Armenia's evolving foreign policy, which seeks to balance traditional alliances with the need to reduce dependence on Russia.

Economically, Armenia has benefited from the conflict, as trade between Armenia and Russia has significantly increased. However, despite the immediate economic gains, increasingly continued cooperation with Russia on this matter could mean greater pressure from the West to adhere to sanctions limiting future growth. Armenia has already taken some steps decreasing Russia's opportunities for sanction circumvention through Armenia. Thus, the

prolonged war might mean more pressure for Armenia's economic ties with Russia that are not in line with the Western sanctions.

As for the geopolitical impact on Armenia, while Russia remains deeply engaged in the conflict in Ukraine, its capacity to engage in South Caucasian regional issues, including those related to Armenia's security, has significantly diminished. This means that Armenia will likely face a reduced Russian presence and involvement in the South Caucasus, which in turn will drive Armenia to further diversify its foreign relations, fostering closer ties with countries such as the United

States, European Union, and other powers like Iran, India, and China, in order to reduce its dependency on Russia. The Armenian government will also continue to pursue normalization of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan to achieve the goal.

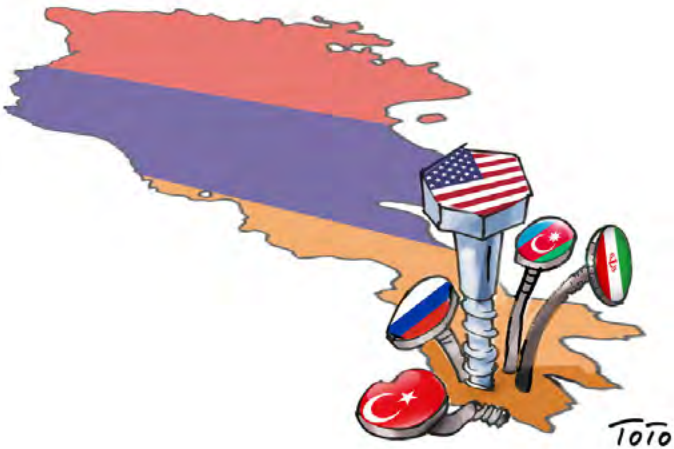
However, Russia's victory might lead to its deeper engagement within the region and Armenia. Hence it is crucial for Armenia to pursue balanced relations with all the important actors in the region regardless of the outcome of the war.

Azerbaijani-Turkish Aggression

One constant and crucial challenge for Armenia is the danger of Azerbaijani-Turkish attacks against Armenia. Since the 44-day war of 2020, Azerbaijani rhetoric has become more aggressive with President Ilham Aliyev constantly making statements to justify further attacks against Armenia. One recent remark was made in an interview with Azerbaijani television channels on the night of January 7, when Aliyev said: "Armenia is effectively a source of threat to the region. The independent Armenian state is essentially a fascist state. For nearly 30 years, this country was governed by bearers of fascist ideology, and they shaped the state in their own image. Therefore, fascism must be eradicated." He added: "It will either be eradicated by Armenia's leadership or by us. There is no other way."

Such statements are only a way for Aliyev to legitimize future attacks on Armenia, the danger of which unfortunately remains significantly high. Meanwhile, Turkey is actively promoting the idea of the "Zangezur corridor." With Iran's influence diminishing in the region, Turkey managed to secure negotiations with Iran on the matter-signaling potential concessions. As Turkey grows more assertive, as noted above, Iran could be compelled to soften its stance on the Zangezur issue, leaving room for a serious security threat for the Republic of Armenia.

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





COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Lobbyist for Genocide Denialist Turkey Should Donate Earnings to Armenians

Former Rep. Bob Livingston published a commentary in the Wall Street Journal last week asking outgoing US Attorney General Merrick Garland to apologize for investigating the Livingston Group, a lobbying firm that was paid millions of dollars by the Government of Turkey to deny the Armenian Genocide and block its acknowledgment by the US Congress.

Livingston accused Garland of being “a tool in the Democratic Party’s strategy of misusing the Justice Department to visit injustice on innocent people with differing political views.” Livingston was a Republican congressman from 1977 to 1999. He was slated to become the Speaker of the House, but resigned after the revelation of his extramarital affair. Subsequently, he formed and headed the Livingston Group for 25 years.

Livingston wrote in his commentary that “in 2022 two FBI agents came to my home in New Orleans and questioned me [for 2.5 hours] about incidents involving our representation of an international client in 2018.” The FBI agents presented “a search warrant for all my company’s records related to their questions.” The next day, the FBI informed him that he was “the target of felony charges.”

Livingston claimed that in December 2023 an FBI agent interviewed one of his employees who “was scared to death. He went to bed on Dec. 31, 2023, and didn’t wake up the next day.” Livingston wrote that “every day and night for 20 months, I lived with the possibility that the hammer could drop at any moment. Everything I worked for would be tarnished. My firm would collapse, my employees would lose their jobs, all of us would be ruined in the press, and I could go to prison.”

Livingston claimed that he and his firm were “innocent of all charges.... We spent incredible amounts of money on legal counsel, more than three times what we earned by representing the client at issue. Our attorneys prepared an 88-page brief rebutting all charges. They succeeded in backing prosecutors down, but I am convinced the department’s actions were political and malicious, targeting me as a lobbyist who has supported Donald Trump and been critical of President Biden.... The statute of limitations expired on our case in November, and prosecutors have said they are no longer interested in pursuing charges.”

Rather than being satisfied that the charges against him and his firm were dropped, Livingston went on to claim that “members of the Trump admin-

istration and Mr. Trump himself have been hounded and arrested. They’ve had their lives ruined for minor white-collar infractions. Mr. Trump has prevailed over attempts to destroy him, but others have been less fortunate.” Livingston conveniently forgot that Trump was convicted of sexual abuse and 34 felonies, becoming the first US President who is a convicted criminal.

In order to put Livingston’s complaint in context, let us learn a little more about this man and see who should apologize to whom.

The New York Times, in an article published on October 17, 2007, titled: “Turkey’s Man in the Lobbies of Capitol Hill,” provided a partial list of Livingston firm’s sinister activities on behalf of genocide denialist Turkey for millions of dollars.

The Times described Livingston as “the main lobbyist for Turkey in blocking Congressional efforts to pass an Armenian genocide resolution. After succeeding twice before [in 2000 and 2004] — and collecting more than \$12 million in fees for his firm, the Livingston Group — he is pushing once again for his client.... He escorted Turkish dignitaries to Capitol Hill to warn that the resolution threatened to destroy a strong Iraq war alliance.”

“A surge of defections by [House] members who backed the resolution showed that Mr. Livingston’s high-powered effort was gaining momentum,” the Times reported. “Mr. Livingston has showered money on House and Senate members, the National Republican Congressional Committee and other political causes. He and his firm gave more than \$200,000 in campaign donations in the last election cycle, records show.... The issue has pitted Turkey’s money and high-placed connections against a persistent and emotional campaign by Armenian-American citizens’ groups,” the Times wrote.

To leave no stone unturned, the Turkish government had also recruited the “former Rep. Stephen J. Solarz whose firm got \$165,000 this summer lobbying for Turkey under an arrangement with Mr. Livingston.” Furthermore, Turkey hired “another prominent lobbyist, Richard A. Gephardt, of Missouri, the former House majority leader and a Democrat” who had co-sponsored the Genocide Resolution while he was a House member. His firm, DLA Piper, signed a year-long lobbying contract with Turkey for \$1.2 million. Just in the 12 months beginning in August 2005, Turkey spent \$3.2 million on lobbyists and public relations firms.

The Livingston group also lobbied for Azerbaijan, Congo and the Cayman Islands. “More than a quarter of the firm’s income, which has totaled more than \$71 million, has come from foreign clients, records show,” the Times article revealed.

Rather than asking Attorney General Garland to apologize, Livingston is the one who should apologize to the global Armenian community for spreading and profiting from his heinous lies denying the Armenian Genocide. Livingston should donate to Armenian-American organizations all \$12 million his firm earned from Turkey to right the wrongs he and his firm committed.

Turkey Between The West and the East Realignment ‘Beyond’ the Middle East

By Dr. Loqman Radpey

Turkey’s bold foreign policy moves in recent years reflect a determined effort to redefine its regional and global role. From its military interventions in Syria to its growing engagement with BRICS, Ankara’s actions reveal a broader strategy. These ambitions challenge the international order.

Turkey’s involvement in Syria underscores its increasingly interventionist approach to the Middle East. By actively supporting jihadist and terrorist groups, Ankara has positioned itself as a key player in the Sunni-Shiite power struggle. This strategy aligns with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s vision of a neo-Ottoman sphere of influence, where Turkey assumes a leadership role in the Sunni Muslim world. Unlike traditional statecraft, Turkey’s geopolitical imagination prioritizes intervention and influence. This is not solely about immediate security concerns; it is about shaping the regional order to reflect Turkey’s historical and ideological ambitions.

Turkey’s actions in Syria and Iraq also signal a deeper shift away from its Western alliances. Erdogan’s government has cultivated closer ties with Russia, challenging NATO’s cohesion and trans-Atlantic interests, exemplified by acquisition of Russia’s S-400 air defense system — a move that alienated NATO allies and raised security concerns about espionage risks to U.S. bases

in Turkey.

Even as Turkey provides light weapons to Ukraine, Erdogan’s efforts to circumvent Russian sanctions highlight Ankara’s nuanced balancing act. This historical strategy of playing the Russian card seeks to maintain economic ties with Moscow while carving out an independent role in the global order.

Turkey’s interest in joining BRICS reflects its broader aspirations to challenge Western dominance. Erdogan has framed this engagement as a commitment to “diversity of approaches, identities, and politics in the global economic system.” However, this rhetoric masks a more strategic aim: leveraging Turkey’s unique position between East and West to maximize its geopolitical clout. The move also asserts a reversion to the natural region, which is indicative of an imperial Islamic order. Some BRICS members advocate for a “civilizational state.” model that prioritizes sovereignty and cultural identity over liberal democratic norms. This vision resonates with Erdogan’s own neo-Ottoman worldview, which emphasizes Turkey’s colonial distinctiveness.

Turkey has used its strategic location to its advantage in negotiations over Sweden and Finland’s NATO membership. By positioning itself as a gatekeeper, Erdogan has demonstrated his ability to extract concessions from both Western and non-Western powers.

Turkey’s foreign policy ambitions are not limited to geopolitics; they extend into the ideological realm. Erdogan’s government has fostered close ties with political Islamist movements, including Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, which reflect Turkey’s long-term investment in shaping the future of political Islam across the Middle East and Europe. Hosting conferences featuring Hamas leaders, such as Khaled Mashal, who recently called for suicide attacks against Israel, highlights Ankara’s ideological commitments. Moreover, Turkey’s partnership with Qatar in financing Islamic movements reveals a coordinated strategy to dominant Sunni Muslim communities globally especially after weakened Iran’s axis of resistance.

Turkey’s foreign policy exemplifies the complexities of a multipolar world order. With a dual approach, Tur-

key has accused NATO of fuelling the war in Ukraine while simultaneously leveraging its NATO membership to bolster its strategic position. Turkey’s ambitions present a complex challenge for U.S. policymakers. On one hand, Turkey apparently remains a critical NATO ally. On the other hand, its pivot toward Russia, BRICS and political Islam undermines the values and principles that underpin the trans-Atlantic alliance.

Turkey is seeking to redefine its role as an independent power broker, unbound by traditional alliances or norms. This raises difficult questions about how to engage with an increasingly assertive and unpredictable Turkey. In the Middle East, Turkey’s ambitions could exacerbate existing tensions. By positioning itself as a leader of Sunni Islam, Ankara risks deepening sectarian divides and destabilizing the region further. Its ideological outreach could also fuel extremism and undermine efforts to promote stability and democratic governance. By combining interventionist strategies with ideological outreach, Ankara is reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the region and “beyond”, as Erdogan claims.

Turkey’s metamorphosis demands a measured response, and the international community must thoughtfully consider its implications. For the West and its allies, engaging with Turkey will require a nuanced approach that balances strategic cooperation with efforts to address the challenges posed by Ankara’s evolving foreign policy towards the broader problem of a multipolar world.

(Dr Loqman Radpey is a Middle East Forum fellow, and is the author of Towards an Independent Kurdistan: Self-Determination in International Law (published by Routledge in 2023), which offers a Middle Eastern perspective on the right of self-determination. Loqman, with expertise in the Middle East and Kurdistan, has made contributions to various press, legal, and political outlets, including ABC News, The National, *Times of Israel*, *Die Zeit*, *The Jerusalem Post*, ASIL Insights, Oxford University Politics Blog, EJIL:Talk, Oxford Human Rights Hub, and *Opinio Juris*.)

Armenian Students Win 17 Medals At International Zhautykov Olympiad

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The 21st International Zhautykov Olympiad in Mathematics, Physics and Computer Science was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on January 13-17.

The competition brought together around 700 students from 20 countries, the Armenia Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reported on January 20.

The Armenian team of school students captured 17 medals, including 2 gold, 7 silver and 8 bronze, at the International Zhautykov Olympiad.

The competing students represented Yerevan’s Physics and Mathematics Specialized School named after Artashes Shahinyan, Quantum College, Photon College in Gyumri and the National Polytechnic University of Armenia Foundation Yerevan High School.



The winning students from Armenia

The Never-Ending Peace Circus: When Dictators Play Diplomacy

By Berge Jololian

Negotiating peace between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey has officially entered the realm of farce. Add Russia’s Putin and Belarus’s Lukashenko to the mix, and you have the world’s most dysfunctional quartet of dictators — Aliyev, Erdogan, Putin and Lukashenko — who could easily moonlight as the villains in a satirical geopolitical sitcom. Their demands on Armenia range from ludicrous to outright laughable, revealing that their vision of “peace” is more like a game of “Let’s Humiliate Armenia for Fun.”

Name Games and Mountain Claims

It seems that Armenia’s negotiations with Azerbaijan and Turkey for a peace treaty are less about diplomacy and more about surreal theater. The ever-growing list of demands from the Aliyev-Erdogan duo ranges from the audacious to the outright absurd. Their latest? A request for Armenia’s Foreign Minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, to change his name because “Ararat” is simply too triggering for Turkey. After all, how dare an Armenian official carry the name of a mountain that has symbolized Armenia for millennia, even though it now sits awkwardly within Turkey’s borders?

Erdogan reportedly said, “every time I hear the word Ararat, I’m reminded of things I’d rather not admit happened.” Suggestions for Mirzoyan’s new name include “Flatland Mirzoyan” or simply “Nothing-to-See-Here Mirzoyan.”

Meanwhile, Putin chimed in to support Erdogan’s claim, declaring that Mount Ararat was “never really Armenian anyway” and suggesting it be renamed Mount Neutral. “Let’s make it fair for everyone,” Putin said, ignoring his troops’ failure to lift a finger when Azerbaijani forces ethnically cleansed Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh under the watchful eye of Russian “peacekeepers.” Apparently, in Putin’s world, peacekeeping means keeping peace between Azerbaijan and Turkey - by throwing Armenia under the bus.

Azerbaijan, emboldened by its oil wealth and Turkey’s unwavering support, has also proposed that Armenia redesign its national flag. “The red, blue, and orange colors are too vibrant and might provoke Azerbaijan,” Aliyev allegedly complained. He suggested something “less confrontational” - perhaps a plain white flag? After all, why bother negotiating peace when you can just force the other side to preemptively surrender?

Meanwhile, Turkey insists that Armenia issue an official apology for Mount Ararat’s continued presence on the Armenian coat of arms. “We consider it cultural theft,” Erdogan reportedly said, conveniently forgetting that Mount Ararat was, in fact, Armenian long before Turkey existed. As a compromise, Turkey has offered to lease the image of the mountain back to Armenia for a modest fee — paid in Turkish lira, naturally.

Armenia must brace itself for more absurd demands from the Erdogan-Aliyev duo — perhaps something as ridiculous as renaming Lake Sevan to “Lake Erdogan.” After all, the name “Lake Sevan” might hit too close to home, reminding them of Lake Van, the cradle of Armenian civilization that they’d rather everyone forget.

As for Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan? He hopes he keeps his name - and maybe even climbs Mount Ararat one day, just to remind the world of whose legacy it truly is.

The Corridor to Nowhere

Let’s not forget the infamous “Zangezur Corridor” demand. Azerbaijan insists on a direct land route through southern Armenia, claiming it’s for economic development. Rumor has it, though, that Baku’s real plan involves constructing a private highway for Aliyev’s motorcade, complete with golden toll booths and “Welcome to Azerbaijan” signs written in Comic Sans. “It’s a purely logistical need,” officials say, as they quietly sketch plans for Azerbaijani flags to be planted along the route, complete with giant statues of himself. Putin nodded approvingly, saying, “I’ll lend you some of my shirtless horseback photos for inspiration.”

Erdogan, never one to be outdone, suggested building a pipeline alongside the corridor, not for oil, but to pump Turkish tea directly into Azerbaijan. “It’s cultural diplomacy,” Erdogan said with a straight face.

Meanwhile, Lukashenko, Belarus’s own contribution to the axis of absurdity, proposed installing a chain of potato-themed rest stops along the way. “Everyone loves potatoes,” Lukashenko declared. “This will unite us all!”

When Armenia suggested joint monitoring mechanisms to ensure fair implementation of any peace deal, Erdogan scoffed. “We don’t need oversight,” he said. “Azerbaijan and Turkey are perfectly capable of monitoring themselves.” As evidence of their impartiality, they offered to provide binoculars exclusively to their own observers.

While the absurdity of these demands is enough to make anyone laugh, the underlying truth is far less funny. The Aliyev-Erdogan duo continues to leverage their power to impose unreasonable terms, testing Armenia’s patience and resilience. The international community, watching this spectacle, must remember that peace cannot be achieved by bullying one side into submission.

Peacekeeping, Russian-Style

The role of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh has been nothing short of theatrical. Tasked with protecting Armenians, they instead stood idly by while Azerbaijan carried out ethnic cleansing. “We’re peacekeepers, not peacemakers,” Putin clarified. “Besides, we were busy coordinating with Erdogan and Aliyev on more important matters, like deciding who

gets to rename Yerevan next.”

Some speculate that Putin’s endgame is to turn Armenia into a vassal state entirely dependent on Moscow. “It’s not betrayal,” Putin reportedly told Aliyev and Erdogan over tea. “It’s just business. Besides, who needs Armenians when I’ve got friends like you two?”

Aliyev, Erdogan, Putin, and Lukashenko — collectively known as the Axis of Dictators — seem less interested in diplomacy and more focused on solidifying their own power. Their combined track record includes war crimes, suppressing dissent, rigging elections, and rewriting history. The only thing missing is a boy band album titled Dictators United: Greatest Hits of Oppression.

The list of demands doesn’t stop at names and corridors. Erdogan wants Armenia to apologize for existing, while Aliyev insists that Armenian churches are “clearly Azerbaijani mosques in disguise.” Putin, for his part, wants Armenia to declare Russian as its official language and adopt mandatory shirtless calendar photos of himself in all government offices.

A Call for Sanity

While it’s tempting to laugh at the absurdity of these demands, the reality is sobering. Armenia faces existential threats not only from Azerbaijan and Turkey but also from the betrayal of supposed allies like Russia. The international community must confront this axis of dictators, whose actions jeopardize not only Armenia’s sovereignty but also global stability.

At this critical juncture, Armenians must heed the timeless calls for unity from the great poets Paruyr Sevak and Yeghishe Charents. Sevak implored Armenians to overcome their divisions, famously stating, “If we are to survive, we must unite, not for ourselves, but for the sake of Armenia.” Similarly, Charents, in his poignant verse, reminded his people of their shared destiny: “Oh Armenian people, your only salvation is in your collective strength.” These words resonate now more than ever, as internal strife only serves to weaken Armenia’s ability to confront external threats.

Divisive criticism of the Armenian government and its leadership fractures the nation, eroding its capacity to defend against genuine enemies. The real threats to Armenia’s sovereignty are not internal but lie with the authoritarian regimes actively undermining its territorial integrity and identity.

In recognizing the harsh realities of geopolitics in a region dominated by dictatorships, unity is no longer a choice but a necessity. Armenians must redirect their energy toward building collective strength through solidarity and action, rising above internal divisions to protect their homeland. Only through the unity envisioned by Sevak and Charents can Armenia secure its sovereignty and ensure its survival in an increasingly volatile and unforgiving geopolitical landscape.

(The author resides in Yerevan.)